



Plum Lines

The quarterly journal of The Wodehouse Society Vol. 17 No. 4 Winter 1997

CHICAGO AND ALL THAT JAZZ, 1997!

By Elin Woodger and Ed Ratcliffe

What ho Chicago! The city known for its wind hosted the latest and perhaps best yet convention of The Wodehouse Society, presented by the Chicago Accident Syndicate. But warmth of weather and warmth of spirit were most noticeable—Chicago was as balmy as the finest summer day at Blandings (“Are you sure this is October?”). And the warmth of spirit made it clear that we were going to have a grand old time in the best tradition of previous conventions—and so we did!

Thursday, October 2

The ever-so-grand Intercontinental Hotel stood ready as Wodehousians began converging from every corner of America as well as England, Sweden, the Netherlands, and New Zealand. Some had arrived as early as Wednesday, and by Thursday afternoon Plummiess began to encounter other Plummiess. With cries of “What ho!” and “Oh, I say!” we exchanged hugs with old friends, and Internet buddies attached faces to names. I believe it was Margaret Slythe from England who referred to the rest of us as her “two-year family.”

We soon discovered the concierge desk, guarded by a life-size cardboard cutout of an English bobby. Here early registrants signed in, received handsome dark blue totebags, and found inside an impressive array of goodies: maps of Chicago, London, and Britain (the bags had been generously donated by the British Tourist Authority); Chicago tourist guides for shopping, entertainment, culture, and sports; the “Chicago Accident Syndicate Songbook,” providing words for our sing-alongs; a jolly magnet in the shape of a nice fat Berkshire sow; an official convention pen and a pad of paper bearing Plum’s signature and caricature; a Chicago ’97 key ring; and a

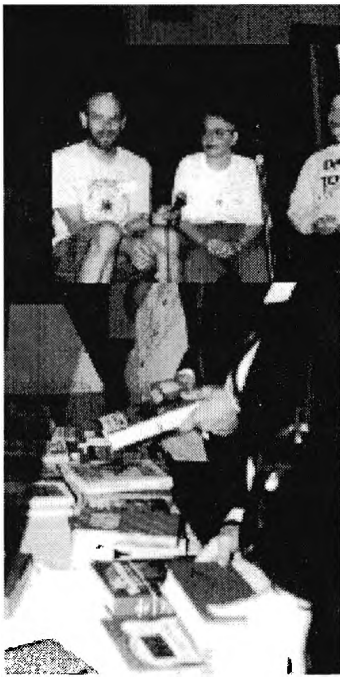
plum-colored license plate holder bearing the legend “Ask me about P.G. Wodehouse.” Told that we would receive our convention mug and pin the next day, we responded with an astonished, “You mean there’s more?”

Many (Most? Well, all right, lots of us) collected at the Intercontinental’s bar, there to rearrange furniture and otherwise challenge the wait staff as the throngs of Plummiess grew larger. Spirited conversation and laughter overflowed the bar and spilled out into the streets as groups of revelers broke away for dinner and socializing with as sound a lot of good eggs as ever donned a heliotrope sock. Some of the durable among us stayed out for what Bertie would have described as a “latish evening.”

Friday, October 3

Many of us went early to register just outside the meeting room on the Intercontinental’s third floor, and to browse in the anteroom among the offerings of book dealers and audiotope sellers and the displays from various TWS chapters. Since the convention activities did not begin until late afternoon, we filled a busy day with sightseeing, excellent museums, and river cruises to admire Chicago’s magnificent downtown architecture. One hardy group decided to play cricket—a remarkable decision, given that only two in the group had ever played the game and most of the rest were intimidated by its mysteries.

Still, it seemed the thing to do on such a lovely morning, so we bundled into cars and taxis and headed north to a small park where we were joined by one Ramesh Srikanthan, an area resident and capital fellow who stretched both himself and his schedule to provide the cricket equipment. In a prolonged practice session, old



Book browsing
(Photo credits at
end of article)

cricket hands Gussie Fink-Nottle (aka Alekh Bhurke) and Pongo Twistleton-Twistleton (aka Shamim Mohamed), with Ramesh and his courageous friend, Alak, patiently taught the rest of us the basics of the game.

Then we divided into two teams—the Green Swizzlers led by Gussie, and the May Queens headed by Pongo—and launched into the sort of game that would make professionals wince, but satisfied us no end. Gussie Fink-Nottle later reported the game this way to alt.fan.wodehouse: “If ever

America decides to civilise herself by having a proper national cricket team, she will not have to search far...Where else could you find an opening batswoman like Lady Constance (Anne Bianchi) who scored a run right off the first ball she faced and sacrificed her wicket while going for a valiant second run! Or Max Pokrivchak, who took wickets with his wily googlies without giving away any runs! Or Susan Cohen, who kept rotating the strike! Dan Cohen, throwing himself at every cracking shot hit by Charles Bishop without caring for life or limb. Aunt Dahlia (Elin Woodger) always alert at point and Aurelia Cammarleigh (Kristin Fowler) in what might be loosely termed a deep 1st slip.



Alekh Bhurke bowls,
Shamim Mohamed
takes aim of a different sort.

Pongo kept the wickets excellently but could not bat due to an injury. Caroline Pokrivchak was the official score keeper and took to it like a Drone to a cocktail...I must also add that I clean bowled Charles Bishop with a slow straight one and that, ladies and gentlemen, was a sight to see. A wonderful delivery. I have no doubt that he is, even as I write, practicing his bowling to return the favour

someday.”

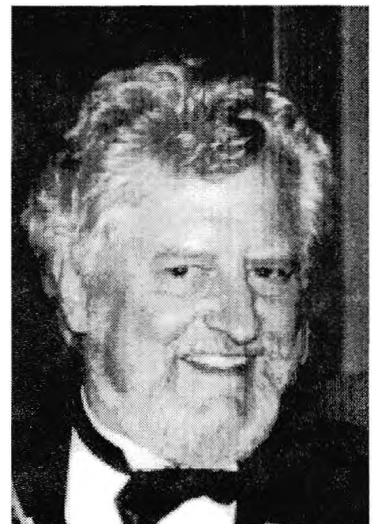
The Green Swizzlers won the abbreviated game by only three runs, and we who had previously been baffled by the sport left the cricket grounds only mildly fogged and quite pleased with our play.

The convention began at four o'clock Friday afternoon, when we gathered in the meeting room for socializing, games, and the commencement of the Scripture Knowledge Competition. It wasn't long before egg-and-spooners were dashing down the middle of the room, cheered on by their fans, while Steggles (looking suspiciously like Charles Bishop) worked the crowd, making book and doing his best to nobble the likeliest contenders for the brass ring. Elsewhere, Plummies were happily tossing cards at a top hat (it's much harder to score than you might think), while others were content to enjoy the Wodehousian camaraderie. Eventually chief convention organizer Dan Garrison stepped up to the microphone, welcomed us to the convention, and announced the Scripture Knowledge Competition (hereafter to be referred to as the SKC). About which a few words must now be said.

This was not, as you might expect, a quiz designed to test our knowledge of the kings of Judah, but rather a jolly wheeze thought up by Quizmaster Tony Ring to determine which TWS chapter knew the most about the Wodehouse Scripture. The game was modeled after the popular British TV program “Mastermind.” A three-person team from each TWS chapter was to subject itself to the excruciating challenge of ques-



Nevertheless, we
sometimes confused
cricket with baseball!



Dan Garrison



Grand Inquisitors
Neil Midkiff, Tony Ring

MacGregor, Shamim Mohamed, and Doug Stow, not pictured); the Drone Rangers of Houston, Texas; the Pdrone of St. Louis; Capital! Capital! of Washington, D.C.; Chapter One of Greater Philadelphia; and the NEWTS of New England. These were joined by two scratch teams: a U.S. Domestic team and an International Team from England and Sweden.



Drone Rangers: Toni Rudersdorf, Elliott Milstein, Anne Bianche

“What kind of animal was Sam Goldwyn in *The Mating Season*?” The sadistic Tony and Neil wouldn’t accept a mere “dog” as an answer to the question—one had to specify what *kind* of dog. Correct answers were greeted with a happy rattle; incorrect answers were crushed by a honk like a flatulent Bronx cheer. Too-loud whispers showed that the “experts” were in the audience, and Tony an-



Pdrone: Sandy Morris, Dick Olsen, Eric Otten



Capital! Capital!
Shana Singerman
Ann Hoey, John Phipps

nounced at one point a score of “Teams 13, Audience 20,” and asked listeners to be quiet lest they give away answers. Most in the audience later confessed themselves quite happy that they had not

been on stage. And many on stage confessed they would have preferred the view from the audience!

We shall return to the SKC later in this report, but there is still much to say about Friday’s activities. With the opening reception and the first Scripture Knowledge session completed, groups of Plummies scattered hither and thither for drinks and dinner, then returned to the Intercontinental for what proved to be a highlight of the convention: an original performance of two Wodehouse stories by the City Lit Theatre of Chicago. This troupe specializes in dramatizations of literature and in each of the past several seasons has presented an adaptation of a PGW novel. Artistic Director Mark Richard, who adapts and directs these Wodehousian productions, also plays Bertie Wooster. Their *Joy in the Morning* will run from November 14 through January 25—alas, too late for us. However, on Friday evening the company presented two readings at the convention just for us: “Jeeves Takes Charge” and “Bertie Changes His Mind” (the bookend stories in *Carry On, Jeeves*). In the first story Mr. Richard was joined on stage by Page Hearn as Jeeves, Kelly Nesper as Florence Craye, Kenneth Northcott as Uncle Willoughby, and Justin Fletcher as the wretched boy Edwin. Mark Richard provided the key element in this and the other successful Wode-



Chapter One: John Baesch, Dan Cohen, Alekh Bhurke



NEWTS:
Elin Woodger,
John Fahey,
Richard Morrissey

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U.S. Domestic Team:
Max Pokrivchak,
Susan Cohen, Jay Taub



International Team:
Sven Sahlin, Helen
Murphy, John Fletcher



City Lit Theatre: Mark Richard as Bertie



Kelly Nespor as a whole herd of people

house adaptations: the narration from the original story. Plummers who have had the good fortune to see fully-staged City Lit performances say it is a delight to see Bertie turn to the audience, and offer his comments on the proceedings.

The second story, "Bertie Changes His Mind," featured Kenneth Northcott as Jeeves. Mr. Northcott's English voice and dry delivery made for a delightful reading of the only story narrated by Jeeves. Kelly Nespor drew raves for her multiple performances as the schoolgirl, the maid, Miss Tomlinson, and the entire student body, all done by a simple switch of headgear and changes of voice.

It was when she stood up alone and portrayed an auditorium full of young girls singing a rousing welcome to Bertie that she nearly gained a standing ovation.

After the performance Mr. Richard returned to the microphone to take questions from the audience about adapting Wodehouse for the stage and about the City Lit's successful productions. It was a hugely satisfying evening. We are most grateful to City Lit for providing marvelous entertainment and to the Chicago Accident Syndicate for

arranging it. Bravo!

Saturday, October 4

The big day had arrived! And a full day it was, with seven speakers due to step up to the plate, four more rounds of the SKC to squeeze in (not to mention the finals), the Dreaded Business Meeting, and a banquet to top all TWS banquets.

The proceedings began in high style with a talk by Michael Dirda, Pulitzer Prize-winning critic for *The Washington Post*, on "Wodehouse and the Critics." Michael presented many answers from many sources to a question never, I believe, considered so carefully before:

What were Wodehouse's masterpieces: his best novel and short story? What was Michael's conclusion? You can read it for yourself—his speech is printed in this issue. (We expect to print several other speeches in later issues.)

Will Richardson from New Zealand was the next speaker. A new acquaintance to most of us, he is a classical scholar and is co-authoring a book with Dan Garrison. Will spoke about Wodehouse as lyricist, focusing on two songs: "Go, Little Boat" from *Miss 1917*, and "Bill," intended for *Oh, Lady!, Lady!!*, but cut from that show and later used in *Showboat*. He spoke lyrically, if you will,

of Plum's simplicity of style, his almost complete lack of conscious poetic technique, and the "singability" of his lyrics. Will's discussion of the songs was illuminated by the singing of Hal and Lara Cazalet. The Cazalets, Plum's great-grandchildren, were particularly welcome at our convention. (Both are professional singers and performers. Hal is currently touring in the states.) Lara made an especially big hit with her renditions of both versions of "Bill": Plum's rarely heard original version, never used on stage, and Hammerstein's revision in *Showboat*. It was perhaps the first time both versions had been performed



Michael Dirda



Will Richardson



Lara Cazalet

and Rosie were surprising and amusing.

The last bit of morning entertainment was the Dreaded Business Meeting. Conducted with a feather touch by President Elliot Milstein, this half hour proved to be one of the day's pleasures. Elliot spoke briefly about the



Helen Murphy

Susan and Dan Cohen of Chapter One, and petitions were on hand to help push the movement along. The primary bit of business, though, was the proposed new constitution for The Wodehouse Society. After two years of discussions about providing an architecture for the society without overburdening it, Elliot presented and explained a one-page document that provides a minimum of administrative machinery. The constitution was accepted with only one dissenting vote. New members of the soci-

ety will continue to receive

together. The final speaker of the morning was the estimable Helen Murphy, who discussed "Plum and Rosie: A Match Made in Heaven." Helen spoke knowledgeably about the popular literature and advertisements that Plum drew upon in his stories, and persuasively presented the probable source of Rosie M. Banks and her "Mervyn Keene, Club-man." Her parallels between Plum



Hal Cazalet

possible creation of an international steering committee looking toward a worldwide Wodehouse society. Officers of the various societies will continue to discuss the matter and TWS members will be kept apprised of developments. Elliot mentioned the ongoing campaign to get P. G. Wodehouse on a U.S. postage stamp. This effort is being coordinated by Su-

ety will continue to receive the original short and sweet "constitution" written by founder Bill Blood, and Marilyn MacGregor will send the new constitution to those who request it.

As expected, Vice President Dan Garrison was unanimously elected president; he immediately proposed the blushing Elin Woodger for vice president and she was approved with a whoop and a holler.

Another Scripture Knowledge Round, then a rush for the doors as the hungry crowd sought lunch.

The afternoon session began with round five of the SKC, wherein the Pdrone's faced the fish-eating International Team and went down to honorable defeat.

The mood turned briefly serious as Jon Lellenberg delivered his talk entitled "Wodehouse Makes a Comeback." His subject was Wodehouse's Berlin broadcasts and their consequences, as seen in light of the correspondence, now stored at the Library of Congress, of the late Kenneth McCormick, Plum's editor at Doubleday before World War II. Jon argued that Plum was profoundly naive about politics and public sentiment, and failed to understand how much his broadcasts affected the British people, not only during the war but afterward. In the discussion that followed, many members of the audience offered their opinions on this painful episode in Plum's life, but without dampening the overall good spirits of the day.

Jon was followed by Peter Sinclair, a fellow mem-



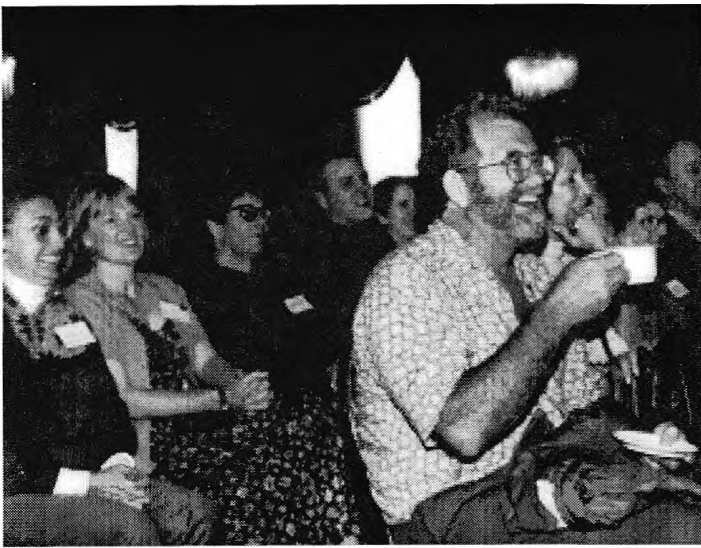
Elliot Milstein



Jon Lellenberg



Peter Sinclair



The "Wilberfloss effect"

ber of the Capital! Capital! chapter, who reported hilariously on "The Wilberfloss File." This was (and is) a series of real-life events in Peter's office touched off by Peter's use of the name of J. Filken Wilberfloss, a minor character in *Psmith, Journalist*. Peter initially used J. Filken to fend off pushy salespeople ("That department is managed by Mr. J. Filken Wilberfloss, but he's out in the field right now"). After a number of such conversations Filken began to take on a life of his own. He appeared on mailing lists, collected numerous invitations, and received numberless phone calls. Peter's boss was annoyed to find that J. Filken, but not he himself, had been invited to be listed (for a price) in a kind of *Who's Who*. And there was that call from the office of (no kidding) Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich . . . Aided by his office colleagues, Peter has accumulated a thick file of phone messages and correspondence addressed to "Wilbur Floss," and the file continues to grow.

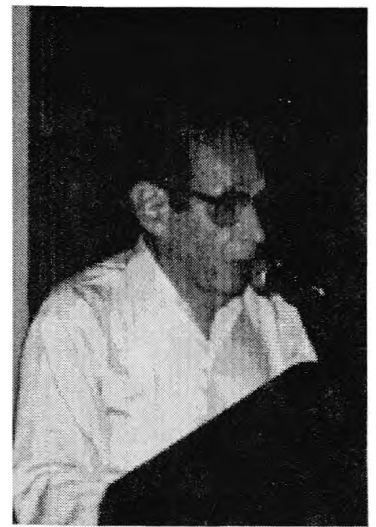
Marilyn MacGregor, TWS corresponding secretary, spoke on "Plum's Sherlock: Conan Doyle's Influence on Wodehouse." Marilyn demonstrated with many quotes



Marilyn MacGregor

the strong connection between Arthur Conan Doyle and Plum, who greatly admired Doyle and his stories. Wodehouse made frequent references to Holmes in his stories, and his creation of Adrian Mulliner was in itself a salute to Doyle. Marilyn's talk provided a fascinating insight into the relationship between these two masters of fiction.

The last speaker of the day was Peter Schwed, Plum's American editor and publisher at Simon and Schuster for the last twenty-five years of his life. Peter's subject was the Princess shows in the early part of the century and the songs they featured. He was assisted most ably by the talented Cazalets, who sang "Till the Clouds Roll By." Peter mentioned his favorite of all Wodehouse dramatizations, the little-seen "Wodehouse Playhouse" of early 70s television..



Peter Schwed



Plum's great-grandchildren and his editor together (with Neil Midkiff), like distant planets in conjunction—has it ever happened before?

The afternoon session ended with the last semi-final of the SKC, pitting the Drone Rangers against the NEWTS. After much laughter and several nail-biting moments, the NEWTS won the right to meet the formidable International Team in the evening finals.

We gathered early that evening for cocktails, chat, and costume displays: Over here the Empress of Blandings (Carla Gladstone) is snuffling about for that misplaced potato peeling. Over there one spies Madeline Bassett (Cecily Martin) waxing enthusiastic about the stars being God's daisy chain, while Claude and Eustace (Nicholas Lellenberg and Carey Martin) trail jauntily behind her,



Lady Bassett (Anne Cotton) with elephant gun

impending mischief clearly printed on their young faces. And what's this? TWO Gussie Fink-Nottles (Anne Bianchi and Alekh Bhurke) scarlet-clad as Mephistopheles? Cocktail in hand, leopard-skin hat flamboyantly atop her head, and black feather boa floating about her neck, Grayce Llewellyn (Jean Tillson) is chatting up Bertie Wooster (John Fahey), who is wearing a suitably elegant dressing gown, having roused the

inhabitants of Brinkley Court out of bed with his ill-advised ringing of the fire bell. Lord Emsworth's Girl Friend (Marilyn MacGregor) has arrived in a red velveteen dress, "flarze" clutched tightly in her hand. She is accompanied by her brother, Ern (Jay Taub), who seems to have misplaced his shoes, for he is wearing oversized bunny slippers. Constable Potter is suitably oafish, and among the flappers Cathy Oliveri is impossibly glamorous. The costumes are brilliant, and later in the evening are featured in a fashion show emceed by that expert on What the Well-Dressed Plummie is Wearing, Jan Kaufman. In the midst of all this socializing Shamim Mohamed was helping several helpless gentlemen "achieve the perfect butterfly effect" with their bow ties.



Drone (Alekh Burke)

Then it was time for dinner, and at each place setting we found a little booklet beautifully designed, hand set, and hand printed by Doug and Margaret Stow to commemorate this 9th International Convention of The Wodehouse Society. A keepsake to treasure, it consists of twelve pages, each with a Wodehouse quote.

Well, the breadrolis had no sooner been served than they began to fly. In gentle tosses and long, hard pitches, chunks of bread filled the air until the floor looked like the Arctic tundra in a hard winter

And then, after numerous toasts to absent friends, we got down to the ever-popular banquet. What can we say of the meal that is not said by Jon Lellenberg's menu below? The food and service were excellent, and happy chatter filled the room. It was difficult to find a face without a smile (or spoon) on it. Of the

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It can be done! Shamin Mohamed proves it.

LE DNER

**CHEZ LE WODEHOUSE SOCIETY
CHICAGO, OCTOBER 4, 1997**

LE PLUM TOMATO SALAD

LE BIRD OF SOME KIND
AVEC LES VEG. ET LA STARCH

LES BREADROLLS

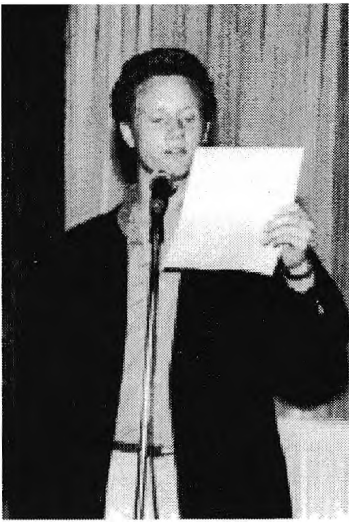
LES VINS

Spiked Fink-NOTTLE'S DELIGHT

LE COFFEE

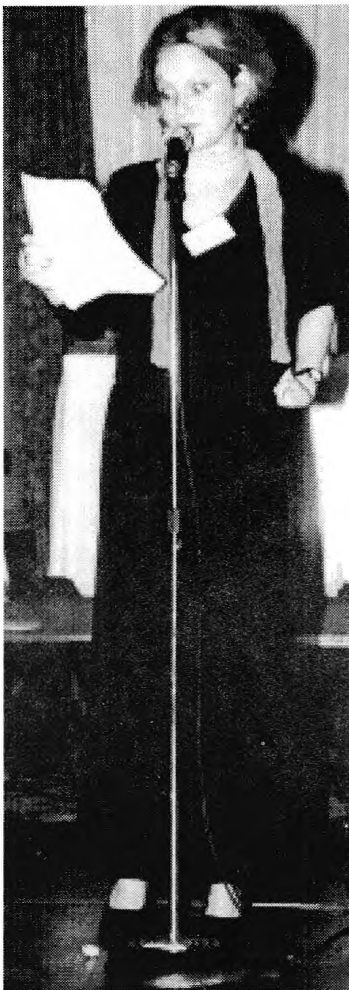
(as Bertie Wooster remembered it)

Our thanks to Jon Lellenberg for this menu.



Hal Cazalet reading
Matt Simon's
winning poem

and was read by Hal Cazalet. The poem, published elsewhere in this issue, is Bertie's



Lara Cazalet,
poetically horrified

other festivities—well, they stretched on until past midnight, and included the finals of the Great Poetry Handicap.

Several finalist poems had already been chosen by a committee, to be read aloud that evening by their authors if present. Hal and Lara Cazalet very kindly agreed to read the poems of several absent authors. The winning poem, chosen by audience applause, had been written by the absent Matt Simon of Cambridge, Massachusetts, and was read by Hal Cazalet. The poem, published elsewhere in this issue, is Bertie's lament on his dunking in the swimming bath. We (and by the editorial "we" we mean both of us) the poems to be of surprisingly high quality.

Scattered throughout the evening several prizes were awarded, and acknowledgments and presentations were made, to deserving Plummiess, including the hard-working convention organizers.

And there was the special treat of listening to Hal Cazalet sing "Sonny Boy" to a very appreciative audience, who rewarded him with a well-deserved standing ovation.

But what of the SKC, you ask? Well, the Grand Finale took place despite complaints from the NEWTs that while the rest of the crowd had been fed chicken, the International Team had undoubtedly been served fish—surely a cunning ploy to allay their embarrassment at their

coming loss. I mean to say, how could anybody win against a team consisting of John Fletcher, Helen Murphy, and Sven Sahlin? But the NEWTs made a respectable showing all the same—the winning margin was a mere five points. The victorious International Team descended from the stage to wild applause. Congratulations Helen, John and Sven! We who could never have answered half the questions you did salute you!

As the evening wound to a close the room filled with the sounds of jazz (Chicago has always been known for the music), drawing a number of couples to the dance floor—many of whom did not let their left hip know what their right hip was doing. It was a sight to see.

Sunday, October 5

Our final gathering took place in the appropriately-named King Arthur's Court. The entrance to the room is guarded by two suits of oversized armor (empty, I suppose, though I didn't check). The room has a look of large-scale pre-Raphaelite luxury, as if John Jacob Astor had hired Dante Rossetti as interior decorator: lofty coffered ceiling, dim paneled walls, glowing stained glass, no end of leafy surface decoration, and vistas that vanish in the distance. A casual little place to drop into for brunch. There was an abundance of good friends, good food, good conversation, and the knowledge that we were about to part. When the clinking of tableware had died down, the final event of the weekend was announced: the now traditional reading of a Wodehouse short story by the Blandings Castle chapter. The tale this time was "The Crime Wave at Blandings," read by Ed Ratcliffe, forever typecast as Lord Emsworth, Missy Ratcliffe, ditto as Lady



Reading of "The Crime wave at Blandings":
Neil Midkiff, Marilyn MacGregor, Jan Kaufman,
Missy and Ed Ratcliffe, Shamin Mohamed,
Tom Wainwright, Jay Taub.
(Beth Wainwright not shown.)



Our final sing-along, Neil Midkiff at the controls

Constance, Tom Wainwright as Beach, Shamim “Pongo” Mohamed as young George, and Jay Taub as the Efficient Baxter. Narrators were Jan Kaufman, Marilyn MacGregor, Beth Wainwright, and Neil Midkiff. (Neil had also pruned and adapted the story superbly and directed rehearsals.) The presentation was fun for audience and performers alike, and one of Plum’s funniest stories appropriately closed our convention.

Well, not *quite* closed it. Some of us weren’t ready to face the Real World yet, and gathered round the piano (not for the first time that weekend) for another sing-along, aided mightily by Neil Midkiff’s piano playing and the lyrics of P. G. Wodehouse. So the good times in Chicago came to an end. Hugs abounded as we said our good-byes and expressed our hopes of seeing each other again before the next convention...until we finally, reluctantly, slid down the drainpipe and fled the premises. Some of us, surely, by milk train.

Yet so much has been left out of this report! The mind’s eye conjures up so many random people and events...

—The talented Cazalets, whose presence and performances gave us so much pleasure...

—Neil Midkiff, who made countless contributions to the fun and games, and provided all the piano accompaniment throughout the proceedings. Many thanks to Neil!...

—Bill Milligan, who designed the nifty convention logo—a cool, Chicagoish design that appeared on many convention items.

—The Drones Club tie sported by so many and envied by so many others. Future orders may be placed with David McKenzie of Chapter One (details elsewhere in this issue)...

—The gathering of tie-sporting Plummies Sunday morning for a group picture that will be sent, along with their own ties, to the absent Richard Osborne and

Norman Murphy...

—Alekh Bhurke, he of sartorial splendor on Friday and Saturday evenings. Who can forget his gray cutaway, spats, top hat, and cane, or his scarlet Mephistopheles?...

—Alekh again, running from corner to corner to corner of the cricket field cheerfully dispensing instructions to those who hadn’t the foggiest...

—American cricketers, continually thinking they were playing baseball and throwing their bats to the ground as they took their runs, much to their instructors’ dismay...

—Tony Ring, presiding over the Scripture Knowledge Competition with outrageous pig tie and much more aplomb than some of the contestants (Tony knew *all* the answers)...

—Dan Cohen, toting a Bible and a list of the kings of Judah to the stage for the SKC, which helped his team not at all...

—The standing ovation given to the City Lit performers. Without a doubt, they know their Wodehouse! (“Oh, are we?”)...

—Carla Gladstone, awarded the first of the ten (ungraded) costume prizes for her brilliant portrayal of the Empress of Blandings...

—A table largely populated by NEWTs claiming “first blood” in the bread-tossing event with a direct hit on the Chapter One table...

—Lara Cazalet again, who, when asked what she thought of her first TWS convention, responded, “I think you are all mad!”—then went on to confess that she had had a wonderful time...

—The final sing-along at the piano. We Plummies sure do love our “Sonny Boy!”...

—Jay Taub, as the Efficient Baxter, emitting a wonderful howl as he was potted repeatedly in the seat of the trousers...

—Finally, there was the superb job done by the Chicago Accident Syndicate in putting together this splen-



See you in 1999!

did convention. Their seamless efforts gave 200 members a most happy weekend. Dan Garrison must be singled out as Chief Perpetrator. The co-conspirators include, but are by no means limited to, Jon Lellenberg, Katherine Lewis, Susan Jewell, Tina Garrison, Bill Saddler, Dean Miller, Carolyn Simons, Bill Milligan, Gale Wagner-Miller, Christina Woelke, and Ann Bishop. Now who did we miss? This may well be remembered as one of the greatest conventions in history.

What? You think we exaggerate? Well, old thing, just ask anybody who was there!

Above all we are grateful to our beloved
Sir Pelham Grenville Wodehouse
whose life and work we meet to celebrate.



Photo credits: Page 2, Book browsing (Jan Wilson Kaufman(JWK)), Alekh Bhurke (JWK), Nevertheless (Jean Tillson), Dan Garrison (JWK). Page 3, Grand Inquisitors (Ralph Chermak), Drone Rangers (JWK), Pdrones (JWK), Capital! (JWK), Chapter One (JWK), NEWTS (JWK), U.S. Domestic Team (JWK), International Team (JWK). Page 4, City Lit (JWK), Kelly Nesper (JWK), Michael Dirda (JWK), Will Richardson (JWK). Page 5, Hal Cazalet (Jean Tillson), Lara Cazalet (Jean Tillson), Helen Murphy (JWK), Elliot Milstein (JWK), Jon Lellenberg (Ed Ratcliffe), Peter Sinclair (JWK). Page 6, "Wilberfloss effect" (JWK), Marilyn MacGregor (JWK), Peter Schwed (Ed Ratcliffe), Plum's great-grandchildren (JWK). Page 7, Lady Bassett (Elin Woodger), *It can be done!* (Elin Woodger), Drone (Ralph Chermak). Page 8, Hal Cazalet (JWK), Lara Cazalet (JWK), Reading (Elin Woodger). Page 9, Sing-along (JWK), See you in 1999 (Elin Woodger).

THE BETRAYAL OF BERTRAM

By Matt Keiler Simon

This was the winner of The Great Poetry Handicap at the Chicago convention, and a nice piece of work it is.

Soaring, flying swinging I
Did cleave the gentle air on high:
Ye gods! How could a mortal chap
Feel weightlessness and grace like that!
From ring to ring to ring to ring,
O'er swimming bath and tiles did sing
My lusty frame through midnight air
On Tuppy Glossop's fruity dare.

How little did my tipsy head
Know Fate with her thick pipe of lead
Behind me stood with rolled up sleeves—
Woe for Bertram! Where were you Jeeves?
O times! O manners! Wretched fiend!
This Glossop's devilry unseen
Betrayed a friendship's trust and care:
The final ring—it was not there!

Have you, my friends, e'er hit the drink
In swank attire with gold cufflink?
No? Never? Well, then let me say,
For Bertram 'twas no holiday.
I clambered out, while this dark horse
(Of Judas's correspondence course)
Could only scream and hoot and race
With laughter at the Wooster face.

How could a man of honour miss
A chance to right a wrong like this?
Fear not for Bertram, my stout friends.
The Luminous Rabbit will make amends!



A pillar of integrity, like all the Mulliners, Matt Simon merely adds to his rock-solid reputation for honesty with the following passage from his cover letter for this poem:

I feel quite strongly that any unfair attempt to bias the highly intelligent, devilishly attractive, and extraordinarily kind judges would be unethical and reprehensible. Furthermore, I can only assume that the refined and cultivated judges of The Great Poetry Handicap are entirely above bribery and corruption. (Would \$1,500 do?) To those of gentle pedigree, such vulgarity would *not* be cricket. (I could make it \$2,000.)

LOUDER AND FUNNIER

A review by Bob Nissenbaum

Bob Nissenbaum, when he is not writing reviews for fun, does them for the *Pen & Dagger*, a monthly newsletter issued by Mystery Books, a bookshop in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, in which he has a small interest.

It seems to be a sacrosanct theorem of literary reviewers that precious few writers of fiction, however brilliant in that field, can write essays, news articles, biographical material, etc.—in a short phrase, any non-fiction—even tolerably well. However, our hero (ahem!) seems to have the ease of versatility to switch from one to the other seamlessly. I suspect it is because his approach doesn't vary, so that his fiction seems like fact, and vice versa.

A beautiful case in point is the series of articles Plum wrote for *Vanity Fair* magazine in New York in the late twenties*, during his regime as theater critic, and later as managing editor. Incidentally, his (temporary) replacement, Bob Benchley, was a clear case of the opposite: he could write uproariously funny essays but was really lukewarm at his fiction. But I digress. Plum rewrote and polished these magazine articles for publication in book form in London (1932). They have never been reprinted in the U.S. to this day. Because of the loosening of the copyright restrictions in Great Britain (succumbing to pressure from its EC partners to loosen its hold on the good stuff), we can now secure these essays from the Mother Country.

An even dozen essays, with subsections and diversions dividing up three of them, and crowned by a biographical, explanatory, and (of course) witty intro., comprise the bound volume. Since trying to delve analytically into the Master's humor is a little like trying to catch lightning in a jar, I will brush lightly over the texts, extracting examples where the whimsy tugs me thence.

The first offerings, in three parts, contains some tongue-in-cheek literary observations. *Not so t-in-c* is the piece decrying the then-current trend to bung a female love interest into mystery thrillers. Quoth he: "Who wants a beastly girl messing about and getting in the way when the automatics are popping?" Plum waxes eloquent about "her" beauty and stupidity: "a messenger, a one-eyed Chinaman, brings her an unsigned note at 2:00 a.m. to 'come at once,' so she naturally accompanies him to a ruined cottage in a swamp, where the hero, at great inconvenience to himself, must rescue her." Sherlock Holmes would "permit them to call at Baker Street, and tell him about the odd behavior of their wicked uncle, and...in a

pinch he might even allow them to marry Watson...but once the story was underway, they had to retire into the background and stay there." Plum then proceeds to give a brief overview of crime fiction of the twenties, accompanied by his own "spin" on the good, the bad and the ugly.

In many ways a man, as we know, of the 19th century, he bemoans the disappearance of falconry, with all its trappings, and in a similar vein, the demise of the position of country house-keeping's major domo in "Butlers and the Buttled," in which he points out how it is hard on the butlers to have faded from the scene, and also laments the time long ago when being buttled TO was a wonderful kind of life. He expounds on a theme rife throughout his fiction, and repeated in his autobiographical material—to wit: that he has an unconquerable fear of butlers ex officio, and suspects that most of the rest of us ordinary mortals who have experienced life under the butler do, as well.

There are essays about divorce, income tax, sports, gambling, and ocean liner travel (at which he is admittedly an authority), but my favorite piece is in the last section of the article on theater life, in which he deftly eviscerates the Baconian view that W. Shakespeare did not write his own material. In a brilliantly conceived scenario, F. Bacon takes his latest play, something called *Hamlet*, to the 16th century equivalent of a Broadway producer. Said p. calls in a gent known as a "fixer," i.e., a man who can repair damaged drama. The fixer is named Bill Shakespeare, and what he does to poor Frannie Bacon's play is yours to read about and enjoy. I suppose that goes for the whole book.



* Jasen's bibliography says these stories were written "during the later teens", and McIlvaine's bibliography confirms it.

—OM

WODEHOUSE AND THE CRITICS

By Michael Dirda

A talk delivered at the Chicago convention of The Wodehouse Society, October, 1997. Michael is a writer for and an editor of *The Washington Post Book World*. He was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for literary criticism in 1993 and later achieved the even greater distinction of membership in The Wodehouse Society. His talk is reprinted here by his kind permission and that of the publisher, The Washington Post Co. I submit that this is more than an entertaining talk; it is a chunk of quite respectable literary research. Critics and professors of literature often entertain themselves with what may be called the masterpiece question. No one, to my knowledge, has attempted a comprehensive answer to that question with regard to the works of PGW. Until now. —OM

Among the gifts to humanity bestowed by a beneficent providence one must surely count the longevity, imaginative fertility and sheer industriousness granted to Pelham Grenville Wodehouse. Had our author booked passage to New York on that spiffy new liner the *Titanic* or had he succumbed at forty during one of those deadly flu epidemics early in the century, he would certainly be appreciated today by only a few antiquaries, dusty specialists in the byways of Edwardian and Georgian fiction. He might rank with Barry Pain, Ouida or Ethel M. Dell, though perhaps not quite so high as these colossi of the best seller list.

Yes, it could have been a very near thing for enlightened readers everywhere. What if Wodehouse, like his confrere E. M. Forster, had written four or five novels and then simply retired, having discovered that his pen—or rather his Monarch typewriter—had gleaned his teeming brain? Or what if the Wodehouse peepers had been a little stronger and he had been ordered up to the front trenches during the Great War, and there met the fate of his fellow humorist Saki, not to mention a generation of poets that included Wilfred Owen and Rupert Brooke?

But Wodehouse didn't end up as cannon fodder and he never stopped writing, producing somewhere between 90 and 100 books—the exact figure depends on how you calculate and whom you ask. For fans the great quantity of Wodehouse titles is an occasion for thanks and joy. One will never, it would seem, run out of books about Lord Emsworth and Jeeves and Psmith and Uncle Fred and Monty Bodkin and innumerable Mulliners, Drones, Crumpets and Eggs. But for the critic this impressive literary achievement insidiously leads to an overwhelming question: Which is the Master's greatest book? Which novel or story collection do you reverently lend to the neophyte, eager to enter the literary equivalent of the Elysian fields, a locale that classical scholars assure us abuts the gardens of Blandings Castle? Not least, which single volume would the informed Wodehousian choose to tuck under his or her arm en route to a desert island, preferably with Jeeves to tend the coconuts, Mr. Mulliner to

tell stories in the evening and either Corky or Catsmeat Pirbright, *a son gout*, for companionship?

These are, admittedly, all slightly different questions, but they overlap sufficiently as a way to think about Wodehouse and the critics. Which novels, in short, have the Master's admirers judged his best? And, as a corollary, which short stories?

To determine some answers I read around in a good many books, articles and reviews dealing with Wodehouse, consulted various reference works and literary companions, checked out several humor anthologies and short story collections. I spent a pleasant couple of weekends at my task and herewith announce the results of my researches. Doubtless, I have overlooked relevant material, and doubtless members of this audience, far better informed Wodehouseans than I, will be able to offer further suggestions and corrections.

Let us begin with the author himself. Asked to name his favorite among his books, Wodehouse told his *Paris Review* interlocutor: "Oh, I'm very fond of a book called *Quick Service* and another called *Sam in the Suburbs*, a very old one." In fact, as good as his word, Wodehouse chose *Quick Service* as the novel that rounds off that splendid anthology, *The Most of P.G. Wodehouse*. However, as for *Sam in the Suburbs*, aka *Sam the Sudden*, on his 70th birthday Wodehouse paradoxically confessed to a *Sunday Times* reporter: "If you ask me frankly whether I consider *Sam the Sudden* or *The Man with Two Left Feet* any good today, I must tell you no. Are people still reading the stuff?"

In short fiction Wodehouse recommended a number of his miniature masterpieces. For a collection called *My Funniest Story* he plumped for the Mulliner story "Honeysuckle Cottage." Just after the war he compiled three anthologies with his agent Scott Meredith and these reprint either "Sonny Boy" or "Trouble Down at Tudsleigh." In *A Century of Humour*, edited by PGW alone, he chose "The Exit of Battling Billson." But when Frank Muir was editing *The Oxford Book of Humorous Prose*, the genial raconteur of *My Word* asked the Master to suggest his own entries. This time Plum opted for "From a Detective's

Notebook” and the famous section of *Right Ho, Jeeves* in which a drunken Gussie Fink-Nottle presents the prizes at Market Snodsbury Grammar School.

So much for the author. But what does he know? Let us advance to some of his best known interpreters and critics. Richard Osborne, perhaps our greatest authority on Wodehouse, announced in the appendix to *The Penguin Wodehouse Companion* that *Joy in the Morning* was his “favorite Bertie/Jeeves novel.” Biographer Frances Donaldson names *Right Ho, Jeeves* as her subject’s best book. In a more expansive passage she adds, “I have enjoyed *The Small Bachelor*, *Ice in the Bedroom*, *Do Butlers Burgle Banks*, a collection of short stories called *Indiscretions of Archie*, even *French Leave* and *Barmy in Wonderland*, as much as any of his books except the two masterpieces *Right Ho, Jeeves* and *The Mating Season*.” Philip Thody, in a prefatory somewhat philosophic essay in the mammoth Wodehouse bibliography, notes that Bertie is always “happy to find himself on the losing end if that is the best way to make people happy. The paradigmatic case of this is at the end of what is Wodehouse’s best book, *Right Ho, Jeeves*.”

Like many commentators, including Joseph Connolly, N.T.P. Murphy and Benny Green, Owen Dudley Edwards never points to a single book as Wodehouse’s best, but his perceptive study implicitly makes the case for *Leave it to Psmith* as the plum of Plum’s productions, both in itself and because of the number of different series that may be linked to it. In *The Comic Style of P.G. Wodehouse* Cornell linguist Robert Hall chooses *Uncle Fred in the Springtime* as representative of his subject’s mature humor. When proffering an extended analysis of the Wodehouse prose style, Hall applies his skills to the opening section of *The Luck of the Bodkins*, clearly a personal favorite, especially in its more leisurely English version. Herbert Warren Wind suggests near the beginning of his genial profile of the sage of Remsenburg that *The Code of the Woosters* is the great work. David Jasen avoids naming a particular Wodehouse title, though he comes closest in describing *Service with a Smile* as “one of his masterpieces.” Similarly, R. B. D. French only goes so far as to say that *Summer Lightning* and *Heavy Weather* are “the most solid and decorous of the Blandings stories” and to call *Uncle Fred in the Springtime* somewhat overrich. In my opinion, one can never be too rich. In her elegant *Wooster Proposes, Jeeves Disposes or Le Mot Juste* Kristin Thompson makes a case for the considerable merits of such late books as *Ice in the Bedroom*, and takes a mild potshot or two, calling *The Code of the Woosters* episodic and *The Mating Season* so exaggerated as to be close to a parody.

But critics, really! What do they know? Now publishing companies, they have their corporate fingers on the pulse of the market. When Simon and Schuster inaugurated a series called *The P.G. Wodehouse Classics* it started with *Fish Preferred* (that is, *Summer Lightning*), *The Code of the Woosters* and *Uncle Fred in the Springtime*. When Penguin first brought out Wodehouse in paperback, it turned to *Right Ho, Jeeves*, *The Code of the Woosters*, *Leave it to Psmith*, and, somewhat surprisingly, *Big Money*. A Vintage paperback series similarly began with *Leave it to Psmith*, *Mulliner Stories* and *The Code of the Woosters*.

Clearly, four or five contenders for best book are emerging. Consider the novels included in three classic Wodehouse collections. For *Nothing But Wodehouse*, published in 1932, Ogden Nash chose *Leave it to Psmith*. In the American edition of the 1939 *Weekend Wodehouse* the unnamed editor reprints *Fish Preferred*, aka *Summer Lightning*. As I said earlier, *The Most of P.G. Wodehouse*, published in 1960, includes *Quick Service*. Interestingly, when Peter Schwed recommended this volume in an essay included in the huge Morgan Library centenary volume, he misremembers its contents and speaks of *The Luck of the Bodkins*. Could this be an act of wish fulfillment? Was *The Luck of the Bodkins* the novel that Schwed had hoped to include?

Let us turn for a moment to some of the short stories. When the writer’s agent Scott Meredith edited the 1949 *Best of Wodehouse*, he chose what he regarded as the best short story about each major character: Hence, “Jeeves and the Yuletide Spirit”; “Trouble Down at Tudsleigh” (Freddie Widgeon); “Strychnine in the Soup” (Mulliner); “The Level Business Head” (Ukridge); “The Crime Wave at Blandings” (Lord Emsworth); “Sonny Boy” (Bingo Little); “The Letter of the Law” (Oldest Member), and “Tried in the Furnace” (Drones Club). James Heineman, among the greatest Wodehouse collectors and boosters, must have thought particularly highly of “The Great Sermon Handicap” since he eventually published six volumes devoted to its translation into various languages.

In the Modern Library’s *Selected Stories of P.G. Wodehouse* editor John W. Aldridge reprints nothing but Bertie and Jeeves adventures. “Of all Wodehouse’s stories,” he writes, “those relating to Jeeves and Bertie Wooster are, to my mind, the most successful...*Leave it to Psmith* is an almost perfect book...But Wodehouse’s mastery lies in the field of the short story, and there Jeeves is absolutely without peer.” One might, by the way, want to contrast the latter part of this critical observation with a remark of Owen Dudley Edwards: “It is ungenerous to the Jeeves short stories, notably those in *Very Good Jeeves*, to deny their high quality, but only one or two of them are comparable in quality and human observation to the novels.”

You pays your money and you takes your choice.

By now, I trust, matters are growing a tad confusing. Let's be less high-minded and more venal. Perhaps the best Wodehouse book is the one that's worth the most. In this case, you would obviously plump for a first edition of, say, *The Pot Hunters* or *The Swoop*, each of which sell for \$4,000 or \$5,000, according to the latest edition of *Collected Books*. Of course, Wodehouse himself would probably prefer *Summer Moonshine*, for which *The Saturday Evening Post* paid \$45,000 in 1938 for serial rights. Nevertheless, the Master's most lucrative prose—the most return on the word—must be the only two Wodehouse sentences uncut from the musical *Anything Goes*. Those two sentences entitled Plum to a share of the profits, amounting at one time to \$500 a week during the show's run. If, however, one were to point to the single most profitable sentence in the oeuvre, that could only be: "Mrs. Gregson to see you, sir" the first recorded words, from "Extricating Young Gussie," of the most gigantic brain this side of Spinoza, the inimitable Jeeves.

Because most established critics have tended to neglect Wodehouse, often dismissing him as a mere entertainer, his most informed admirers have frequently been ordinary readers and fellow craftsmen. Hilaire Belloc famously called him "the head of my profession," while the master of the English ghost story M.R. James and the poet A.E. Housman both deeply admired his felicitous prose. The great Russian writer Vladimir Brussilov once remarked, with his usual modesty, "No novelists anywhere any good except me. P. G. Wodehouse and Tolstoi not bad. Not good, but not bad." In a similar, if less colorful fashion, W. H. Auden compared Wodehouse with Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, and not entirely to their advantage.

Evelyn Waugh, it is said, displayed an obsessive fondness for the Psmith stories, and once suggested that an anthology ought to have reprinted "Strychnine in the Soup" since it was funnier than "Goodbye to All Cats." Brother Alec Waugh firmly stated that if he were shipwrecked on a desert island, he would take along "the ever delightful *Mike*." Anthony Powell also preferred the early school stories to the mature masterpieces, while the late poet laureate John Betjeman claimed to have "loved every word Wodehouse has written. I think I have read every one from the days he appeared in *The Captain*." Malcolm Muggeridge reports that *Mike* held a special place in its author's esteem because it conveyed so well the action and atmosphere of a cricket match." When Muggeridge told his friend George Orwell about this, Orwell replied with his trademark seriousness that "Wodehouse was perfectly right. *Mike*, he insisted, was his best book."

Kipling—himself frequently undervalued these days—told a friend that "Lord Emsworth and the Girlfriend" was "one of the most perfect short stories he had ever read." This is a judgment in which Frances Donaldson and Owen Dudley Edwards concur, each calling this moving, perhaps partly autobiographical story the peak of Wodehouse's short fiction. For *The Oxford Book of Humorous Prose* Frank Muir also selects "Lord Emsworth and the Girl Friend" along with "Ukridge's Accident Syndicate." It's worth recalling that Ukridge was Wodehouse's own favorite among his fictive creations. The once prominent English critic Bernard Levin named *Uncle Fred in the Springtime* as his favorite book. In his preface to *The Code of the Woosters*, Alexander Cockburn observes that *Joy in the Morning* is "regarded by many as preeminent in the Wooster/Jeeves cycle."

Many writers on Wodehouse discuss his virtues—the audacious similes, the fracturing of quotation and cliché, the razor-edged plotting—without focusing on any particular title. Like Trollope or Agatha Christie, PGW is a climate all to himself. People say "I'm reading a P. G. Wodehouse," the particular title seeming hardly to matter. Indeed, even for many admirers it is sometimes difficult to remember which bits of comic business occur in which books. Obviously the oeuvre as a whole counts for more than its individual parts. This is a compliment to the high and even level of the Wodehouse accomplishment, one characterized by what Frank Swinnerton called an "irresistible air of improvisation" supported by an exquisite use of language.

All that aside, an editor must nevertheless make distinctions. In *Tellers of Tales*, a collection of the world's greatest stories, Somerset Maugham—no slouch at short fiction himself—includes "Uncle Fred Flits By." So too does Louis Untermeyer in his *Treasury of Laughter*. (A companion volume, *The Treasury of Great Humor*, reprints "Strychnine in the Soup.") Historical novelist Thomas B. Costain, once a name to conjure with, chose "The Clicking of Cuthbert" for his popular anthology *Read with Me*. For his *Treasury of British Humor*, scholar and humorist Morris Bishop—a Cornell friend of Robert Hall's—picked "Tried in the Furnace," adding sensibly: "I dare not assert that this is the noblest story Wodehouse ever wrote. Who could choose the one most perfect rose displayed at the Royal Horticultural Society, or the finest vegetable marrow ever grown at Blandings Castle?" In *I Couldn't Help Laughing* Ogden Nash again nets "Uncle Fred Flits By," as do several other anthologies. I think it and "Lord Emsworth and the Girl Friend" are probably Plum's most admired stories.

Robertson Davies once expressed his fondness—in a review for *The Washington Post Book World* of several

Wodehouse items—for *Jill the Reckless*, probably for its theater background and its bats-squeak whisper of sexuality, one of the few in Wodehouse: “The touch of his body against hers always gave her a thrill, half pleasurable, half exciting.” Shockingly explicit. Paraphrasing Faulkner on Keats’s “Ode on a Grecian Urn,” Wilfrid Sheed asserted that *Leave it to Psmith* was worth any number of old ladies. Nancy Mitford once wrote in a letter to Evelyn Waugh that certain sentences in *The Code of the Woosters* made her absolutely shriek with laughter.

Which suggests the interesting question: Which is Wodehouse’s funniest sentence? Richard Osborne suggests the opening to *The Luck of the Bodkins*: “Into the face of the young man who sat on the terrace of the Hotel Magnifique at Cannes there had crept a look of furtive shame, the shifty, hangdog look which announces that an Englishman is about to talk French.” Elliot Milstein in a *Plum Lines* article disagrees and gives the laurel for best opening sentence to *Joy in the Morning*: “After the thing was all over, when peril had ceased to loom and happy endings had been distributed in heaping handfuls and we were driving home with our hats on the side of our heads, having shaken the dust of Steeple Bumbleigh from our tyres, I confessed to Jeeves that there had been moments during the recent proceedings when Bertram Wooster, though no weakling, had come very near to despair.”

In yet another learned disquisition Curtis Armstrong maintains that the opening sentences to *The Code of the Woosters* deliver the biggest, if subtlest, laugh right off: “I reached out a hand from under the blankets and rang the bell for Jeeves. ‘Good morning, Jeeves.’ ‘Good evening, sir.’”

With such lines on my mind, I decided to look up the Wodehouse entries in the 1996 *Oxford Book of Quotations*. This estimable volume selects nearly two dozen citations from the oeuvre, including four from *The Code of the Woosters* and four from *The Inimitable Jeeves*. One sentence from the novel is particularly notable: “He spoke with a certain whatisit in his voice, and I could see that, if not actually disgruntled, he was far from being grunted.” Still, I suspect that Wodehouse’s most celebrated witticism, since recycled by numerous other authors, is this one, the dedication to *The Heart of a Goof*: “To my daughter Leonora without whose never-failing sympathy and encouragement this book would have been finished in half the time.”

Reference books! Start down that factstrewn path and there is no end. In *The List of Books*, a guide to good

reading, Frederick Raphael and Kenneth McLeish choose *The Inimitable Jeeves* as their main selection, followed by *Leave it to Psmith* and *Summer Lightning*. In the Selective P.G. Wodehouse Chronology that prefaces the Morgan Library’s exhibition volume the unnamed compiler calls *The Code of the Woosters* “for many the ultimate Jeeves-Bertie novel.” *The Dictionary of American Biography* entry, scripted by Philip Thody, mentions Gussie presenting the prizes as one of the funniest scenes in literature and points to “Lord Emsworth and the Girl Friend” as the best of the Blandings stories. The headnote to the Wodehouse entry in *Contemporary Literary Criticism* refers to its subject’s “strongest novels, *The Code of the Woosters* and *Joy in the Morning*.” *A Reader’s Guide to the 20th Century Novel* throws caution to the wind and includes four titles, with accompanying short essays: *Psmith in the City*; *Uneasy Money*; *Carry On, Jeeves*; and *Galahad at Blandings*.

If one or two or even three of these last seem like slightly eccentric choices, it is worth noting that, in the end, nearly every Wodehouse title has its advocate. In a review for the *New Republic* of *Sunset at Blandings*, D. David Bowen concludes, “for the great Wodehouse read *Something New*, *Pigs Have Wings* or *Full Moon* in the Blandings series, or the Jeeves books *Joy in the Morning* or *The Code of the Woosters*.” Richard Osborne admired *Jill the Reckless* as one of the “best contrived, one of the fullest of something for everybody, one of the longest and probably the best value for money of all the pre-farce light novels.” R. B. D. French calls *Bill the Conqueror*, “one of the more solid and roomy books of the period,” and describes *The Small Bachelor* as “one of the most elegant and controlled works of Wodehouse’s middle manner.” Robertson Davies particularly praises *Performing Flea* as offering with Virginia Woolf’s diary, “the most penetrating insight into a writer’s life that I have seen in current literature.” Evelyn Waugh refers frequently in his correspondence to *The Mating Season*, though mainly for the scene in which Gussie, drunk again, gives his name to the police as Duff Cooper. With this flourish and a send-up of A. A. Milne’s Pooh poetry, *The Mating Season* takes a mild poke at two of Wodehouse’s harshest critics during the affair of the Berlin broadcasts.

We will hear more about those broadcasts this afternoon from that distinguished Conan Doyle and Wodehouse aficionado Jon Lellenberg, who, in his cups, once confessed to a particular fondness for *Cocktail Time*. Of course, this is a man who displays a sampler in his kitchen embroidered: “Blessed are the Debonair for They Shall Drink Cocktails.” Even a novel like *Psmith Journalist* has its ardent fans. Owen Dudley Edwards, for instance, says that it “is an astonishing novel . . . this novel, more than any other, tells what the American progressive era in jour-

nalism was about.” Naturally one must first care about the American progressive era in journalism. Charles E. Gould says of *Hot Water* that it is one of Wodehouse’s “most light-hearted, extravagantly and skillfully plotted and funniest novels.” And in 1956 Wodehouse’s editor Peter Schwed wrote that *Something Fishy* seems to be “just about a perfect work of art.” A writer’s editors, however, are never on oath. Still, retitled *The Butler Did It*, this same book would be Plum’s “biggest seller in America since the end of World War II.”

Which, by this time you might wonder, or then again you might not, is my own favorite Wodehouse? At first I was going to choose the chimerical *White Hope*, a title which in Charles E. Gould’s words “somehow crept into Simon and Schuster’s list of books by P. G. Wodehouse about 1962 and has been there ever since.” But if we are wishing I will go all the way and pick the book that Plum hoped to do in 1955. According to David Jasen, “Plans for Plum’s next novel were unusually ambitious. It was hoped that he could write a story involving all of his major established characters—what Simon and Schuster described as an ‘an all-star Wodehouse novel.’ When he came to it, however, he was unable to evolve a plot of sufficient strength and the idea had to be abandoned.”

Imagine Jeeves at Blandings! And the return of Psmith! And perhaps Adrian Mulliner teamed up with Bingo Little against the efficient Baxter and the villainous Roderick Spode. Best of all, think of Bertie, Lord Emsworth and Uncle Fred entangled in some hare-brained scheme to thwart Aunt Agatha! And Bring on the Girls, all of them from Madeline Bassett and Stiffy Byng to Honoria Glossop and Bobbie Wickham! Ah what a book that would have been! Sometimes while drifting into sleep, I like to think that Wodehouse just might have it waiting for us when we finally reach that Great Celestial Library.

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TYPE CAST

At each of our last five conventions I have been asked to play the part of Lord Emsworth in a play or reading. Why, I wonder, have I never been asked to play the rich, handsome, young Esmond Haddock? Or Desmond Franklyn, the “lean, keen, hawk-faced Empire-building sort of chap”? No, it’s always that doddering, wooly-minded old . . . ah . . . what *is* his name? — OM

POROSKNIT

David Landman recently uncovered a slab of social (or is it cultural?) history when he noticed one word in a Wodehouse lyric and one advertisement in a long-ago magazine. Here’s his account of the discovery:

In the song “Bongo on the Congo” from *Sitting Pretty* of 1924 there are the following verses:

The summer girl is not a prude
Her tastes are simple, even crude:
Her clothing, what there is of it,
Is what you might call porosknit.

No one has any trouble with the last word because it obviously denotes see-through mesh material. But I wondered why Wodehouse spelled it that peculiar way instead of “porous-knit,” until I ran across the enclosed ad in *Colliers Easter Number* for March 19, 1910. “Porosknit” was a brand name probably sufficiently well known to be familiar to a musical comedy audience in 1924. The *Colliers*, by the way, contains the Hollywood story “Archibald’s Benefit,” later collected in *The Man Upstairs*.

“Porosknit”
Summer Underwear
FOR MEN FOR BOYS
Most comfortable because it feels like nothing at all in hot weather. Surprisingly durable—elastic. Cools the body.
FOR MEN Any style FOR BOYS
50c Shirts and Drawers 25c
 per garment
Union Suits, \$1.00 for Men, 50c for Boys.
Buy from dealers. Write us for interesting booklet.
CHALMERS KNITTING COMPANY, 3 Washington St., Amsterdam, N. Y.
You must insist on seeing this Label
On Only the Genuine Porosknit Garment

1999 CONVENTION

Toni Rudersdorf, president of the Texas Drone Rangers, writes that our 1999 convention is scheduled for the next-to-last weekend of October at the Wyndham-Warwick Hotel in Houston. For the numerically inclined that’s October 22–24, 1999. Toni is moving fast on this!

NEW MEMBERS

FROM BARRY PAIN TO ANSELM MULLINER: A WODEHOUSE SOURCE TRACED

By William A. S. Sarjeant

Throughout a long life—and despite the early distraction of sport and the later distraction of television—P. G. Wodehouse was not only a prolific writer of his own books, but also an eager reader of books by others. In a letter quoted by David Jasen (P. G. Wodehouse, *A Portrait of a Master*, 1974, p. 17-18), Plum's long-time friend, William Townend, wrote that "[h]e was an omnivorous reader. Some authors were Barrie Pain and James Payn, Rudyard Kipling and W.S. Gilbert."

Kipling and Gilbert, of course, remain famous names, even nowadays. Their influence upon Plum's own writing has been considered—albeit usually briefly—by most biographers. In contrast, there has been only one specific reference to the influence of Barrie Pain on Wodehouse, when Plum himself wrote to Richard Usborne (quoted in Frances Donaldson's *P.G. Wodehouse*, 1982, p. 62) as follows:

When was the first number of *Chums*? Was it 1892? Anyway, it contained—in addition to Max Pemberton's "Iron Pirate"—a school story by Barry Pain called "Two" (published in book form as *Graeme and Cyril*). It made an enormous impression on me. It had practically no plot but the atmosphere was wonderful. I was re-reading it only the other day and it's great stuff.

I would like to suggest that, in another instance, Wodehouse may have based a plot on an idea culled from one of Barrie Pain's other books—*In a Canadian Canoe* (London: Henry, 1891). This was Pain's earliest book; it comprises two groups of stories and three individual tales, most of them republished from the Cambridge University student literary magazine *Granta*. The group of nine essays that furnish the book's title are written in a style reminiscent of that of Jerome K. Jerome. They are very much in the style of Jerome's *Idle Thoughts of an Idle Fellow* (1886), representing Pain's musings and dreams while rowing leisurely, or just drifting, in his canoe on the Backs at Cambridge. In the ninth essay, there occurs the following passage:

A curate was once complaining to me about certain hardships that he suffered at the hands of his vicar. "And, above all," he said, "I am never allowed to preach an evening sermon. I get no chances. The vicar always preaches the evening sermons." There was a good deal of justice in the complaint; we are all naturally more righteous

in the evening. When the light dies behind the stained windows, and the music speaks, and through the open doors you can smell the syringa-bushes, then—for some reason that I know not—it is more easy to think oneself a sinner and to wish one were not. Preaching would naturally be more effective at such a time.

Pain did not develop the theme, but it is my belief that the paragraph stayed long in Plum's mind. Almost fifty years later, it came to fruition in one of the very best of the Mulliner stories, "Anselm Gets his Chance", published in the collection *Eggs, Beans and Crumpets* (1940, p. 132). Here is Mr. Mulliner, discoursing to that ever-receptive audience in the Angler's Rest:

"The old old story," he said, a touch of sadness in his voice. "I do not know if you gentlemen are aware of it, but in the rural districts of England vicars always preach the evening sermon during the summer months, and this causes a great deal of discontent to seethe among curates. It exasperates the young fellows, and one can understand their feelings. As Miss Postlethwaite rightly says, there is something about the atmosphere of evensong in a village church that induces a receptive frame of mind in a congregation, and a preacher, preaching under such conditions, can scarcely fail to grip and stir. The curates, withheld from so preaching, naturally feel that they are being ground beneath the heel of an iron monopoly and chiselled out of their big chance."

Barrie Eric Odell Pain was born in 1864, the son of a Cambridge draper. His family was sufficiently well-to-do as to send him to a public school, Sedbergh in Yorkshire (no, not Sedleigh!) and permit him to study at Cambridge University. After graduation—and perhaps as a result of their similar style—Pain succeeded Jerome as editor of *Today*, then one of Britain's most important literary periodicals. He was a prolific writer, especially of novels and humorous stories of working-class life. He is remembered nowadays for his short stories of mystery, crime and detection, in particular *The Memoirs of Constantine Dix* (1905), which has been several times reprinted.

Regrettably, however, Pain's humorous writings have almost faded from memory. Though dated in theme and attitudes, they are well worth finding. I enjoyed especially *The One Before* (London: Grant Richards, 1902), in which the lively illustrations by Tom Browne add greatly to the fun.

In contrast, the other essays in Pain's first collection no longer read well. They are sometimes quirkily humorous, often thoughtful, but they contain classical allusions that few modern readers will comprehend and are much too often charged with undergraduate morbidity. (The sequence "The Nine Muses Minus One" represents the apotheosis of this). However, since it surely served as launching-point for one of Plum's finest humorous flights, the collection has earned its own special place in literary history.

ON RECEDING CHINS

Marilyn MacGregor found the following delightful letter in *The First Cuckoo, More Classic Letters to The [London] Times 1900-1975*. The letter has been reprinted a number of times in various places, but may still be new to many of us. The letter was dated 30 November, 1937.

Sir,

Your correspondent Mr. John Hayward is to a great extent right in his statement that Bertie Wooster has a receding chin.

A fishlike face has always been hereditary in the Wooster family. Froissart, speaking of the Sieur de Wooster who did so well in the Crusades—his record of 11 Paynim with 12 whacks of the battleaxe still stands, I believe—mentions that, if he had not had the forethought to conceal himself behind a beard like that of a burst horsehair sofa, more than one of King Richard's men—who, like all of us, were fond of a good laugh—would have offered him an ant's egg.

On the other hand, everything is relative. Compared with Sir Richard Glossop, Tuppy Glossop, old Pop Stoker, Mr. Blumenfeld, and even Jeeves, Bertie is undoubtedly opisthognathous. But go to the Drones and observe him in the company of Freddie Widgeon, Catsmeat Potter-Pirbright, and—particularly—of Augustus Fink-Nottie, and his chin will seem to stick out like the ram of a battleship.

Your obedient servant,
P. G. Wodehouse

SOMETHING ODD?

By John Fletcher

In the first Blandings novel, *Something Fresh* or *Something New*, can you sort out what happens on which days?

George and Aline, Ashe and Joan all go to Blandings Castle on a Friday (chapter 3, §3 and §9). Chapter 5 is set on that Friday. Chapter 6 describes the next day, Saturday; §1—in the small hours, Baxter disturbing Ashe Marson and Joan Valentine as they both independently converge on the scarab; §2—later in the morning, when Ashe and Joan agree to take turns at trying to raid the museum to steal it. Ashe (winning the toss) starts on that Saturday night. As they take alternate nights, Ashe would maraud on the nights of Saturday, Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and the following Sunday and Tuesday. Joan would take the nights between. Chapters 7 and 8 are both about the day "ten days after Joan and Ashe had formed their compact" (7 §1). Baxter had had nine sleepless nights since first interrupting Ashe (7 §2) or "ten nights to cool off" by "nearly two o'clock" on Sunday morning (chapter 8 §1); and George had dined eleven nights at Blandings (8 §2). As I count the days and nights, that should take us to the second Tuesday-Wednesday night, and Ashe's turn. In his prowling, he collides with George Emerson bringing food to Aline (8 §4), so waking up the house. In chapter 9 §1 Ashe "recounted the events of the past night" to Joan and tried to dissuade her from taking her chance next, "after what happened last night". So it must be Wednesday. Joan insisted on sticking to the rota agreed. By half-past eleven on the following morning (Thursday?) when Baxter wakes up, the scarab had been stolen. "It being Sunday morning, . . . most of the occupants of the place had gone off to church" (9 §2). Yet chapter 9 §4 seems to be the day after that Wednesday night, and so Thursday, because Peters, back from church, was magnanimous to Emsworth; Ashe told Peters that Joan was the thief; and Joan assumed that Ashe had broken his word and stolen it himself.

Is it Thursday or Sunday? Tony Ring (as author) and I (as publisher) are now preparing the volume of the concordance dealing with the Blandings saga. We would like to solve the conundrum, if possible.

AN INTERVIEW WITH P. G. WODEHOUSE

By Jack Ellsworth

The following article was recently spotted in *The Great Neck Record* published in the town of Great Neck, Long Island, New York. We called Mr. Ellsworth and learned that he owns and manages radio station WLIM in Patchogue, not far from Remsenburg, and writes just for the fun of it. His interviews with a number of well-known people have been published in a group of Long Island newspapers. Mr. Ellsworth told us that he met P. G. Wodehouse, "a very likable and gracious man," at an event to benefit the Bide-a-Wee pet cemetery (a special interest of Plum and Ethel), and was subsequently granted an interview at Remsenburg. We are grateful for Mr. Ellsworth's permission to reprint this interesting interview.

It was on a lovely spring afternoon in the early 70s that I had the thrill of interviewing Mr. P. G. Wodehouse. We sat on his comfortable sun porch at his home in Remsenburg. Mr. Wodehouse had enjoyed a long and illustrious career in music and literature. His contributions to the world of popular music included collaborations with Jerome Kern, Guy Bolton, and Oscar Hammerstein. Mr. Wodehouse first worked with Jerome Kern in London in 1906. They wrote several songs together and later collaborated on various shows including *Miss Springtime*, an early Ziegfeld show, and one called *Have a Heart*, which ran briefly in New York and then went on the road. After that came the 1917 *Oh, Boy!*, an enormous success.

Among the songs in *Oh, Boy!* were "Nesting Time in Flatbush," "A Pal Like You," "An Old Fashioned Wife," and the most memorable, "Till the Clouds Roll By." Another great success that same year was *Leave It to Jane*. Again Jerome Kern wrote all the music and P.G. Wodehouse did the lyrics. *Leave It to Jane* enjoyed a three-year off-Broadway revival in the mid fifties. Mr. Wodehouse said he really loved that show.

I asked Mr. Wodehouse, "Of all the songs you wrote with Kern, which were your favorites?"

He replied, "Well, I'm very fond of 'The Siren's Song' from *Leave It to Jane*, and, of course, 'Bill', which is in *Show Boat*. We originally wrote 'Bill' for an earlier show called *Oh, Lady! Lady!!* That was about 1918. It was a farce starring Vivienne Segal, but Jerry felt 'Bill' was too slow, so the song lay dormant, so to speak, for about eight years. In 1927, while I was out in Hollywood, Jerry came to me one day and asked if he could use 'Bill' for *Show Boat*...and I said, oh yes, of course you can....and it was a big success. I must say that of all the Jerry Kern melodies, 'Bill' is my special favorite. Of course, all of his stuff was so good."

I asked Mr. Wodehouse, "What kind of a man was

Jerome Kern? You worked with him so often and knew him very well."

"He was a very delightful fellow, very cheerful and full of pep. We got along awfully well. He was such a splendid fellow to work with. He used to work practically all night. Once while he was living in Bronxville, he called me at three a.m. and woke me up to say, 'I've got the melody for the second act number,' and then he played it for me over the phone. Then I wrote a dummy of it and then did the lyrics. Then he continued to work all night. I think that's what killed him. He wasn't strong at all....not an awfully strong fellow and he never wanted to go to bed."

I asked Mr. Wodehouse if Kern was ever concerned about competition with other composers.

"Not while I knew him. He was absolutely leading the field in those days. Then a little later George Gershwin became known. George was actually a protégé of Jerry's and if Jerry needed help on a show, he'd get George to assist him with the music. Later Richard Rodgers came along. I understand toward the end of his life, Jerry was fairly gloomy about the younger generation knocking at the door. He was very sensitive about his position. He fretted if he couldn't sort of be the leader."

I told Mr. Wodehouse that one of Kern's loveliest songs was "I've Told Every Little Star" from *Music in the Air*. Bing Crosby said it was his favorite and that the melody was inspired by the song of a finch singing outside his window one morning while he was vacationing in Quogue. I then whistled what could have been the bird's song.

Mr. Wodehouse chuckled, "That's a delightful story, isn't it?"

I then said, "I've been told that much of Jerome Kern's music was inspired by German folk songs. Is that true?"

"I believe it was. I'm not sure, but I think 'Till the Clouds Roll By' was taken from a German folk melody—or based on one. The great thing about Jerry in those days was that he was so high spirited and he'd do the light numbers so very well. When we worked together, Jerry generally wrote the music first, but if it was a comic song, then I did the lyrics first...but generally he'd do the music first and I'd fit the lyrics to it. I always preferred writing that way. I was awfully inclined to make a thing just like a set of light verse...You know, too regular a meter. I re-

member a song in *Oh, Boy*, the chorus ran something like this...If every day you give her *diamonds* and *pearls* on a string ...Well, I never would have thought of that. I mean the first beat came... If you give her *diamonds* and *pearls* on a string...To me it wouldn't have scanned properly. I mean my stuff when I wrote the lyrics first was always much too regular."

I asked Mr. Wodehouse what he thought about the then current musical *My Fair Lady*. He said, "That is such a wonderful show. The music was awfully good by Lerner and Loewe." He said he didn't care for rock and roll and country music. His comment was, "Well, I don't like it myself, but that may just be an old fashioned point of view. But before I forget, I haven't seen *Hello, Dolly* as yet, but I understand the big number is a world beater."

I then asked Mr. Wodehouse about his present activities. Perhaps best known to many for his writing, particularly about the character Jeeves, he said... "I just finished a novel yesterday. It needs a little more work. My great trouble these days is getting a thing long enough. Publishers want 70,000 words and I'm very apt to write about 63,000, so I have to do a bit of lengthening."

I then asked about the movie he worked on. "In 1937 there was a Fred Astaire movie called *A Damsel in Distress*. Wasn't that based on your book?"

"Yes, I worked on that production. You'll remember Ginger Rogers stepped aside for that film. She wanted to do more dramatic roles, so Fred's leading lady was Joan Fontaine. Fred had to work with her on the dancing because she wasn't quite up to Ginger's talents but she was a delightful, lovely leading lady. The Gershwins wrote the music for *A Damsel in Distress* and there were some wonderful songs that have endured very well indeed. There was 'Nice Work If You Can Get It,' and 'A Foggy Day.'"

"Well, Mr. Wodehouse, this has been a very rewarding experience for me. I've been wanting to meet you ever since my dear old dad introduced me to your work. He was a great admirer of Bolton, Wodehouse, and Kern. And I hear that Guy Bolton lives in this area and that you fellows still get together."

"Yes indeed," Mr. Wodehouse replied. "He remains a very close friend. We worked awfully well together on over twenty shows."

I said, "If only Jerome Kern were alive, you could do another show."

Mr. Wodehouse nodded and said, "Oh, yes!"

"In closing, Mr. Wodehouse, what advice would you give to young people who were interested in writing for the theatre or perhaps writing books and stories such as you have written?"

"Well, that's rather difficult. I'm very glad I'm not starting writing today because the market has practically dis-

appeared. In the early days when I was living in Greenwich Village and trying to earn a living by writing, there were all those pulp magazines like *Argosy*, *The Blue Book*, *The People's* and dozens of them. If you wrote a story you could always land it somewhere...and get about fifty dollars for it. Even the slick paper magazines, they've all disappeared. *Colliers* is gone, so is the *American Magazine*, the *Delineator*, and so many others. Getting a story published today isn't easy"

After chatting a while our interview ended and I departed saying I hoped we'd meet again soon ...Unfortunately we never did.

PLUM AND AGATHA

Jan Kaufman found the following item in *The New York Times* of September 19, 1997. It's an excerpt from a story by Frank McCourt (author of *Angela's Ashes*) about his early days in New York City forty years ago.

It was in Sam's store I first met Yonk Kling: artist, art restorer, bon vivant. There was Yonk over in the fiction section laughing over a P. G. Wodehouse "Ukridge" story. Only those who know and love Wodehouse will know what it's like to encounter a fellow Wodehouse lover. Only a line out of Wodehouse could describe our meeting: I fell on Yonk's neck with a glad cry. We chanted a litany of characters: Bertie Wooster, Jeeves, Ukridge, Rosie M. Banks, Pongo Twistleton

. . . [W]e made our way to Greenwich Street, where Yonk's uncle, Joe Kling, had his bookstore. Joe looked like a character out of an old newspaper movie: green eyeshade, purple bands holding up his shirtsleeves, he lived at the back of the store, where he had a metal cot, a toilet, a sink, a small refrigerator. Every Sunday, Joe traveled to Yonk's apartment on Montague for a bath and a Sunday dinner.

When we walked into the store, Joe was telling a customer: "No, I don't have Agatha Christie. I sell books, not entertainment. That woman's books wouldn't challenge the mentality of a Jersey City politician."

The customer stormed out and Yonk nudged me, "Ask him if he has any Wodehouse."

Joe glared at him. "What are you saying, Yonkel?"

I fell into Yonk's trap. "Mr. Kling, do you have any P. G. Wodehouse?"

Froth suddenly speckled Joe's lips. "What? What? Wodehouse? Friend of yours, Yonkel? He'd better be a friend of yours or I'm throwing him out."

SOMETHING NEW

Three items this time: two new collections of early Wodehouse stories, and a listing of Wodehouse booksellers, including a newly discovered one.
—OM

It's a great day for lovers of Plum's school stories. Our **John Fletcher**, who cleverly conceals himself behind the name Porpoise Books, has just published a collection of twenty-five school stories you probably haven't read. The back of the dust jacket has this to say for itself:

In 1905 P G Wodehouse wrote six stories, set in Wrykyn College and called *Tales of Wrykyn*. Two years before he had published a book with twelve stories and four essays called *Tales of St Austin's*, and no doubt meant to produce an equivalent Wrykyn book. Here it is at last. It contains 25 new Wodehouse short stories: the six basic *Tales of Wrykyn* with their original illustrations; six more Wrykyn stories; and thirteen stories set in other schools. Among the "Elsewhere" stories is "Stone and the Weed," where a newfangled motor car gets a Sedleigh boy away so fast from the scene of his crime that he almost establishes an alibi; "Personally Conducted," in which a teenage girl creditably maroons a Beckford housemaster at the top of a church tower; and "The Adventure of the Split Infinitive," at the farcically named St Asterisk's, a bitter mockery of the Sherlock Holmes stories. We despise ruthless Reginald even while we cannot help admiring his elegant revenges. However wrong the characters seem by any adult standards, even those of their own time, we are drawn into their world of warped values. They are unusual, even bizarre; certainly wry, they are in many ways also our kin.

I asked Len Lawson and found that many of these stories were originally published in *The Captain*, a popular magazine for boys, but some were from such obscure sources as *Windsor Magazine* and *London Magazine*. All were written in the first decade or the early teens of the century. Len says that nine of the stories have been published in relatively recent collections: *Plum Stones*, *The Swoop and Other Stories*, and *The Uncollected Wodehouse*. None of these books quite made it to *The New York Times* bestseller list, however, so for most of us there is much good stuff in this new book. We are indebted to John Fletcher for making the stories available.

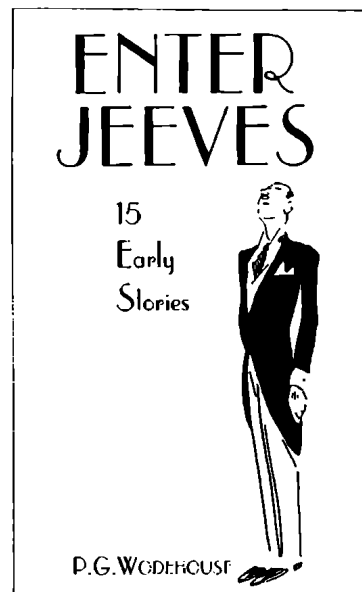
It's a handsome hardcover book, well produced with crisp, clean printing, and a pleasure to read. The Wrykyn stories are accompanied by their nineteen original magazine illustrations. A bonus is the authentic-looking "Wrykyn College Lower Fifth Form Prize," a certificate, complete with coat of arms, printed on the first endpaper and already signed by the headmaster. Blank lines are provided for the insertion of your own name and/or that

of a domestic animal of your choice.

I bought my copy of the book at the Chicago convention. A note on the dust jacket says that you can get your copy "and a list of books related to Wodehouse, from Book Systems Plus (telephone 01799-542254), at 2B Priors Hall Farm, Widdington, Essex, CB11 3SB." Members in America might find it more convenient to get a copy from one of the specialist booksellers listed later in the column. For reference: ISBN 1-870304-24-1. I don't have a price for the book.



David Jasen, also a TWSer, announces the publication of a new collection of early Wodehouse stories, edited by David and published by Dover, the well-known republisher of all sorts of worthy out-of-print material. "This is the only collection," according to the back cover, "to contain the first eight Jeeves short stories as well as the complete Reggie Pepper series." Reggie, as all dedicated fans know, was a Drone and the predecessor of Bertie Wooster, though he lacked any such figure as Jeeves.



The Pepper stories range from "Absent Treatment" (*The Strand*, 1911) to "The Test Case" (*Illustrated Sunday Magazine*, December 1915). The Jeeves stories range from "Extricating Young Gussie" (*Saturday Evening Post*, September 1915) to "Jeeves Takes Charge" (*The Strand*, 1923).

The appeal of this collection is twofold: (1) some of the stories are hard to find—five of the Reggie Pepper stories and two of the Jeeves stories are not listed in Jasen's bibliography and none appear in the relatively recent *The Uncollected Wodehouse* and *The Swoop and Other Stories*; (2) all of the stories appear here in their original magazine form. As David wrote (private communication—I'm feeling very literary today): "...these earliest Jeeves stories are somewhat different than commonly found in the short story collections, when Plum rewrote them from magazines. Tightened them up, don't you know, but somehow lost the original take-your-time feeling the magazines imparted."

The only nit I can pick is that none of the delightful old

magazine illustrations is included, but we don't read Wodehouse for the pictures. Bet you haven't read most of these stories, and this may be your only chance.

The book describes itself as "Unabridged Dover (1997) republication of 15 stories from standard editions. Edited and with an introduction by David A. Jasen. 240 pp. 5 3/4 x 8 1/2. Paperbound." ISBN 0-486-29717-9 (pbk.) The price in the USA is \$8.95. Dover Publications, Inc., 31 East 2nd Street, Mineola, New York 11501.



Ralph Doty, way out there in Oklahoma, writes as follows about a book dealer way back there in Maryland:

At the risk of striking a commercial note, I have come across what looks like the chance to do a spot of good for good old TWS . . . A chappie with whom I've done the occasional bit of business, Nelson Freck of Second Story Books in Rockville, Maryland, has begun to offer first editions of *The Master*, as well as some fairly respectable Wodehousiana: I include a page of his catalogue so that you can see for yourself. . . . Try to call when Nelson isn't there, so that you may have the extra treat of conversation with his charming wife, Jennifer.

The commercial note is just exactly what we want to strike, since so few Wodehouse books are given away these days and so many are hard to find. The two pages of the October 1997 catalog (DC #54) list 84 books by Wodehouse, including many firsts, and four related items, such as Benny Green's biography.

For those who came in late and are just getting settled in their seats, I should point out that other Wodehouse specialists are doing business at their old stands, and doing many of us a great service. They all provide catalogues.

Finally (a fourth item), A Common Reader, often a rich source of Wodehousian treasures, has published a handsome new paperback edition of *Bring on the Girls!*, Plum and Guy Bolton's somewhat exaggerated but very entertaining version of their collaboration in musical comedy.

The book is available only through their catalog at \$16.95 per copy. Add \$4.95 shipping and handling for one or two copies. New York residents add sales tax. The book is listed in catalog number 0087. To order call (800) 832-7323 *or write The Common Reader, 141 Tampkins Ave., Pleasantville, NY 10570-3154. For further information on this book and others, go to: www.commonreader.com

A PUBLIC SCHOOL QUESTION

Phil Ayers has a question for which someone must have an answer. Phil has been reading the school stories lately and has noticed that the public school boys who are their subjects seem to have no choice of residence at the school.

"In *The Head of Kay's*," notes Phil, "Fenn, the head of the house, hates being there but does not seem able to move to another house. Even when he returns for a new term he must go back to Kay's. Yet Kay, the housemaster, is able to 'borrow' Kennedy from another house apparently without Kennedy's consent. My questions are, did boys have any choice about the house they lived in, could they change houses at will, and could a master require a boy to change houses without his consent?"

Please send your answers to OM or AD and your name will appear *in print*. Golly. —OM

THE SCORE AT SEVENTY

Fritz Menschaar found this self-description of Wodehouse in *The Oxford Book of Ages*. It is said to be an extract from a letter Wodehouse wrote to his doctor in February, 1951, but I haven't been able to find a published record of the letter. Even when describing his own infirmities, Plum could not avoid being entertaining.

The score then, to date is that I am deaf in the left ear, bald, subject to mysterious giddy fits, and practically cock-eyed. I suppose the moral of the whole thing is that I have simply got to realize that I am a few months off being seventy. I had been going along as if I were in the forties, eating and drinking everything I wanted to and smoking far too much. I had always looked on myself as a sort of freak whom age could not touch, which was where I made my ruddy error, because I'm really a senile wreck with about one and a half feet in the grave.

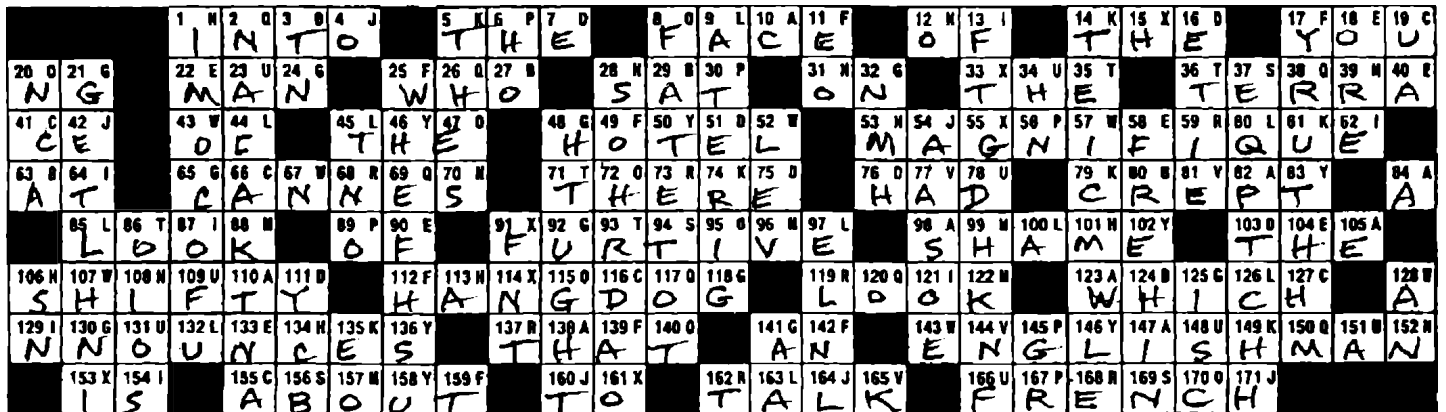
WODEHOUSE ACROSTIC SOLUTION

Here is the solution of the acrostic published in the Autumn 1997 *Plum Lines*, shown in the printing of Peter Schwed himself.

Members who sent correct and complete answers to the acrostic are, in alphabetic order, Joel J. Bratti, Ed Bronstein, Anne Cotton, Allen Crocker, Ralph Doty, Kim Kleinman, Marilyn MacGregor, Roxanne Ortiz McCord, Chris Riff, Paul Schnake, and Murray Wilson. The sender of the first entry is, as promised, entitled to the full-size hand-knitted replica of the Eiffel Tower, done in several lovely shades of blue wool.

It pains us deeply to tell you that we cannot keep our promise. Elin sprained her right index finger on a metaphor while working on this issue of *Plum Lines*, and Ed had scarcely begun to knit when he was painfully gored on the horns of a particularly vicious dilemma. Both of us are recovering nicely but we have been ordered by our medical attendants to avoid even the mildest forms of exercise for an indefinite period.

In what we hope may be some measure of compensation, we are able to offer members of the society 80,000 yards of knitting wool, in several lovely shades of blue, at a greatly reduced price.



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