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Plum Plagiarist? Of Course Not!

BY CHARLES E. GOULD, JR.

Many a time and oft (to begin by plagiarizing a phrase from Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* also to be found in Chapter 5 of *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit*) have we all—including somewhat older and better scholars than I—noted the astonishing—I surmise unique—degree to which the prose of P. G. Wodehouse is laden with the language of others, ranging from Greeks and Romans through the Bible and drawing-room ballads to the music hall and musical comedy stages of London and New York, interlaced with more than a high-school curriculum of poetry both English and American. His genius, of course, is a divine and sacred mystery, but his ability is susceptible to secular study: he enjoyed a Classical Education, at a time when much was learned by rote, so while he learned a lot of verse, he developed a good ear and a good memory. He lived in both England and America when—especially after the turn of the century—in Cole Porter's or somebody else's phrase, perhaps the poet Swinburne's, "Times [were] hot." He spent such a mind-boggling lot of time framing situation and plot that in the actual writing, once the laborer's task was essentially o'er, still with his nose to the grindstone and his shoulder to the plough, he could essentially coast on his ear. (The

Swedish exercises must have helped in this enterprise.) By the time he began writing, Wodehouse had taken in an earful of Western literature, apparently at a glance, and with increasing frequency throughout his career he cribbed from it with absolute impunity.

However, in the words of Cole Porter, "Times have changed," and by certain current standards Wodehouse alive would now be in what the poet Burns calls "durance vile." (In *The American Heritage Dictionary*, Third Edition, under "durance," George Will is cited for this phrase, with no acknowledgement whatsoever to Burns. I bet George Will got it from Wodehouse . . . without acknowledging Wodehouse either.) Let me tell you a little story. A prizewinning former student of mine entered a highly prestigious university last fall, where she was happy and productive, finishing the Fall Semester superbly. A week or two into the second semester, however, she incorporated in a paper about Shakespeare something she had derived from the Internet. (What she did, exactly, I do not know, nor is it relevant to this discussion. That having read Shakespeare with me she made such a move is even more puzzling. It is like getting McDonald's To Go when you could be dining at the Algonquin—but that is not relevant either.) The university promptly sent her down, withdrew credit for the Fall Semester, and stipulated that if she returns next fall she must do so as a freshman. Of course my first response to this news was to get mad at the institution, not at my former student. Her mistake was going on the Internet at all, for it will soon make every value and creed of my profession obsolete, if it has not done so already. The line between "plagiarism" and "research" was laughably fine when I was in graduate school 35 years ago; now—thanks to the Net—it is hilariously imperceptible to



little kids and the former president of Hamilton College alike. Whatever mistake my former student made, I'd blame the culture and the institution first. The ancient university's extremely tough line seems to me an image of widespread, laggardly abnegation of academic responsibility. That my college freshman friend did not believe she was doing anything wrong may seem hard to understand and easy to sneer at—but it's true, just the same, and she did not create the brave new world in which such things can be and overcome us like a summer's cloud: we did that.



Most readers of this literate journal will have noted that in the foregoing sentence I used a phrase from Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and rephrased a line from *Macbeth*—without attribution. What must now become of this ancient and honorable game of the literati, the dropped allusion, or quotation without quotation marks? That in fact there is what the university termed an “attribution-of-source issue” is exactly what makes it a game—a game at which P. G. Wodehouse is the undisputed master. Everyone understands that Wodehouse is not plagiarizing when Bertie Wooster says (*Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit*, Chapter 15), “Suddenly a thought came like a full-blown rose, flushing the brow,” whether or not we recognize the line as coming from Keats's *The Eve of Saint Agnes*. In the same chapter, we find: “He started straight off cleansing the bosom of the perilous stuff that weighs upon the heart” (*Macbeth*), “He was once more in the position of an Assyrian fully licensed to come down like a wolf on the fold with his cohorts all gleaming with purple and gold” (Byron), and “There was what is called the rub” (*Hamlet*). In Chapter 16 we turn up lines or phrases from Robert Service's “Dangerous Dan McGrew,” Tennyson's “Sir Galahad,” the *Maxims* of Publius Syrius, *The Merchant of Venice*, Coleridge's “Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” and John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, while Chapters 17 and 18 extend to George Leybourne (“The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze”), another Coleridge (“Kubla Khan”), Longfellow's “The Village Blacksmith,” Matthew Arnold (“Seeing her steadily and seeing her whole, I

found myself commending Aunt Dahlia's sagacity . . .”), Lorenz Hart (“I was bewitched, bothered and bewildered . . .”), and another Longfellow: “I took a nice easy half-swing [with young Thos's cosh] and he [Spode] fell to earth he knew not where” (“The Arrow and the Song”). These are quotations without quotation marks, indeed, but there is an assumption—a convention—that they will be recognized as such, even readily identified. Of course, it is not an invariably sound assumption: some of Wodehouse's allusions are elusive, and some remain still unidentified by the greatest experts, London's Richard Osborne and Norman Murphy, although it's obvious to the ear that allusions they are. (I am certain, for example, that the title of the Wodehouse story “The Awful Gladness of the Mater” is derived from a line of English poetry I read and lost long ago, referring to “the awful gladness of the matter.”) Here the question of whether Wodehouse is passing off the work of others as his own or doing something quite different seems to turn wholly upon the reader's perception of his motive, which included no attempt to cheat. That might just possibly be true of the case history above: when a certain body of knowledge by some means does fall into the public domain, it doesn't have to be cited. If that moment is difficult to define, there's all the more reason for our working as teachers to define it.

In the last half century or so, since the time when Wodehouse might be said to have been in his prime, I wonder whether there have been cultural and academic changes of such magnitude that the assumption—the convention—I mention above is no longer anywhere near as reliable as it once was. Wodehouse, especially in the *Jeeves* stories, is so constantly and variably allusive as to challenge an English teacher of 35 years' experience, and I'm wondering here—without any snobbishness at all—just how much of his allusiveness eludes a new, albeit devoted, generation of readers for whom such things are not reliably public domain. As a start on what could be a long and ultimately tedious study, let's categorize a few more examples from *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit*, in which Wodehouse is at his allusivest, sometimes running to three or four a page.

Category #1 includes the allusion, like those above, made (of course, in Bertie's first-person narrative voice) without any hint or recognition that there is any allusion at all. We find one on the very first page of the novel. “The view I took of it was that the curse had come upon me” (Tennyson, “The Lady of Shalott”). On the same page, we find an example from Category #2, the allusion that suggests it's an allusion but does not cite or even hint at its source: “. . . those poets

one used to have to read in school who were always beefing about losing gazelles” (Thomas Moore, *Lalla Rookh*). Believe me, no one has to read Thomas Moore in school any more; indeed, I have read Thomas Moore only because of Wodehouse’s allusions to him.

Category #3 involves the allusion that is clearly an allusion, though Bertie attributes it to Jeeves, as in Chapter 4: “His [Stilton Cheesewright’s] chest is broad and barrel-like and the muscles of his brawny arms strong as iron bands. I remember Jeeves once speaking of someone of his acquaintance whose strength was as the strength of ten, and the description would have fitted Stilton nicely.” The first sentence here belongs in Category #1: “The muscles of his brawny arms/ Are strong as iron bands” is from Longfellow’s “The Village Blacksmith,” from which another line is similarly swiped in Chapter 17: “His brow had become wet with honest sweat”; in these instances Bertie has or gives no clue that he’s quoting. In the second sentence, however, the attribution to Jeeves clearly means a quotation, however mysterious to Bertie; if it’s a mystery to the reader here in Chapter 4, it’s cleared up in Chapter 11:

“Who was that pal of yours you were speaking about the other day whose strength was as the strength of ten?”

“A gentleman of the name of Galahad, sir. You err, however, in supposing him to have been a personal friend. He was the subject of a poem by the late Alfred, Lord Tennyson.”

That makes Category #4, in which the allusion is cleared up somehow, as it is there, and as it is here in Chapter 12:

“There is a method by means of which Mrs. Travers can be extricated from her sea of troubles. Shakespeare.”

I didn’t know why he was addressing me as Shakespeare, but I motioned him to continue.

The phrase “sea of troubles” is from Hamlet’s soliloquy in Act III, Scene 1, and here Wodehouse—or Jeeves—has at least given us a hint as to where we might look if we needed to; but at the end of the same chapter, Jeeves again quotes from two of Shakespeare’s plays (*Macbeth* and *Julius Caesar*) in one conversation, without giving the Bard so much as a nod, thus in effect giving the Bard the Bird:

“So let’s go. If it were . . . what’s that expression of yours?”

“If it were done, then ’twere well it were done quickly, sir.”

“That’s right. No sense in standing humming and hawing.”

“No, sir. There is a tide in the affairs of men which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune.”

“Exactly,” I said.

I couldn’t have put it better myself.

How is Bertie . . . ?



We know from experience that Jeeves is likely to be quoting (but he’s quoting without quotation marks, you notice), and it is true that these are (or once were) pretty well-known lines, but I would not bet that an average Kent School senior these days would be able to spot either of them—not especially from ignorance or lack of exposure (we teach both those plays)—but because there is something in the Internet-Age Culture that prevents such nifties from becoming part of the usual student’s lexicon: the idea that there’s no reason to know anything when you can find it on the Net anyway. You may argue that a large percentage of Wodehouse’s allusions can be found in *Bartlett’s Quotations*, but that monumental work was never thought to replace its sources, whereas in the minds of many students today the Internet is—or is rapidly moving in that direction on the current tide in the affairs of boys and girls which, taken at the flood, leads on to misfortune.

Another variation—let’s call it Category E, so as not to make this too scientific or bean-countingly numerical in its approach to an art—is the mangled allusion, again without attribution. Still in Chapter 12 of *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit*, we read the following inspired nonsense as Bertie explains to Aunt Dahlia:

I ought to have warned you that Jeeves never leaps about and rolls the eyes when you spring something sensational on him, preferring to preserve the calm passivity of a stuffed frog. . . . Experience has taught me that there always follows some ripe solution

of whatever the problem may be. As the fellow said, if stuffed frogs come, can ripe solutions be far behind?

Well, “as the fellow said” tells us that there’s an allusion, or at least an echo, here; but the rare student in my experience who reads Wodehouse, while understanding the passage and seeing that it’s funny, doesn’t get it. I’m not showing off, I’m curious: how many of my present readers under 40 get it? Under 30? Get what? People of my generation or an older one, or people in my profession—and I use the term loosely, of course—might see it as an allusion to a line from Shelley’s “Ode to the West Wind.” Others, however well-read, might be able to identify it only as an allusion to or echo of a cliché: “If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?” Others yet, like the rare student I just mentioned, don’t see an allusion or hear an echo at all but still find the passage funny. I assume that Wodehouse assumed that virtually anybody reading it would get it: such an assumption, I think, is no longer valid, but a testimony to his genius (if one wants yet another) is that it really doesn’t matter. A case in point, also in Chapter 12, is one that I myself don’t get: with regard to the “tankard of the old familiar juice” that Jeeves has just stepped out to get, Bertie promises Aunt Dahlia “first go” at it, saying, “Your need is greater than mine, as whoever-it-was said to the stretcher case.” The “whoever-it-was” implies that the line, however commonplace, is derivative, though it sounds less literary than topical. Who knows? (A mute, inglorious Jeeves—or, more accurately, one wishing to be anonymous—replies, having scanned an early draft of this article: “The source of the quotation you seek, Sir, is Sir Philip Sidney, who giving his water-bottle to a dying soldier at Zutphen in 1586 said, according to his biographer Fulke Greville, ‘Thy necessity is yet greater than mine,’ Sir. The word *necessity* is almost always misquoted as *need*.”) Thank you, Jeeves.

In Chapter 14 of *Aunts Aren’t Gentlemen*, the last novel Wodehouse lived to complete, after many welcome repetitions of old gags Wodehouse suddenly produces a brand new one, when Bertie tells Jeeves: “You see before you a man who is as near to being what is known as a toad at Harrow as a man can be who was educated at Eton.” However well the elaborate syntax here speaks for an Eton education, Bertie is semiconsciously mangling a line from Kipling (“Pagett, M.P.”), to which Wodehouse is deliberately alluding in the confidence that his readers will get the joke. I say “semiconsciously” because clearly Bertie knows he’s alluding to something, even as he screws it up. (Next

to two to follow, I think this is Wodehouse’s funniest line, 100% original, composed in the year before he died. Just imagine what that old university’s required footnote would do to it! I won’t supply one.) When he is not so confident of his readers’ literary awareness, however, Wodehouse sometimes does in effect provide a footnote of his own. In Chapter 25 of *Something Fishy*, the following dialogue occurs between Keggs the butler and Mortimer Bayliss the art critic:

“You are leaving Shipley Hall, sir?”
“I am. It stinks, and I am ready to depart.”

Evidently not sure that we are as up on our Walter Savage Landor as we are up on our Kipling, earlier in the chapter Wodehouse has Mortimer Bayliss recall that eminent Victorian’s famous—or only famous—couplet:

I warmed both hands before the fire of life.
It sinks, and I am ready to depart.

It’s a little labored, perhaps, but to me well worth the effort—to be sure we get the joke, the mangled line, not to give Walter Savage Landor his just attribution.

An even finer, perhaps the finest, variant on this one occurs in Chapter 3 of *The Code of the Woosters*, in this immortal dialogue between Bertie Wooster and Madeline Bassett:

I remembered something Jeeves had once called Gussie. “A sensitive plant, what?”
“Exactly. You know your Shelley, Bertie.”
“Oh, am I?”

Philip Hensley, in his discussion of Wodehouse in *The Spectator* (14/21 December 2002), misquoting a little, remarks that “This is not exactly a pun, but a joke about grammar, about the way that the genitive can, with the help of hopeless ignorance, transform a complete sentence in English.” I don’t follow this argument. The thing is not a joke about grammar at all. It is exactly a pun—on the genitive (possessive) pronoun *your* and the contraction *you’re*, and on *Shelley*, too, which to Bertie sounds like an adjective. And “hopeless ignorance”? Nay, not so, as the Angel said to Abou ben Adhem: the phrase “sensitive plant” is to Bertie nothing more than a metaphorical cliché, as it must be to most readers these days; to Wodehouse it is a skillfully and hilariously attributed allusion to a poem by Shelley (“The Sensitive Plant”—not even a very good poem) that to him might have been a cliché,

in his public domain, but that now is obscure, and ignorance of it is by no standard whatever “hopeless.” I daresay that Shelley’s “The Sensitive Plant” is not part of even the most pedantic graduate school curriculum in 2004. But virtually any reader will see the joke, or at least see that there is one.



So here is Wodehouse, plagiarizing to his heart’s content in the voice of his persona. Note incidentally that Uncle Tom and Aunt Agatha, to name but two, never speak in allusions, whereas however unconsciously Aunt Dahlia does, referring to that long hour by Shrewsbury clock (Shakespeare, *Henry IV, Part 1*), well-versed too in the movements of the Troops of Midian and the potential movement of the sword of Damocles, even when she can’t recall his name. A dropped allusion in the Wodehouse World is a badge of honor finding (in the poet Milton’s phrase) “fit audience though few.” But in the oldest and most distinguished university of its size in northern New England it can nowadays get you hauled up before the latter-day Vinton Street Beak, a G. D’Arcy Cheesewright’s Uncle’s Grand-Nephew, who will snip the umbilicus of your laptop computer as the work of a moment and fine you what amounts to 45,000 quid.



What, I ask you, would the University make of this one? In Chapter 18 of *Summer Moonshine* (1937), Wodehouse writes:

Not since the historic occasion when Lo, the poor Indian, threw the pearl away, richer than all his tribe, and suddenly found out what an ass he had made of himself, had anyone experienced such remorse as now seared Adrian Peake.

Here I sum up for you, the Jury. In *Othello* V.ii (1604), Shakespeare had written the following lines:

Then must you speak . . . of one whose hand
Like the base Indian, threw a pearl away
Richer than all his tribe.

In *Essay on Man* I.3 (1733), Alexander Pope had written the following couplet:

Lo! the poor Indian, whose untutored mind
Sees God in clouds, or hears him in the wind.

And in *Little Dorrit* (Book I, Chapter 20, 1856), Dickens had written these words spoken by the eponymous (if you know your French, Bertie) Mrs. Merdle:

There used to be a poem when I learnt lessons,
something about Lo the poor Indian whose
something mind!

Had Wodehouse read all this stuff? Did he perhaps know that Dickens had already made a joke by converting the interjection “Lo” to a proper noun? Did he, like the Arabs in the Longfellow poem he is so fond of quoting (“The Day is Done”), silently steal away? Of course he did, and may Heaven speed his stealth. Of course, I know: Wodehouse is writing fiction and being funny, not turning in a piece of work for academic credit, but he’s a verbal kleptomaniac of the first order. That does not make him a plagiarist.

He was, moreover, a master of the art of self-derivation—what now, I gather from a respected junior colleague, is termed “repurposing.” Recently from Galahad Books in London is the first publication in book form of *A Prince for Hire*, a novelette that began in 1909 as the novel *Psmith Journalist*, then appeared in 1912 as *The Prince and Betty* on both sides of the Atlantic in two markedly different versions, and then appeared, completely rewritten, in serial form in the monthly *Illustrated Love Magazine* in America, in 1931. Was this an attempt to deceive anybody or bilk the paying customers? I don’t think so. An artist, surely, has the right to adapt his own work . . . even for money. On the other hand, might the paying customer—or the academic institution—term this whole deal a form of plagiarism? These days, quite possibly.

Wodehouse spoofed himself on this very topic in the Preface to *Summer Lightning* as early in his long career as 1929:

A certain critic—for such men, I regret to

say, do exist—made the nasty remark about my last novel that it contained ‘all the old Wodehouse characters under different names.’ He has probably now been eaten by bears, like the children who made mock of the prophet Elisha: but if he still survives he will not be able to make a similar charge against *Summer Lightning*. With my superior intelligence, I have outgeneralled the man this time by putting in all the old Wodehouse characters under the same names. Pretty silly it will make him feel, I rather fancy.

And so it should.

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On paper, Blair Eggleston was bold, cold, and ruthless. Like so many of our younger novelists, his whole tone was that of a disillusioned, sardonic philanderer who had drunk the wine-cup of illicit love to its dregs but was always ready to fill up again and have another. . . .

Deprived of his fountain-pen, however, Blair was rather timid with women. He had never actually found himself alone in an incense-scented studio with a scantily-clad princess reclining on a tiger skin, but in such a situation he would most certainly have taken a chair as near to the door as possible and talked about the weather.

Hot Water, 1932

“. . . Truly,” sighed the bishop, “as a jewel of gold in a swine’s snout, so is a fair woman which is without discretion. Proverbs xi. 21.”

“Twenty-two,” corrected Augustine.

“I should have said twenty-two. . . .”

“Mulliner’s Buck-U-Uppo,” 1926

Dirty Dancing in Wodehouse Or, Hitting the Ouled Nail on the Head

BY DAVID LANDMAN

Careless readers—and I know of none in our Society; I speak only of outsiders—probably make no distinction between the dance done by Nautch girls and that done by the Ouled Nail. The more they are to be pitied. Cognoscenti will, of course, be quick to appreciate the difference between the movements appropriate to each form of dance when these hoofers are evoked by the Master—as they so often are—as patterns for the reaction of his characters when jolted by bad or electrified by good news. Briefly, when they are, for good or ill, reduced to the jim-jams.

A convenient novel from which to illustrate this distinction is *Full Moon*, where in Chapter Two Freddie Threepwood informs his cousin Prudence that if he can talk Tipton Plimsoll “into giving Donaldson’s Inc. the exclusive dog-biscuit concession throughout his vast system of chain stores,” his father-in-law, the eponymous CEO of Donaldson’s Dog-Joy, will “go capering about Long Island City like a nautch girl.” Later on—in Chapter Five to be precise—we find Freddie, for the most honorable of motives, extolling the pneumatic charms of Veronica Wedge to this same Plimsoll; yet his innocent words arouse such jealousy in the chicken-livered clam that “it was not long before Tipton was writhing like an Ouled Nail stomach dancer.”



Mahomaden Nautch Girls, by Taurines

Though both men are American business movers and shakers and, as such, could be assumed to share certain tribal gestures, the prospective gyrations of Mr. Donaldson (despite his pots of money, he has no first name) and the actual ones of Tipton Plimsoll are decidedly not the same. Those who say so are talking through their tutus!

Let us first consider the prospective terpsichore of Mr. Donaldson. Freddie envisioned him capering in joy like a nautch girl, and we begin by considering what Nautch dance is. Nautch is a derivative of a classical form of dance of North India called Kathak. Originally a temple dance performed by dancers dedicated to the gods, it became, during the medieval period, a courtly entertainment and received the name “Nautch.” From there, the Nautch girl—as Pran Nevile, author of *Nautch Girls of India* tells us—became a secularized entertainer of men and belonged “to a unique class of courtesans” known as baijis (pronounced “bi-jees” like a Cockney version of the pop music group) who (unlike the pop music group) “had refined manners, a ready wit and poetry” in their blood. Eventually, loose women took up a degraded and flagrantly sexual version of the Nautch, a development that led to the sweeping Anti-Nautch Act of 1947 which virtually eliminated the Nautch from India from whence, if we attend to our Wodehouse, it apparently took up residence in Piccadilly and Shropshire. But, surely, you are justified in asking, isn’t it most unlikely that Freddie would envision America’s premier dog-biscuit baron cavorting in a flagrantly sexual manner, no matter how high sales had shot? It is just not done in Long Island City. We agree and, perforce, must anticipate that Donaldson’s joyous gyrations would strictly follow the classical forms. According to the experts, he will then indulge in “slow graceful movements,” languid even. His legs will be bent “with the feet flat rather than lifted and pointed.” His “jumps of delight” will be low, and he will engage in “elaborate stamping rhythms.” His torso will shift from side to side “turning on the axis of the spine” (as if it had an alternative) while the movements of the mogul’s arms will be “subtle and elaborate, every gesture having a narrative function”: one envisions the ringing of a cash register and the trousering of receipts. I think we are now fully equipped to visualize Mr. Donaldson in his financial ecstasy, his graceful and fluid motions miming the sale of another ten or twenty thousand cases of Dog-Joy. It is a classic.

The picture with regard to Tipton Plimsoll’s demeanor during Freddie’s luscious encomium of Veronica Wedge’s charm is, however, not as easy to conjure up. It will be remembered that the reaction

of this Plimsoll, upon hearing the girl of his dreams succulently described by the man he suspected of stealing her affections, was to writhe “like an Ouled Nail stomach dancer.” The problem facing the conscientious ideator is that with regard to the Ouled Nail, the experts disagree. First, let us say just what an Ouled Nail stomach dancer is. The Ouled Nail (pronounced “ooled Nile”) are a Berber tribe of Algeria. The men of this tribe have hit upon what seems to them the ideal form of economy. They stay at home sleeping in doorways, drinking strong coffee and drumming their deep-toned darabukkehs while the young women—with abdomens edified since girlhood—flock to cities like Biskra and Jelfa where they entice male customers with remarkable shoulder shimmies, belly quavers, and snake arms. The golden coins they earn from these encounters are worn on their person, and when sufficient wealth has been collected, they return to their villages, marry, deposit the money to their husband’s account, and settle down to quiet domesticity. (An economic system apparently so satisfactory to all concerned that, had he been to Biskra or even to Jelfa, must have given Alan Greenspan food for thought.) So much all the experts agree on. But just what is that wibbly wobbly dance that the Ouled Nail (and Plimsoll) do so well? Here we are led into deep waters.



An Ouled-Nail Tribal Dancer, by Georges Clairin

Alexander Dumas (*Adventures in Algeria*) describes the motion as beginning slowly and gracefully as a swaying adder, after which the movements grow “more and more voluptuous” until, quivering and swaying with arms outspread, the dancer emits “a wild cry of animal passion” and sinks “fainting to the ground.” Morbleu! All right for Athos, Porthos, and Aramis, I am sure, and, if you discount locker-room gossip, probably for D’Artagnan as well, but it will never do for Tipton Plimsoll who, after all, was educated in England. Our inner eyes, therefore, must be averted from the Dumas description (and from all other French sources for that matter).

But when we have done so, we are hard-pressed

to escape the snake motif, for it occurs again in the description of Hendrik de Leeuw (*Crossroads of the Mediterranean*), where the Ouled Nail are depicted as “flexing their muscles rhythmically . . . with grace and elasticity and finely co-ordinated motions of arms and cobra-like suppleness of body.” The hitch here is that it is all too reptilian; for though his particular spot of bother is being crushed in the toils of the Green-eyed Monster, Tipton’s throes cannot quite be visualized as supple, graceful, and elastic. This will not do either.

Undoubtedly, the definitive abstract of the writhing dance that Tippy tripped is provided by one Hamsa (*Desert Winds*). According to this keen observer, Tipton would have been “rippling and jerking every muscle, dislocating the abdomen with each spasm.” Othello, who had the advantage of being both a jealous lover and a Moor, would have recognized the convulsion and approved.

We have seen that a vast and quivering gulf exists between Nautch and Ouled Nail, and I trust I have assisted in clarifying the mental images fabricated by novice readers in this important aspect of the Master’s works.

Note from the O.M.



I’d like to thank the kind people who said such good things about me in the last issue of *Plum Lines*. After I read them I needed to remind myself that, when I became editor, I was not chosen by universal acclamation—I was the Only Volunteer. It is, as Jane Austen would say, a corrective thought.

—Ed Ratcliffe



By the Way

BY JAN WILSON KAUFMAN

We’ve had a number of changes of those who work in the trenches of the Wodehouse Society, including Dan Cohen, the new *Plum Lines* Editor in Chief who was introduced in the last issue. Amy Plofker, who remains Corresponding Secretary, has now taken on the additional duties of Membership Manager and Treasurer, which means not only will she continue to write to all potential members who want information about TWS, but she will also take care of dues payments and address changes. She is taking over these latter duties from Gary Hall and Linda Adam-Hall, who are now doing the layout and production of *Plum Lines*. Following are brief descriptions of these exceptional volunteers, in their own words.



Amy Plofker, the new TWS Membership Manager, seen at the Toronto banquet wearing the green satin dress she hand-beaded in an art deco design

Amy Plofker started reading Wodehouse at the tender age of 9, being determined to read everything her older brother and sister did. She soon outstripped them, however, and made a valiant attempt to read the complete works before leaving high school. She was lucky in her choice of colleges, selecting the one that not only had a cricket team but an excellent collection of obscure Wodehouses to read when goofing off.

Upon reaching woman's estate, she languished in the cold, cruel, humorless work world until 1995, when a newspaper article on the Philadelphia chapter led her to The Wodehouse Society. Came the Boston Convention that year, and she never looked back! In 2001 she rashly agreed (no doubt due to an overindulgence in hash browns at brunch) to take over Corresponding Secretary duties from the incomparable Marilyn MacGregor. Expecting to be a complete frost, she found instead that writing silly letters to potential new members was a perfect contrast to her work as a medical writer (humor being there frowned upon). In summer 2003 she decided to propel a New York City chapter into being. This successful venture, now known as the Broadway Special, was blessed by some of the best members, coconspirators, and well-timed theater productions that ever a newly fledged chapter could have desired.



Gary Hall and Linda Adam-Hall in their wild youth at the Houston Convention

Gary Hall and Linda Adam-Hall have been TWS Membership Managers for two years, and they've immensely enjoyed contact with so many witty Wodehouseans. Gary discovered P. G. Wodehouse at an early age, when his mother heaved a copy of *The Golf Omnibus* at his head. Gary's head, that is, not the head of P. G. Wodehouse. Later, despite Gary's physical and mental similarities to Bertie Wooster, Linda agreed to wed him (Gary, not Bertie). Many blissfully married years later, Gary chanced upon an article about The

Wodehouse Society in the United Airlines magazine. Welcomed into the fold, he and Linda proceeded to reveal their (at the time) Nebraska address to Colonel Norman Murphy, who promptly sent them to seek information about that noted Nebraskan, Fred Patzel, the Western States Hog-Calling Champion. The dashing couple was successful, and actually interviewed some of Fred's descendants. Linda and Gary cemented their pighooistic reputation when they offered a presentation of hog-calling samples at the Philly convention. The happy pair now resides on a mountain in the alpine village of Estes Park, Colorado, where they are attempting to develop the art of elk calling, to the consternation of the locals.

* * * * *

There are many things which would probably make Wodehouse raise an eyebrow or two about the current century, but an article in the *San Francisco Chronicle* of December 26, 2003, which explains how his beloved alma mater Dulwich College is starting a branch in Shanghai, would surely surprise him and, perhaps, occasion some pretty sharp comments in his letters to his fellow Dulwich Old Boy Bill Townend. Shanghai Dulwich International School will be the first Western-run school to admit Chinese students, who initially will be taught separately and in their native language, as a law banning Westerners and Chinese students from learning in the same classroom is still in effect. The headmaster, Colin Niven, taught Britain's prime minister, Tony Blair, at Fettes College in Scotland, and Blair's recent visit to this Chinese campus has helped increase interest in this expensive new high school.

* * * * *

TWS member and medical doctor Chris Dueker, of the Blandings Castle Chapter, said he recently realized that, for once, Wodehouse was wrong and the title of his story "Jeeves Exerts the Old Cerebellum" should have been "Jeeves Exerts the Old Cerebrum." The cerebrum is the part of the brain that coordinates thinking, and the cerebellum's role is to govern movement, posture, and balance. Chris added that this incorrect nomenclature did not lessen his enjoyment of the story, which he had read several other times before noticing it.

* * * * *

NOTE: With the shift of duties, it's possible that some address or other membership information changes that you submitted via the website (www.wodehouse.org) did not make it to the Membership Manager. If you made changes to your membership information in 2004, please check the roster (included with this issue of *Plum Lines*) to ensure that the changes were properly made. Thanks! –GH

The Maestro's Amazing Memory

BY DENNIS CHITTY

A talk delivered at the Toronto convention of The Wodehouse Society, August 2003.



Dennis Chitty, Toronto, 2003

Most people here know that our host chapter, the Pickering Motor Company, is named after Dudley Pickering, the motor magnate in *Uneasy Money* who had become engaged to that unpleasant gold digger Claire Fenwick. The poor man was so infatuated that he could think only of his luck in having acquired “the latest model, self-starting, with limousine body and all the newest.” But there are other, less well-read people, who will miss this allusion.

That’s the trouble with allusions. They fall flat if the audience doesn’t recognize them. It’s unlikely, for example, that anyone here knows what is meant (in *Money for Nothing*) by “that Kruschen feeling,” which was supposed to be produced by a tonic designed to keep us young. The ads featured an elderly gentleman jumping fences and behaving much like the men in today’s Viagra ads (and I don’t mean the ones with Bob Dole). These ads in their turn will mean nothing to later generations.

Wodehouse no doubt expected his allusions to be understood by people who had had a public school education (“public school” being Britspeak for “private school”). But today, most of us lack his education in the classics, fewer are as familiar with the Bible, we know our Shakespeare less well, and almost no one

has as good a grounding in poetry. So we miss half the fun that Wodehouse himself got out of his allusions. Luckily for us this will change when Norman Murphy publishes his work in tracing them.

Authorities agree that his six years at Dulwich provided Wodehouse with his stock of allusions, most of which were no more than those a Victorian schoolboy would have had at his fingertips. But his real-life headmaster, Gilkes, a renowned classical scholar, must be credited with inspiring Wodehouse as powerfully as the Reverend Aubrey Upjohn terrified Bertie Wooster, and as other headmasters terrified Oliver Sipperley and Sacheverell Mulliner. Education in Victorian days meant one thing and one thing only, namely education in the classics. Gilkes’s pupils had to translate Greek and Latin verses into and out of English, a discipline that undoubtedly helped Wodehouse develop his ear for rhythmic language.

Wodehouse left Dulwich in 1900, and by the time he published *The White Feather* in 1907 he was already addicted to using allusions and quotations to “heighten narrative effect.” In this early story, he has an ingenious if none too subtle way of introducing them. The pugilist Joe Bevan had previously travelled with a Shakespearean repertory company, which enabled him to quote advice from *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*, such as “Nor do not saw the air too much with your hand, thus, but use all gently; that’s what you’ve got to remember in boxing, sir.” And when stories in *The Man with Two Left Feet* appeared between 1914 and 1916, Wodehouse had accumulated a collection of allusions that he used again and again; for example, “God’s in his Heaven” (together with the larks and snails), “reason returned to her throne,” and “the maddest, merriest day of all the glad New Year.” Recycling must have kept Wodehouse in touch with a vast number of references, and we can enjoy seeing them used in different contexts. In 1915, for example, a distaste for Chicago “made Lot’s attitude towards the cities of the plain almost kindly by comparison.” And in 1971 we have Aunt Dahlia saying “that sort of thing might be overlooked in the cities of the plain, but not in Market Snodsbury.” Wodehouse said with false modesty that he was not bright enough to “think up anything really clever” off his own bat; “but give me my Bartlett,” he said, “and I will slay you.” But even if he used Bartlett for the longer quotations, he first had

to remember whom or what to look up.

Indeed, his occasional mistakes show how seldom he relied on Bartlett or other sources. For example: He described both Beach and Monty Bodkin as “so dead, so dull in look” instead of “so dull, so dead in look”; he credited Shakespeare and Pope instead of Shakespeare and Byron with the phrase “twice-told tale”; he had Aunt Dahlia appearing like a mighty rushing wind instead of a rushing mighty wind; and time after time he had people skipping like the high hills instead of hopping. And having made such slips, he tended to remember his version rather than the original.

I quote these minor lapses in no carping spirit. On the contrary, they support my claim that the maestro relied on memory rather than books. If pointed out to Wodehouse, these minor inaccuracies would have enabled him to poke fun at his critics, as he did at the purist who noted his misspelling of “sleave,” at the man who wrote “You big stiff, it wasn’t Cortez it was Balboa,” and at sundry others. His sin of failing to check his references occurred, I think, because he wrote so fast that checking them would have slowed him down and perhaps reduced the freshness of his style.

Let us look now at Wodehouse’s technique, comparing his trivial scenarios with momentous accounts in his four main sources, namely, the classics, the Bible, Shakespeare, and the poets.

The Classics

Given his classical education, we need not be surprised at his references to Horace, Virgil, Lucretius, Juvenal, Xenophon, Marcus Aurelius, Demosthenes, Cicero, Diogenes Laertius, Pliny the Elder, and others. Jeeves, of course, was always ready to spout Latin phrases such as *nolle prosequi* and *rem acu tetigisti*, which he translated for Bertie as “You said a mouthful.” And in *Pigs Have Wings*, English barmaids such as Maudie Stubbs are said to have the queenly dignity of the late Cornelia, mother of the Gracchi.

The Bible

We know little about Wodehouse’s education in Scripture other than that he was brought up on the Bible. We know that some of the aunts who looked after him in his holidays were wives of clergymen. And if his school experience was anything like that of Richard Usborne’s, he would have had six years of “community prayers twice a day, chapel once a day and twice on Sundays, Bible-readings, divinity classes, and Latin graces before and after meals.”

Many of the scripture allusions are easily recognized—for example, when Bertie compares his hangover to the feelings of Sisera as Jael the wife of Heber drove spikes (actually nails) into his head; when Ronnie Fish realizes that in getting engaged to Millicent, he, like Samson pulling down the temple, has gone too far; when Aunt Dahlia complains that Job’s troubles are so much less than hers; and when Bertie calls Stiffy Byng and Balaam’s ass sisters under the skin. Such comparisons call for no amazing memory, only genius in applying it.

But Wodehouse also stored in his memory such lesser incidents as that of the regime change wrought by Samuel on King Agag, a very minor character who “came unto him delicately” before being hewed in pieces. In *Uncle Dynamite* Wodehouse has Pongo Twistleton descending the stairs “mincingly, like Agag,”—“mincingly,” not “delicately,” which is more evidence of an amazing memory for the incident if not for the exact words.

Further evidence of a good memory comes from the witty exchanges of biblical quotations in the three Buck-U-Uppo stories, in which Augustine and the bishop sling 16 quotations back and forth from Proverbs, Song of Solomon, Numbers, Ecclesiastes, Hosea, Psalms, and Deuteronomy; and others from Ecclesiasticus and Esdra in the Apocrypha. For example, the bishop, being afraid to face his wife with the news that he has given the Steeple Mummery vicarage to Augustine, explains that “A bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell of the matter. Ecclesiastes x. 20. I shall inform her of my decision on the long-distance telephone.”

Shakespeare

Shakespeare was another main source of Wodehouse’s allusions. Before his internment during the war, he always meant to read the bard but preferred reading Agatha Christie. If so, he must have relied on schoolboy memories. No great feat would have been required for him to remember *Othello*, for his young lovers were always suffering from jealousy. Thus Ronnie Fish becomes Othello’s younger brother; Blair Eggleston becomes a blond Othello; and Ambrose Tennyson becomes a man who, if “smeared with a bit of burnt cork . . . could step right on to any stage and play Othello without rehearsal.”

Allusions to King Lear, Cleopatra, and Romeo are also easy to recognize, but most of us probably missed the allusion to Ross, a minor character but an “astute nobleman who noticed things.” The perceptive Ross

had noticed Macbeth's pallor after seeing the ghost of Banquo ("His highness is not well") and would have noticed similar symptoms in Pongo Twistleton, who feared, when there came a knock on his bedroom door, that he would be discovered alone at 2:45 A.M. with Elsie Bean. Although, like all Wodehouse characters, Pongo was innocent of sexual misconduct, he wisely decided to hide Elsie in a closet before opening the door to a suspicious and homicidal Bill Oakshott.

After Wodehouse had studied Shakespeare during his internment in World War II, he apparently reread the plays every two or three years. So from then on there's no need to invoke long-term memory.

The Poets

W e turn now to the poets. I'll start with the allusion to "the feathered friend which puzzled the poet Wordsworth so much. 'O Cuckoo! shall I call thee Bird, Or but a wandering voice?' he used to say, and I don't believe he ever did get straight about it." While at school, Wodehouse must have learned by heart this and many other poems, and his memory served him well until the day of his death at the age of 93. So let's look at how he applied his memory. I'll give you five examples and would like to see how well you recognize the poets and poems. Please keep score—a total of 10 points is possible. [Answers on page 19.]

1. In *Pigs Have Wings*, Sir Gregory Parsloe-Parsloe enjoys remembering the sumptuous food now denied him by his fiancée Gloria Salt, and we are led to admire him for taking his fate so well: "A sorrow's crown of sorrows," quotes Wodehouse, "is remembering happier things." The dyspeptic J. Preston Peters had similar fond memories of calorie-laden recipes.

2. In *Big Money*, when Lord Biskerton took the bus he was "bowed down with weight of woe." Fortunately the poet spoke figuratively, "for grief has no tonnage." Otherwise "the Number Three omnibus . . . could never have made its trip."

3. In *Heavy Weather*, Lord Tilbury has been sat upon in the mud by Cyril Welbeloved and is brought before Lord Emsworth. "There was a scuffling of feet, and the prisoner at the bar entered, trailing like clouds of glory Stokes, first footman, attached to his right arm, and Thomas, second footman, clinging like a limpet to his left."

4. In *Right Ho, Jeeves*, when Bertie arrives on his bicycle at Kingham Manor, his "ear detected the sibilant shuffling of the feet of butlers, footmen, chauffeurs, parlour maids, housemaids, tweenies, and

. . . no doubt cooks, who were treading the measure. 'I suppose,' thought Bertie, 'you couldn't sum it up much better than by saying that there was a sound of revelry by night.'"

5. In *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit*, Bertie, given the wrong directions, climbs a ladder into the bedroom of Frances Craye. He realizes that "someone had blundered."

So we have seen that Wodehouse had a brain stuffed with references (much as, according to Gussie, Bertie's pockets were stuffed with lists of the Kings of Judah).

To finish up, I'll take a look at *Stiff Upper Lip, Jeeves*, which was published in 1963, when Wodehouse was 82. He included over 100 allusions, most of them recycled, the most frequent being "The iron entered into his soul," which he had already used at least 19 times. This is not surprising, as life was often cruel to the Wodehouse characters: when Lord Emsworth remembered how Sir Gregory Parsloe had lured away his pig man, George Cyril Wellbeloved; when Bertie found that little Seabury had used up all the butter that Bertie needed to get boot polish off his face; and when Albert Peasemarch found he had to sing "The Bandolero" instead of the "Yeoman's Wedding Song." The iron enters Bertie's soul again when he sees Gussie defying Madeline by eating a ham sandwich in front of her, in rebellion against the vegetarian diet she had forced on him. Bertie knows this is the end of the engagement and that he himself may now have to marry Madeline.

The allusion is to the iron entering the soul of Joseph, whose refusal to sleep with Potiphar's wife landed him in the stocks—a story of revenge by a woman scorned. (Scorned women in the Wodehouse canon were never as raunchy as this, nor did they react as violently.)

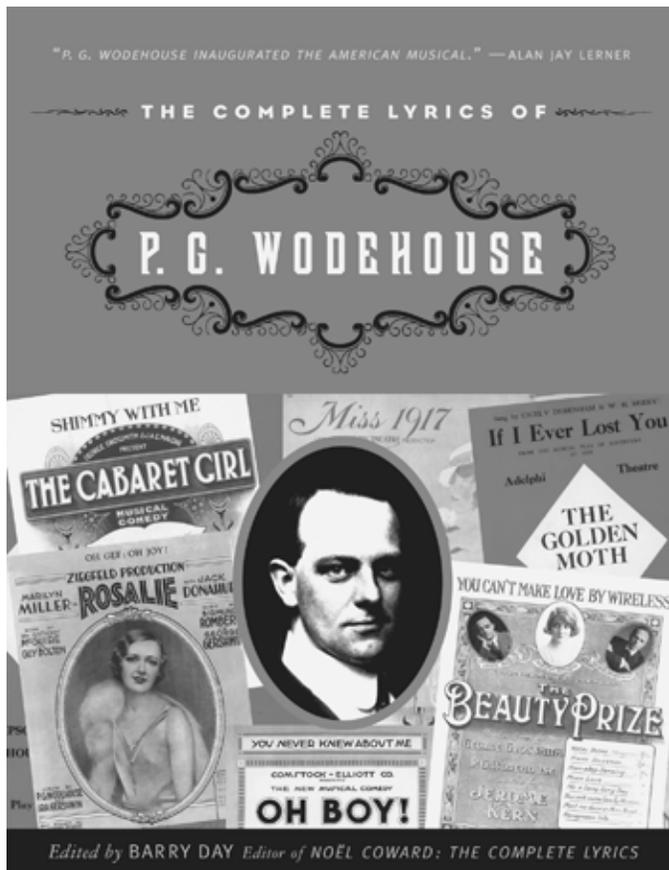
That the Wodehouse imagination was still in high gear is also shown by the story of Stiffy Byng and her attempts to catch the conscience of her uncle, Sir Watkyn Bassett, who had, she thought, swindled some unsuspecting man by giving him a mere five pounds for a statuette worth a thousand. She therefore persuaded her fiancé, the Reverend Stinker Pinker, to preach a sermon on Naboth's vineyard. He duly composed the sermon and laid it on a table on which stood an oil lamp. Stinker, alas, was always bumping into things, and true to form, he bumped into the table, upsetting the oil lamp, setting the sermon on fire, and leaving himself no time to rewrite it.

So Stiffy Byng thought up another scheme for getting at Sir Watkyn, a scheme for which she asked

Stinker, when in London, to enlist Bertie's help. Bertie at first told him that nothing would induce him to revisit Totleigh Towers, but circumstances forced him to change his mind. His arrival surprised and delighted the Reverend Pinker, who "was no doubt murmuring to himself 'Rejoice with me for I have found the sheep which was lost.'" I believe this was the first time Wodehouse had used this quote. It shows that at age 82 the maestro's memory was still amazing.

The Princess and SO Much More

BY DAN COHEN



The Complete Lyrics of P. G. Wodehouse,
edited by Barry Day
Scarecrow Press, \$69.95, 544 pages

This is a big and expensive book that every Wodehouse fan is going to want to own. We all know that Plum wrote over 90 books, on which his fame primarily rests. Most of us have a general idea that

Plum also wrote the lyrics for a number of successful musical comedies during the early years of the 20th century, but very few have a real sense of just how much writing he did for the musical theater and how influential he was.

With this landmark volume, Barry Day has laid it all out for us. And it was no easy task. He recently told me: "I found the research comparable to sorting out Shakespeare's folios and quartos—there were so many versions and variants, major and minor. It was as much of a literary and lyrical detective story as anything else. Just when you thought you had something pinned down, another version would turn up and provide a clue pointing in a different direction. And then there were the blind alleys—a song title that appeared in a libretto but no lyrics to go with it. Was that a song that was then given another name—or was it intended but never written? Or was I being like Dr. Watson—I could see but not observe? [Day has several volumes on Sherlock Holmes to his credit as well.] Anyway, it's done, and if more material should emerge from some old piano bench—there's always the paperback!"

Day has also written or edited books on Noël Coward, and with Tony Ring he coedited *P. G. Wodehouse In His Own Words*. Tony is acknowledged as an invaluable editorial consultant for this volume.

Wodehouse actually began writing lyrics in England somewhere around 1904, but it was in America that his musical comedy career really flourished. Between 1916 and 1918, Wodehouse, Guy Bolton, and Jerome Kern put together a series of musicals specifically for the tiny Princess Theatre in New York that quite literally revolutionized musical comedy. The revolution was the integration of song into the plot. Instead of revue-type shows where a character might sing something that had nothing to do with whatever else was supposed to be going on in the show, Wodehouse, Bolton, and Kern used the songs to define a character and move the plot along. They also helped to end the dominance of Viennese-type operettas on the musical stage by using contemporary characters in contemporary settings, speaking and singing in contemporary language. World War I had helped to sour the American public's taste for musicals set in a fantasy Hapsburg empire anyway.

Most lyricists, W. S. Gilbert for instance, always wrote the words first, and the music was adapted to his words. Plum worked the other way around—the music came first. He was not a particularly musical person, but his use of language was so skillful that he could adapt his words to practically any melody, even what he described as the "little twiddly notes."

"That's the way I like working," he said, "and to

hell with anyone who says I oughtn't to."

Though there are occasional revivals of Princess musicals or some of Plum's other major musicals, they are now essentially museum pieces. He is best known for his contributions to two shows in which he played a relatively minor part. The song "Bill" was originally written for the Princess musical *Oh, Lady! Lady!!*, but it was cut and finally used 10 years later in *Show Boat*. Kern wrote the music, but Oscar Hammerstein wrote the book and most of the lyrics.

The most "Wodehousian" of all musicals, and by that I mean the show that most effectively portrays the spirit of Plum's books, is *Anything Goes*. Wodehouse and Bolton did write the original book for that show, but Cole Porter wrote the music and lyrics, though Wodehouse did some revisions of the lyrics for the British production.

Plum loved writing musical comedy. Long after he ceased to be a force in the evolution of the genre, he recalled, "Musical comedy was my dish, the musical-comedy theater my spiritual home. I would rather have written *Oklahoma!* than *Hamlet*. (Actually, as the records show I wrote neither, but you get the idea.)"

For me one of the great delights of this book is not so much that it documents Plum's great but often unappreciated influence on musical comedy, but that it documents the great and often unappreciated influence that musical comedy had on Plum's major occupation: the writing of comic novels and short stories. Wodehouse famously described his novels as "musical comedies without the music." This is generally taken to mean he wrote light, frothy fiction that did not go deep into life as did "the great Russians." And that is certainly true. But he meant more than that: He structured his novels, particularly the early ones, in scenes, "and have as little stuff between the scenes as possible." He thought of them in terms of "acts, chorus numbers, duets and solos."

Wodehouse based his characters not on real people but on popular stereotypes, often types found on the stage. There was, for example, the character of the "dude," a mainstay of London musicals. He appeared on stage with a top hat and a monocle or a uniform and a monocle. This was a character type introduced by George Grossmith, Jr., son of George Grossmith, the Gilbert and Sullivan stalwart. Grossmith Jr. was an actor and writer with whom both Wodehouse and Kern had worked. Wodehouse wrote, "The trouble with George is that if there's a prince in the show, you can't keep him away from it with an injunction. Show him a white uniform with gold frogs across the chest and a lot of medals and he starts making mewling noises."

Day points out that Plum often used the characters he created for his books as a stock company for a musical. "A principal character, for instance, must be given enough 'big scenes' to justify his star stature. (If this were a musical comedy, we should have to get Leslie Henson to play the part and if he found that all he had was a scene in act one, he would walk out')." Many of Plum's characters were theater people: chorus girls, like Sue Brown, the "second love interest" like "Catsmeat" Potter-Pirbright, and hangers-on like Ronnie Fish. Look at the pictures in this book—you will see what so many of the Wodehouse characters are supposed to look like and dress like. For example, on page 106 there is a picture of Aline Chase and Oscar Shaw in *Leave It To Jane*. Now, I have no idea who Aline Chase and Oscar Shaw were. But they could have stepped right out of the pages of a score of Plum's novels.

The Complete Lyrics of P. G. Wodehouse is a lovely book that can be enjoyed even by Wodehouse fans who have little interest in the musical comedy side of his career. The invaluable Amy Plofker has negotiated a 20-percent discount for TWS members on this book, so the going price will be \$55.95. To get the discount, use promotional code 7S4PGW when making phone or Internet orders. The Scarecrow Press Internet address is www.scarecrowpress.com.

How to Start a TWS Chapter

BY ELLIOTT MILSTEIN

Those who attended the 2003 convention (Right Ho, Toronto!) will know that the Pickering Motor Company is more an invented convenience than a true Chapter of The Wodehouse Society. Having been plucked from the thronging thousands who wanted to host the convention and languishing in Detroit without a Plummie in sight, I gathered together the few friends I had in the area willing to lend a hand, and we called ourselves a chapter. None of these wonderful souls, however, were members of TWS. Only David Warren had read Wodehouse extensively. His wife LuAnn, early in their marriage, when sharing interests is an integral part of conjugal bliss, dabbled in it, as had my own wonderful wife, Elyse, but neither could in any sense be considered Wodehouseans. Mike and Sherry Smith and Dicron Mahakian came along for

the ride, did vast quantities of work, and expressed a willingness to maybe read a short story or two, just so they wouldn't feel totally left out at the convention.

Well, come October, our revels having ended, the Pickerings gathered at a fashionable uptown eatery to celebrate our success and determine if the chapter should continue. (I chose the date to coincide with Plum's birthday but only revealed this to the others at the table, where his memory was duly toasted.) After much discussion, hemming, and hawing, it was decided that no one would be coerced into reading Wodehouse (the idea, frankly, is abominable to me), but the following resolution was made, seconded, and passed unanimously:

"Resolved, that all members who read *Right Ho, Jeeves* in the next six months shall be considered members in good standing of the Pickering Motor Company and shall meet again some time in April or May 2004. If fewer than four members read *Right Ho, Jeeves*, the Chapter shall be considered abandoned."

So here it is now the end of February and only six weeks to go, so it's time for a rundown:

Mike Smith has been very busy catching up on his Kafka and Proust, but he has been heard mumbling from time to time, "Wodehouse, yeah, right, I gotta get to that."

Sherry, when questioned closely, simply repeats, "I really liked *Service With a Smile*. Really, I really did."

Elyse, the best wife a man could have, made it the very next book she read after the meeting. Because she reads in bed at night, I had the opportunity of observing her closely throughout the process, and I can attest that she did in fact chuckle on one occasion. She completed the book and said, "It was amusing, but I don't get what's so great about it." Well, she IS wonderful—just not perfect.

We checked in with David and LuAnn last night. They had misunderstood the resolution and thought that if one had read *Right Ho, Jeeves* any time in the past 25 years, it counted. No, I informed them, you had to have read it since the last meeting. "Have YOU read it since the last meeting?" they inquired. "Yes, I have," I replied. So they both resolved to read it soon.

By the way, I knew that David had read it many years ago, but I thought LuAnn might be fudging on this one. I challenged her. "Are you sure you've read it?"

"I've read a number of Jeeves books," she replied, somewhat peevisly, I thought. "Let's see: There was the one about the Scripture Knowledge prize . . ."

"Okay," I said, "that was *Right Ho*."

"And then," she said, pressing her point, "there was the one where the cook goes crazy and quits."

"That's *Right Ho*, too."

"Okay, and then there was one with the guy with the newts."

"I think that would be *Right Ho* as well."

"Okay. Wait a minute. I read another one. Okay, how about the one where they all get locked out and Bertie has to go get the key?"

By this time David, Elyse, and I were laughing too hard to respond. But she had at least established beyond an s. of a d. that she had read *Right Ho, Jeeves*, and furthermore she promised to read it again soon.

Finally there is Dicron. I saved the best for last. You know, each of us needs at least one Dicron in our life. Dicron has read *Right Ho, Jeeves* and *Heavy Weather* and is just now finishing up *The Code of the Woosters*. He has purchased about 75 Wodehouses on eBay—mostly paperbacks, but also a few first editions—and was recently outbid on a McIlvaine. He was recently spotted at his son's diving competition poring over the last *Plum Lines* and has vowed to contribute an article shortly. He has twice inquired what flight I am on to LA for the next convention. (I had to remind him that it's in 2005 not 2004. He was devastated. I gave him a copy of *Leave it to Psmith*, and he perked right up.) Dicron is the kind of person who makes it all worthwhile. Gives one hope for the human race.

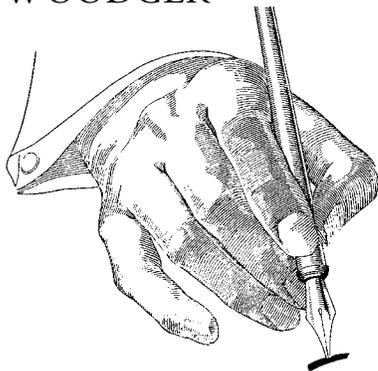
So at this point, the Detroit chapter stands on a knife-edge. Will David and LuAnn keep their promise? Are Michael and Sherry beyond redemption? Will Elyse ever "get it"? Are there any Wodehouseans in the Detroit area who have not yet called or written? Or will Pickering Motor Company go the way of Huppmobile and the Stanley Steamer, leaving Elliott and Dicron alone on lazy summer afternoons, with a couple of whiskeys and soda and a pair of Cohibas, trading lonely nifties back and forth? Stay tuned.



1899 Locomobile

Letter from England

BY ELIN WOODGER



“Well, what I came for was to ask you if you’d care to come for a spin in Colonel Norton-Smith’s car. He’s driving me over to Salisbury to see the cathedral.”

—Barney Claybourne in *The Girl in Blue*

It wasn’t Colonel Norton-Smith but Colonel Norman Murphy who recently made the suggestion that I really ought to see the cathedral, and I right-hoed enthusiastically, so off we went. Salisbury from Bounds Green, London, is not so much “over” as it is “down,” on a south-by-southwest course. Some three and a half hours after departure, we reached one of the most historic and fascinating parts of a country in which history and fascination go together like bacon and eggs. (As Ed Ratcliffe once noted, England is like a giant amusement park—at least for people like Ed and me!)

I cannot attempt to describe the cathedral, as I would never be able to do it justice, but any visitors to this country should give it a good, long gander because it is certainly worth it. One can’t help but stand and gape at the thing, wondering how on earth they built it some 600 years ago. It is equally impressive on the inside, of course, and when Norman suggested we attend Evensong, I was all for the idea. We were seated in the choir stalls with the singers, boys and men, and listened to their glorious voices rise high into the buttresses—a heavenly sound if I ever heard one. You may recall the story “Tried in the Furnace,” when Barmy Fotheringay-Phipps attends an evening church service, and “gradually there poured over” him “a wave of sentiment.” Barmy emerged from that service a changed man. I won’t say that I was a changed woman, but I have to admit that, deeply affected, I became downright spiritual—for a little while, anyway.

The following day we tootled from Salisbury over to Wincanton, the model for Ankh-Morpork in Terry Pratchett’s “Discworld” books. Thanks to my

dear friend Pighooey, I became hooked on Pratchett a few months ago, and I was not surprised to learn that large numbers of Wodehousians also enjoy Pratchett. Like our Plum, he has a way of creating a world that draws one in completely, and he employs both brilliant use of language and clever allusions that can be easily missed. All splendid stuff, and Wincanton is part of it, being home to a dandy little shop devoted to all things Pratchett—called The Cunning Artificers—and also the site of Pratchett fan gatherings twice a year. So we had to see it, of course, as well as Stonehenge and Avebury, which made, all in all, for a very jolly outing, despite all the rain.

Even more recently, Norman and I happened to have charge of his granddaughter Rachael for a day, and we thought a stroll in Epping Forest was in order. This is a long swathe of forest land that used to be prime hunting ground in the days of Henry VIII and Elizabeth I. Indeed, there’s an old Tudor hunting lodge that makes for a most interesting visit, if you happen to choose a day that it’s open—which we didn’t. But never mind; a long, long walk in the woods did us all a heap of good. Afterwards we decided to drive into the town of Epping itself, where, to our delight, we found—wait for it—a *Jubilee Watering Trough*. Furthermore, it was still in full working order. Oh, happy day!

Now, returning to “Tried in the Furnace,” Wodehouse writes: “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 then come out again and walk down the main street and take another look at the Jubilee Watering Trough.” I doubt this is the case in Epping, which seems to be quite a lively town, and where a delightful open-air market was in session (resulting in a few pounds being gleefully spent by yours truly and her companions). But what really pleased me about the day was having, at long last, seen an honest-to-goodness Jubilee Watering Trough, which I would gladly walk down the main street to see again. Life’s simple pleasures and all that.

Another of life’s pleasures since moving to England has been listening to Alistair Cooke’s “Letter from America” every Sunday morning. Recently, however, Britons (and expat Americans like me) received the devastating news that after 58 years of broadcasts (2,869 in all), Mr. Cooke—an avid Wodehouse fan, by the way—has yielded to his doctors and decided to call it quits, this despite being only 95 years young. Sunday mornings are never going to be the same without him; only Plum will be able to provide any adequate solace for our sorrow here.

In other news, the U.K. Society held its first Savage

Club evening of the year on February 10, and the bar was packed with around 45 happy Wodehousians, so there was quite a bit of sluicing going on. This was also the occasion for the Society's AGM (annual general meeting), which is normally done in October or November, but some changes in officers (see *Wooster Sauce* or the U.K. Society's website) necessitated a delay of the proceedings to February. It was Hilary Bruce's first turn at chairing the AGM, and a fine job she did, too—but no surprise there. Norman used to tear through AGM business like a hound after a mechanical rabbit, but Hilary's more sedate approach probably made for a more relaxing (and—sorry, Norman—understandable) time.

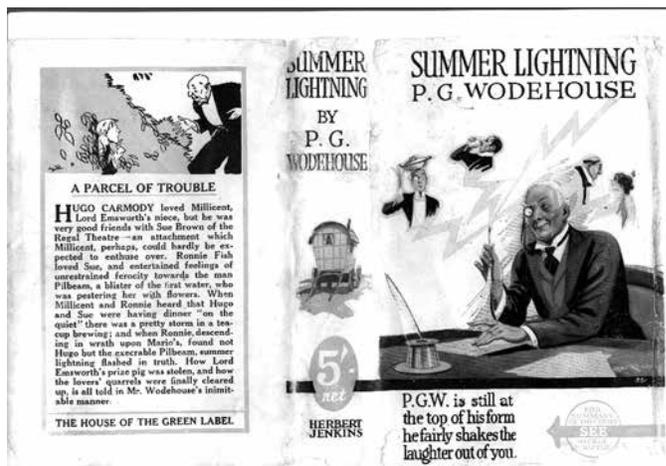
Following the AGM, Helen Murphy presented the talk that I had the pleasure of delivering on her behalf at the Toronto convention. Not surprisingly, Helen pulled it off far better than I, having a lovely, clear voice and the advantage of reading her own words. In "Wodehouse—A Male Thing?" Helen discusses the myth that only men can possibly appreciate Wodehouse and points out the many ways in which he was actually a feminist writer. *Plum Lines* readers will be able to read all about it when the talk is published in a future issue—and delightfully good reading it makes, too.

Meanwhile, on Friday mornings on BBC's Radio 4, we recently enjoyed a series of four half-hour dramatizations of some Mr Mulliner stories—specifically, "The Bishop's Move," "The Ordeal of Osbert Mulliner," "The Knightly Quest of Mervyn," and "The Truth About George." These were all essentially well done, and yet, and yet . . . While the adapter of the stories has to make changes, of course, to make it palatable for radio, it's the non-Wodehousian additions he makes—extra dialogue, descriptions that lack the Wodehouse flair, etc.—that niggle purists like me. I had a similar problem with the Jeeves and Wooster series; it seems sometimes as if these adapter chappies can't let the original brilliant words do their magic, and instead they try to out-Wodehouse Wodehouse. And they rarely succeed. Oh, well, the radio programs were enjoyable all the same, and if you're interested in opinions other than mine, check out the reviews on the U.K. Society's website (<http://www.eclipse.co.uk/wodehouse/>).

There seems to be a lot of Good Stuff happening in the months ahead, including a visit from Wodehouse biographer David Jasen, two cricket matches in June, and the Society's biennial dinner in October—so watch out for future letters, which will Reveal All about these goings-on.

Collecting *Summer Lightning*

BY JOHN GRAHAM



Seventy-five years ago this spring P. G. Wodehouse's third Blandings Castle novel, *Summer Lightning*, made its debut in magazines on both sides of the Atlantic. In the United Kingdom the story was published in six monthly installments in *Pall Mall* between March and August 1929; in the United States it ran in 12 weekly installments in *Collier's* between April 6 and June 2. The American firm Doubleday Doran was first to publish the story in book form, issuing the first edition on July 1, 1929, under the new title, *Fish Preferred*. The first UK edition of the book, published by Herbert Jenkins, appeared on July 19 under the original title. According to Wodehouse bibliographer Eileen McIlvaine, Jenkins may also have issued an early edition using the American title, but if so, the British Library appears to hold the only known copy.

Summer Lightning (or *Fish Preferred*, if you prefer) is not my favorite Blandings Castle novel (I rank *Heavy Weather* and *Leave it to Psmith* higher), but I think it has to be considered one of the cornerstones of the saga, because it introduces us for the first time to several major characters and recurring themes. Most significantly, it is here that the book reader first encounters both Galahad Threepwood and the Empress of Blandings. (I say "book reader" because the Empress actually made her debut in the magazine story "Pig-Hoo-o-o-o-ey" in 1927, but that short story was not published in a book until 1935.) It is also in *Summer Lightning* that we learn about Galahad's unpublished reminiscences and its shocking but undisclosed revelations about Sir Gregory Parsloe and the prawns. Will Uncle Gally ever publish his reminiscences? Will the Empress remain safe long enough to recapture the silver medal in the

Fat Pigs class at the Shropshire Agricultural Show? In short, if you want to fully appreciate the next 10 Blandings Castle novels, you must read this book first.

The texts of *Fish Preferred* and *Summer Lightning* are identical, but only the latter carries a two-page preface by Wodehouse, which is arguably his finest. As you may recall, it begins:

A certain critic—for such men, I regret to say, do exist—made the nasty remark about my last novel that it contained ‘all the old Wodehouse characters under different names.’ . . . he will not be able to make a similar charge against *Summer Lightning*. With my superior intelligence, I have outgeneralled the man this time by putting in all the old Wodehouse characters under the same names. [This classic put-down has also attracted the attention of Charles Gould. See his article in this issue.—Ed.]

Even more memorable, perhaps, is the final paragraph concerning the choice of the title, in which it becomes clear why this preface appears only in *Summer Lightning*:

I recognized it immediately as the ideal title for a novel. My exuberance has been a little diminished since by the discovery that I am not the only one who thinks highly of it. Already I have been informed that two novels with the same name have been published in England, and my agent in America cables to say that three have recently been placed on the market in the United States. . . . I can only express the modest hope that this story will be considered worthy of inclusion in the list of the Hundred Best Books called *Summer Lightning*.

For many years, I have wondered about all those other *Summer Lightnings*. Thanks to the Internet, I now know about some of them. Using the advanced search form on abebooks.com, I found a dozen different books with that title by such well-known authors as Anne Weale, Bill Peach, Simon Dare, Judith Richards, and Olive Senior. There is also one published in the Harlequin super-romance series. Most of these books, however, could not be the ones Wodehouse was referring to, since they have fairly recent copyright dates. But I did find one version of *Summer Lightning* Plum might have known. It was written by George F. Hummel and published in New York by Horace Liveright in 1929. One bookseller describes it as “a novel of intrigue

[set] in contemporary Italy, with Mussolini himself appearing as a character.” (As of mid-February, there were just seven copies for sale. Act quickly!)

If you limit your abebooks search to Wodehouse’s *Summer Lightning*, there are more than 150 copies to choose from, ranging from first editions to recent paperbacks. The first-edition book is the typical Herbert Jenkins product of the period—orange cloth with black lettering. It clearly states “First printing 1929” on the verso of the title page. The dust jacket has an orange background (some reprints change this to white) with a front cover illustration (by Roberts) depicting Uncle Gally at work on his reminiscences. The spine has a small drawing of Rupert Baxter’s caravan and the price of 7’6 on a green price oval. The back cover carries a one-paragraph summary and a green and black line drawing depicting a startled Beach reacting to the sudden appearance of Hugh Carmody from amongst the hedges (or as Wodehouse sets the scene: “At this moment, the laurel bush, which had hitherto not spoken, said ‘Psst’.”).

First editions in dust jacket are rarely offered. If a copy does appear on the market, expect to pay about \$1,500. Very good copies of the first edition book itself sell for \$50–\$150. For that same price, however, you can own a reprint in dust jacket in much the same format as the first—McIlvaine records a total of 12 printings through 1951. *Summer Lightning* was reissued in hardback in 1964 by Herbert Jenkins as part of their 43-volume Autograph Edition, in 1986 by Hutchinson in their 14-volume New Autograph Edition, and most recently in 2000 by Everyman in their ongoing series. There were paperback editions by Tauchnitz, Pan Books, and, of course, Penguin. There was even a version published in 1980 by Oxford University Press, rewritten using no more than 1,500 different words. Publishers do the strangest things!

It was probably Doubleday Doran who changed the story’s title to *Fish Preferred*. It is not a bad title, reflecting as it does America’s obsession with the stock market in the Roaring Twenties, and indeed Wodehouse employs the phrase at least twice in the book. It is not, however, an entirely original title: In 1923 Guy Bolton had published both a play and a novel called *Polly Preferred*. Doubleday Doran issued *Fish Preferred* twice, both times in brown cloth with yellow lettering. The first edition is clearly identified as such on the verso of the title page. Except for the inside flaps, the dust jackets on the two issues are the same. The front-cover illustration by Gaul depicts a nightclub scene out of Mario’s or perhaps Hugh Carmody’s and Ronnie Fish’s now defunct Hot Spot. In 1930 A. L. Burt used the

same plates to issue a hardback that sold for 75 cents. Finally, in 1969 Plum's American publisher Simon and Schuster reissued both *Fish Preferred* and *The Code of the Woosters* in new editions with dust jackets proclaiming "A P. G. Wodehouse Classic." It looked like the start of a new series, but one that never materialized. As far as I know, there are no paperback editions.

For a book that is now 75 years old, first editions of *Fish Preferred* in dust jacket appear on the market with surprising regularity and sell for about \$750. In one regard, the considerably less expensive second-edition dust jacket is even more desirable than the first, because the inside front flap reprints a poem from the New York *Herald-Tribune* by Edward Hope, said to have been composed upon receiving a copy of *Fish Preferred*. I do not think this poem has ever appeared before in *Plum Lines*, so I'll end this column by reprinting it in full. Be sure to note the woeful rhymes in the first and last two lines:

Amusement unequaled in night club or roadhouse
I find in each novel by Pelham G. Wodehouse.
There's no one who's sillier, slicker or subtler
In handling the speech of a fictional butler;
There's no one, in fact, in the whole of creation
Who's able to tie him in light conversation.
For burglars, policemen, old peers and young
lovers
Go madder than hatters betwixt of his covers.
He writes of an earthquake, a shipwreck, a
murder,
And leaves me convinced that there's nothing
absurder;
He writes of a secret'ry stern and officious
I pine for an actual fool as delicious.
No matter what facet of life he goes after.
The polish he gives it soon glitters with laughter . . .
I never could tell in a thousand-line ode how s—
Incerely I reverence Pelham G. Wodehouse.

The question of how authors come to write their books is generally one not easily answered

Milton, for instance, asked how he got the idea for *Paradise Lost*, would probably have replied with a vague 'Oh, I don't know, you know. These things sort of pop into your head, don't you know,' leaving the researcher very much where he was before.

Cocktail Time, 1958



Answers to quiz on page 12

1. Comfort? Comfort scorn'd of devils! this is truth
the poet sings,
That a sorrow's crown of sorrows is remembering
happier things.

Tennyson, *Locksley Hall*
(Lord Alfred, not Ambrose)
2. The heart bowed down with weight of woe
To weakest hope will cling.

Alfred Bunn, *The Bohemian Girl*
3. The soul that rises with us, our life's star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar:
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home:

Wordsworth, "Ode on Intimations of
Immortality"
from *Recollections of Early Childhood*
4. There was a sound of revelry by night,
And Belgium's capital had gather'd then
Her beauty and her chivalry, and bright
The lamps shone o'er fair women and brave men.

Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*
5. 'Forward, the Light Brigade!'
Was there a man dismay'd?
Not tho' the soldier knew
Some one had blunder'd:
Their's not to make reply,
Their's not to reason why,
Their's but to do and die;
Into the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.

Tennyson, *The Charge of the Light Brigade*

My First Time

CONDUCTED BY DAN COHEN

In a past column I wondered if anyone out there was introduced to the works of Wodehouse through the movies or television. Sarah Conrad Gothie is just such a person.

I admit that, like the senior club members, I had to think long and hard to pinpoint the moment that PGW manifested into my life. After a period of reflection (and a gin and tonic), it struck me that the PBS presentation of *Heavy Weather* was the spark that ignited my keen interest in Wodehouse. The promise of Peter O'Toole in league with a pig was sufficient to cause me (and Mother) to tune in. It was delightful! Within the first 10 minutes of the feature, I felt compelled to learn more about the works of this Wodehouse fellow, and I pursued this goal via several Blandings and Jeeves stories. I became hopelessly enamored (as anyone would) and set out to tell the world about how great he was.



Gert, the BBC/PBS star of Heavy Weather, as The Empress

(Here is where we transition from “my first time with Wodehouse” to my Wodehouse promotion activities, but read on, I think you will find it all intriguing.)

In my junior year of high school, I obtained a media outlet for my PGW advocacy efforts through my English teacher, Mrs. Clawson, who invited me to submit an editorial for the “Teen Voices” column in the *Altoona Mirror*. I rose to the occasion with a scathing (or at least I thought so at the time) exposé of the Central High School’s language arts curriculum. I suggested to the readers of the *Altoona Mirror* that perhaps some charming PGW novels could replace the tedious and disheartening works of Charles Dickens and Arthur Miller. Young people, I felt, would sit up and take interest in assignments that were cheery rather than miserable. Alas, the impact of my article on the educational infrastructure seemed negligible.

My latest attempt to enlighten others about Plum was in the senior seminar for my English BA. My esteemed professor, Tom Liszka, granted our class the opportunity to choose (collectively) the final novel for

the reading list. (He may have been motivated by guilt for all the Hawthorne and Homer he’d put us through.) On the designated day, I toted in a copy of *Heavy Weather* and, with the warmth of nostalgia in my heart, gave a mighty sales pitch to my colleagues, describing the light tone, excellent plot construction, and laugh-out-loud humor. “Plus,” I added, sure that this would seal the deal, “there’s a pig in it.” A flurry of interest stirred in the class. Dr. Liszka, ever astute, piped up, “There were pigs in the *Odyssey!*” Alas, *Heavy Weather* did not win the majority vote, due entirely, I feel, to Tom comparing it to the *Odyssey*. Still, two individuals did approach me after class for more information. Someday, when I am a college professor (it’s on my “To Do” list), I fully intend to include PGW as required reading for my students. I have learned, though (and the Toronto convention confirmed this), that it takes a very special (smart, thoughtful, fun, and glamorous) type of person to fully appreciate P. G. Wodehouse’s contributions to literature.

Cecilia M. Etheridge’s introduction to the “mysteries” of Wodehouse took place in a more conventional setting: *THE LIBRARY*.

Was your first time a little awkward? Did it take a while for you to get into the natural rhythm of it all? Even though you grasped the basic scheme of the thing, did it take practice to be really comfortable and laugh with the absurdness of everything?

It was that way with Wodehouse and me. I first barged in on him when I asked a librarian if he could suggest some new books for me because I had been reading mysteries for a long time and was burned out on them. (I came to mysteries because I was burned out on science fiction, but that’s another story.) I told the librarian that I liked mysteries with humor and lighter mysteries, as well as the harder, grittier fare. He thought for a moment, then led me to an area forbiddingly classified in that library as “Literature,” and pointed out PGW.

“These are a bit like mysteries,” he said, “but they have a lot of humor in them.”

I started with *Stiff Upper Lip, Jeeves*. If one is not familiar with the Wodehouse world, it is frustrating to have the entire ménage (Fink-Nottles, Bassetts, fiancées, cooks, aunts, and all) entangled in one’s lap at once, while being aware that one is reading a sequel to a previous novel. I know now, of course, that the activities in *The Code of the Woosters* are not necessary to the enjoyment of *Stiff Upper Lip* on its own merits, but at the time I was mostly bemused by it all.

I did, however, tell my mother about the unusual new author I was reading, and shortly thereafter she found two more books for me at the library book sale: *Summer Moonshine* and *Young Men in Spats*. I treasure these ex-library editions, orange-colored hardbacks from the Dawson County Public Library, Lamesa, Texas. The Master spoke to me in the stories I still love: “Goodbye to All Cats,” “Uncle Fred Flits By,” “The Code of the Mulliners,” and “The Fiery Wooing of Mordred.”

By the time I got to the end of the last story, with the closing sentence, “A box of matches fell at their feet like a father’s benediction,” the hook was well set. I may actually have fallen on the floor at that first reading, but certainly I had the hardest time reading it to my sons because I couldn’t stop laughing, all the while realizing that I was inciting two preteens to arson. I didn’t strike gold the first time, but I’m so very glad I kept reading, because PGW is a huge part of the happiness of my life.

Ralph Doty is another TWS member who reminds us just how important the public library was in so many of our lives.

I discovered P. G. Wodehouse in the June of my fourteenth year. It began, as all my summer Saturdays began in those days, with a three-mile bus ride to the air-conditioned magic of the library. But the magic wasn’t working that day. I was at that awkward age—too old for Mary Poppins and too young for Raymond Chandler—and I mooched dispiritedly through the stacks in search of something, anything, that looked intriguing. I would not now insist that the fiction holdings of the Oklahoma City Public Library in 1959 consisted of the entire output of Rosie M. Banks, but it certainly seemed so at the time. The afternoon wore on—I would have to leave by four to get home for dinner—and a bar of sunlight crept down the aisle, striking gold from the lettering of a scuffed green buckram cover; it said *Pigs Have Wings*. I recognized the quote from *Alice* and idly picked it up, opened it, read a few lines, and was hooked for life.

There!

Tim Kearley, aka *Kid Brady*, wasn’t hooked immediately. It took a seven-hour plane trip.

I would be paltering with the truth if I said my initial encounter with Wodehouse was love at first sight, that I was smitten like Bingo Little by a waitress. Instead, my first meeting with Wodehouse gave me only a mildly pleasant buzz. However, it did pique my

interest sufficiently to make me pursue him later.

Richmal Crompton and the prospect of a transatlantic plane flight led me to PGW. In 1987, after a month in Great Britain, I was due to fly back to the States on the morrow but had no reading suitable for a seven-hour flight—something entertaining and not too taxing. Being in England reminded me of the Richmal Crompton “William” books I had read as a boy. At age 10 I had become the pen pal of an English boy who was temporarily bedridden by an illness. We were both avid readers and became good enough friends to loan our favorite books to each other. Among his loans to me were a couple in Crompton’s “William” series. So the day before I left England, it occurred to me that picking up one or two William books and stirring up some childhood memories might be just the thing to get me painlessly back across the Atlantic.

Thus, I hid myself to one of the many purveyors of used and rare books in central London. I was delighted to find *More William* for £5.95 and *William Does His Bit* for £4.95. But for some reason I wandered from the Cs to the Ws and was struck by the number of items on the shelves by a P. G. Wodehouse. The jackets were replete with sworn statements to the effect that this Wodehouse was God’s gift to humor and the English language. Yet I, a worshipper of Thurber, Benchley, Cuppy, et al., had never heard of him. I was filled with doubt. This seemed to be heresy. Could there be another god in the pantheon? A still, small voice said yes, so I bought one of his offerings. However, as I was yet agnostic, I found the least expensive of them—a Penguin copy of *Aunts Aren’t Gentlemen* for £1. (A tad steepish, I thought, for a 153-page paperback that obviously had been well read already.)

Most of us would agree, I think, that *A’s Aren’t G*. isn’t classic Wodehouse. It doesn’t contain the consistent sparkle of his best work—but some sparkle there is. Wodehouse, for example, seems to anticipate the Yippie Jerry Rubin’s transformation from revolutionary to stockbroker in explaining Orlo Porter’s success selling insurance: “Making fiery far-to-the-left speeches naturally fits a man for selling insurance, enabling him to find the mot juste and enlarging the vocabulary.” There certainly was enough to suggest a new planet of humor had swum into my ken.

Thereafter, when I browsed used-book stores, I quickly headed for the Ws after determining the place didn’t have any Thurbers or Benchleys I didn’t own. And what joy to discover Wodehouse was no slacker like the aforesaid writers, who seemed content to peck out two or three dozen books among them in a lifetime. Wodehouse seemed inexhaustible, his works infinite.

Now, some 17 years and over 100 volumes, audio and video tapes, and DVDs later, I am enormously grateful to Ms. Crompton, air travel, and that gentle spirit that guided me to the Ws.

This final offering from Fran Kitts was, I swear to you, not solicited—but it is deeply appreciated.

Just who changed my life forever by introducing me to Plum? Read on, dear friends.

Golf—I had taken up the blasted sport with wild enthusiasm, often wondering just why I put myself through the mystery of missed putts, drives, chips, etc., at this stage of my life. What kind of masochist actually pays to be miserable? I did. For some inexplicable reason, the heartache is overshadowed by the sense of peace one gets in the open air on beautiful fairways, as all Nature smiles, and the few really good shots of the day keep you coming back to pay for more misery. And as Plum so aptly put it, “Golf, like measles, should be caught young, for if postponed to riper years, the results may be serious.” It was serious. I bought new clubs, bag, clothes, visors (which must match the outfit, of course), shoes, books, etc. My husband Richard knew exactly what to get me for any occasion—anything golf-related. I was obsessed, and our friends suffered through my golf stories à la the Oldest Member.

“Have you ever read Wodehouse’s golf stories?” a friend asked. I had never read any of Plum’s works. As I related this sorry piece of information to our friends, both husband and wife were thrilled. Knowing that a whole new world was lurking just across the pale parabola of joy, they both said, in unison, “Oh, you MUST,” and they promptly gave me a book of Plum’s golf stories. Where had I been all my life? How had I missed this much fun? I laughed until my sides ached. It became embarrassing as I commuted to work trying to control the laughter.

The golf stories gave way to the full range of Wodehouse, and I became as obsessed with Wodehouse as I was with golf. Richard and I went to our first TWS convention in 1991 with the perpetrators of this now not-so-new obsession, our longtime friends, Susan and Dan Cohen, and it’s to them that I owe a debt of thanks for two of the great joys in my life—their friendship and Plum.

Everybody has a story. What’s yours? Send it to Daniel Cohen. If possible, send e-mail as a message, not as an attachment. Attachments remain pretty much a closed book to me. And mark everything FIRST TIME.

The East Coast Binge Lives On!

May 14-16, 2004, in New York City

Since 1996, East Coast Wodehousians have been Slucky enough not to have to wait two years between conventions to browse, sluice, and make merry in the best of Plummish company. This admirable tradition, nicknamed the Off-Year Binge or the East Coast Binge, was begun when some members of Chapter One, Capital! Capital!, and the NEWTS decided they could not wait another year and had a rousing get-together in Rhinebeck, New York (1996). The following year (all right, yes, this was a convention year), another Binge was held in Cape May, New Jersey, attracting Wodehousians from around the country in addition to the East Coast chapters. Then, in 1998, a group of NEWTS and Chapter One-sters made a pilgrimage to Remsenburg, Long Island, with additional fun and games in nearby Southold. In 2000 the Millennium Tour in England took precedence; and plans for a 2002 Binge in Wooster, Ohio, never quite came to be.

That bouncing, bonny newborn, the Broadway Special, is delighted to bring the Binge back to the East Coast! The dates of the Binge coincide with a revival of the Wodehouse musical *Have a Heart*, and we have also assembled for your enjoyment a Walk through Wodehouse’s New York (written by Norman Murphy); a chummy dinner on Saturday night; and lodging in a classic 1926 hotel at a très reasonable price.

List of Activities (do any or all)

- ◆ Arrive Friday, May 14, or Saturday morning, May 15.
- ◆ Friday night: Dinner with spontaneous groups of Wodehousians; stroll around picturesque Gramercy Park.
- ◆ Saturday morning: Various activities, such as trolling for books at the amazing Strand Bookstore; touring Washington Square, the home of Wodehouse’s “artists and writers and so forth”; and other things we haven’t even thought of yet.
- ◆ Saturday: 2:30–5:00 P.M. – *Have a Heart* (see theater information below).
- ◆ Saturday: 5:30–8:00 P.M. – Cocktails and dinner at Paul & Jimmy’s Restaurant (see below).
- ◆ Sunday: Breakfast 9:30–10:30 A.M. – Show up at Friend of a Farmer Restaurant (see below).
- ◆ Sunday: 10:30 A.M.–1:30 P.M. – Wodehouse Walk. (Don’t worry, we won’t be walking all the time! And people may take taxis at certain tactical points of the walk, rather than slogging it out.)

- ◆ Sunday afternoon: Reluctantly board trains and planes and automobiles to return home.

The Details

Gramercy Park Hotel

2 Lexington Ave. at 21st St., New York, NY 10021

Tel (800) 221-4083 or (212) 475-4320

www.gramercyparkhotel.com

Check-in after 3:00 P.M.; check-out before 12:00 noon.

Our chapter's Miss Postlethwaite, M.E. Rich, has efficiently arranged a special group room rate of \$152/night for Friday or Saturday night. Let us know before April 15 if you will need a room (see below); this rate isn't available through the hotel. Otherwise, the hotel's rates are \$165–\$230. The hotel is currently refurbishing (hence the reasonable rates), and we will be getting rooms that have already been renovated. Note that NY sales tax is 8.25 percent, and NYC hotel tax is 5 percent, for a total cost of \$172/night.

Have a Heart

Main Stage, The New 14th Street Y

344 East 14th Street, between 1st & 2nd Aves., New York, NY

Book your own tickets (only \$19!) through www.smarttix.com or phone 212-868-4444. The theater only seats 99, so get your tickets as early as possible.

This 1917 classic musical was Jerome Kern's first collaboration with P. G. Wodehouse & Guy Bolton, and obviously the beginning of something beautiful. It is the story of a couple attempting to save their marriage by going on a second honeymoon and running into an old flame. The romantic mishaps take place in a department store (where the salesgirls, not the customer, are Always Right) and a seaside hotel. Songs include "Napoleon," "Have a Heart," and "Samarkand." Part of the *Musicals Tonight!* series, this is a concert performance with minimal set and costumes but great acting and singing. For further information on this production of *Have a Heart*, visit www.musicalstonight.org/previews.html.

Paul & Jimmy's Restaurant

123 E. 18th St. (between Irving Place & Park Ave.), New York, NY

Stroll back from the theater and let the browsing and sluicing begin at this Gramercy Italian restaurant! For the sum of \$40, the proprietors will provide us with a prix fixe three-course meal with a choice of appetizers, entrées, and desserts. This includes coffee and tea, as well as tax and tip; drinks will be on a cash basis.

Friend of a Farmer Restaurant

77 Irving Place (1 block off Gramercy Park, between 18th & 19th Streets), New York, NY

This popular breakfast spot usually has a line outside by 11 A.M. Sunday, but if we show up when they open at 9:30, we can be seated together upstairs. The Walk will be leaving outside Friend of a Farmer promptly at 10:30, but of course non-Walkers may linger longer over breakfast.

To participate in the Binge:

Please contact Amy Plofker. Give her the following information:

1. Provide your name, address, telephone number, and e-mail address.
2. Are you attending the dinner? Send a check for \$40/person made out to Amy Plofker before May 1. (We can doubtless fit in some latecomers who book after the 1st, but we need to get an approximate headcount by that date, so don't delay, please!) Specify your choice of appetizer: Eggplant Rollatini, Stuffed Mushroom Caps, or Mixed Green Salad; and entrée: Fusilli Primavera, Veal Scallopini, Chicken Scarpariello, or Broiled Red Snapper.
3. Do you need hotel reservations? Tell Amy whether it's for Friday and Saturday, or just Saturday. If calling or writing, please provide your credit card details; otherwise we will be in touch with you to get this information in order to guarantee your room. Note that you must contact us and supply credit card information before April 15 if you want us to reserve a room for you. After April 15, please make your own arrangements with the hotel.
4. Are you attending the Walk? We need to know, for tactical purposes, if we'll be an unruly mob or a trickle.

We look forward eagerly to seeing you at the East Coast Binge! Don't forget to order your tickets for the show!

The Broadway Special

M.E. Rich (Miss Postlethwaite) Philip Shreffler (President)
Amy Plofker (Vice President) Sally Schubert (Treasurer)



Chapters Corner

CONDUCTED BY SUSAN COHEN

It's fun being with other fans and it's fun reading about what other fans are doing. So please use this column to tell the world—the Wodehouse world, that is—about your chapter's activities, zany and otherwise. Representatives of chapters, please send all info to me, Rosie M. Banks, otherwise known as Susan Cohen. Anyone reading this who is not a member of a local chapter but would like to attend a meeting or become a member should get in touch with the contact person listed.

Anglers' Rest
(Seattle and vicinity)
Contact: Susan Collicott

Phone:
e-mail:

On February 7 the clouds parted, the sun uncharacteristically shone, and 17 of the devout gathered at Kell's Irish Pub in Seattle's Pike Place Market to revel, chitchat, and otherwise hobnob with like-minded individuals. Toasts were raised, spirits were raised, and voices were raised (though fortunately not enough to have us ejected). Three members of Wodehouse India who are now residing in Seattle attended, as did travelers from Walla Walla, Washington; Oregon; and British Columbia. But the farthest-flung prize goes to Albert Ramos (the Young Master), who came all the way from Texas for the binge. Our next big gathering will be in April (rough estimate: April 24), and we plan to organize an outing to *The Play's the Thing*, (adapted by Wodehouse) at the Intiman Theater in June.

Blandings Castle Chapter
(greater San Francisco Bay Area)
Newsletter: *The Argus Intelligencer and Wheat Growers Gazette*
Contact: Jan Kaufman, president

e-mail:

Blandings Castle will be host to five distinguished Wodehousians when we attend the Sunday, May 9,

American premiere of the musical *The Cabaret Girl*. They are: Tony and Elaine Ring from England; Phil Ayers and Florence Cunningham, both past TWS presidents from the Seattle area; and NEWT member Amy Plofker, TWS membership secretary/treasurer from Connecticut. Show Time: 3:00 P.M. Place: San Francisco's 42nd Street Moon at the Eureka Theatre. *The Cabaret Girl* is a 1922 Princess Theatre musical farce with lyrics by Wodehouse and music by Jerome Kern. If anyone wants to join us, phone 415-978-2787 to buy tickets and identify yourself as a Wodehousian. General ticket prices are \$29.00; seniors, \$24.00; and students, \$21.00. After the show we'll adjourn to the nearby Elephant and Castle Pub, perhaps singing one of the show's tunes, "Shimmy With Me," as we go.

At our last meeting at Bill Franklin's on February 22, we thought we were going to see some of those delightful *Wodehouse Playhouse* DVDs, but ended up so fervently discussing *The Cabaret Girl* and so eagerly planning the "Hooray for Hollywood" convention (to be held August 11–14, 2005, at UCLA) that we didn't have time to watch.

The Broadway Special
(New York City and vicinity)
Contact: Philip Shreffler

e-mail:

The Broadway Special met on January 31 at the elegant Etoile Restaurant in Manhattan for their first "Poet Burns" night celebration. Dining not on haggis but on Salmon of Knowledge and Le Bird of Some Kind, the assembled company browsed, sluiced, and roistered to a varied program that honored both Burns and Plum. M.E. Rich's toast to the haggis became a paean to the Empress, and Arthur Shoates's exuberant and extempore toast to the immortal memory of Plum was a highlight of the evening. Ben Vizoskie toasted the Lassies as a member of the Drones, while Evelyn Herzog rejoined in her toast to Wodehouse's laddies in the guise of a stern and very learned Aunt Agatha. David Jasen, the evening's featured speaker, regaled his fellow Broadway Specials with anecdotes of his methods of collecting the Master and displayed rare, personally inscribed volumes of PGW's works. The meeting concluded with a spirited singing of such appropriate songs as "A Red, Red Rose" and Auld Lang Syne, with the chapter's anthem, "The Old Oaken Bucket (see the 1925 version of "Jeeves and the Unbidden Guest"), added for good measure. Cards were tossed into a hat before some

chapter members, reluctant to see a good thing end, wended their way to the bar.

Capital! Capital!
(Washington D. C. and vicinity)
Contact: Jeff Peterson

Phone:
e-mail:

On February 8 Capital! Capital! met for a reading of "Honeysuckle Cottage," adapted for the occasion by Ann Hoey. A standing-room-only crowd watched enthralled as the cast, successful members of Washington, D.C.'s power community, strained to portray the full nuance of a dying man's last gasp—"Aaargh!"—and vocalize with true verisimilitude the arf, arfs of the large, friendly, but mentally negligible dog William, not to mention the yip, yips of the small dog Toto. From heart-of-gold barmaids, apple-cheeked housekeepers, and gruff Army colonels, to hard-hearted publishers, heroes, and sweet young things, the readers gave everything they had. The stage direction of the day was: Ham it up! Extra copies of Ann's adaptation of "Honeysuckle Cottage" are available if other chapters would like to do a similar read-aloud. Our next adventure will be Sunday, April 18, when Colonel Ken Clevenger will give a presentation on "P. G. Wodehouse as a Gastronomer." Late spring or early summer will see a presentation by Brian Taves.

Chapter One
(greater Philadelphia area)
Contact: Susan Cohen

Phone:
e-mail:

At our January meeting we passed the hat to collect money for the care and feeding of our newts at the Philadelphia Zoo. Well, one newt actually, since the zoo only allows the adoption of a single animal at a time. Chapter One was able to donate a whopping \$75 to our mandarin newt. It's hard to imagine any newt needing more than this princely sum. Since it was Robert Burns's birthday, Dan Cohen gave a talk on Wodehouse's quotes and misquotes re Burns and others of his ilk. For example, in Chapter Three of *Code of the Woosters*, Bertie tells Madeline Bassett that he remembered something Jeeves had once called Gussie.

"A sensitive plant, what?"
"Exactly. You know your Shelley, Bertie."
"Oh, am I?"

Our next meeting will be Sunday, March 28. Hal Lynch will do a presentation on the forerunners of Wodehouse.

The Chicago Accident Syndicate
(Chicago and thereabouts)
Contact: Daniel & Tina Garrison

Phone:
e-mail:

The chapter holds bimonthly meetings with a wide range of activities. Sometimes members of the Syndicate meet in each other's homes to enjoy a pot-luck supper and read Wodehouse. Sometimes they meet in an Irish pub where there's good browsing and sluicing. They enjoy theater outings followed by dinner at a restaurant, and every time City Lit does a Wodehouse production, Syndicate members are in the audience. They go to the Chicago Botanical Gardens to stroll through the English garden there, while reading excerpts from Wodehouse. They play miniature golf together and have a grand croquet game every year.

The Clients of Adrian Mulliner
(for enthusiasts of both PGW and Sherlock Holmes)
Contact: Marilyn MacGregor

Phone:

The Clients held their traditional Senior Bloodstain at the TWS Toronto convention last August. The Junior Bloodstain was held at the Algonquin Hotel in New York on Saturday, January 17, part of the great Sherlock Holmes celebration which occurs annually. John Baesch and Evelyn Herzog graciously offered the living room of their suite as a meeting room. According to Anne Cotton, such items of deep import as the upcoming 150th Boat Race (between the Blues, Oxford and Cambridge), were discussed, followed by a superb dramatic reading of "The Adventure of the Odd Lotteries," by Robert L. Fish.

The Drone Rangers
(Houston and vicinity)
Newsletter: *DroneStar*, edited by Carey Tynan
Contact: Toni Rudersdorf

Phone
e-mail:

Our annual “Remember Plum” party, held at Tom Glidden’s on February 21, was terrific. We couldn’t stop watching the *Wodehouse Playhouse* DVDs, beginning with “The Smile That Wins,” then going on to “Portrait of a Disciplinarian,” followed by “Unpleasantness at Droitgate Spa.” And that’s only for starters. When it came to these DVDs we were absolute gluttons. We then went on to other forms of merriment. Cheryl DuCoin again played for our sing-along, with tunes by Berlin, Porter, and Mercer. Great fun! A steady flow of Brandy Alexanders and Chocolate Martinis kept our tissues restored. When one adds the buffet table and the cake with “Remember Plum” emblazoned across it in purple sugar crème, one could be forgiven for believing we had stumbled into heaven and were reveling with the chosen few. Sorry if you weren’t able to join us, but we hope next year finds Texas the February gathering place for all right-thinking Plummiess!

The Mottled Oyster Club
(San Antonio and South Texas)
Contact: James P. Robinson III

Phone:
Fax:
e-mail:

The New England Wodehouse Thingummy Society
(NEWTS)
(Boston and elsewhere in New England)
Contact: Anne Cotton, president

Phone:
e-mail:

The first spring Nottle will be held at the home of Bill and Jo Claghorn in Princeton, Massachusetts, on Saturday afternoon, March 27. While our customary browsing and sluicing will be the main business of the day, the program may include a reading of “The Metropolitan Touch.” We will also come up with some way to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the Oxford/Cambridge Boat Race, which will take place on March 28. Please note the following dates for future Nottles on your calendar: Sunday, June 6, at 2:30 p.m., at the home of “Ravi” and Indu Ravi, in Bedford, Massachusetts; Sunday, August 15, at 12:30 p.m. at Tom and Lisa Dorward’s in Ashby, Massachusetts.

The Northwodes
(St. Paul, Minneapolis, and vicinity)
Contact: Kristine Fowler

Phone:
e-mail:

The Northwodes’ big event of the year was the gift presentation on Valentine’s Day of Overlook editions of Wodehouse’s books to the St. Paul Library system. The books were adorned with a bookplate identifying TWS (complete with URL for the website) and the Northwodes. Included as part of the gift were bookmarks with similar information, as well as copies of our list of The Basic Wodehouse Library. The books were checked out at a rapid rate, and the bookmarks and lists were also eagerly snapped up. We marked the occasion with a reading aloud of “Pig-hoo-o-o-ey!” and “Jeeves Takes Charge.” The reading was a great success—well attended and highly entertaining. Kudos to Craig Johnson for convincingly playing both Lord Emsworth and Jeeves. Now that’s showing flexibility! All the library representatives and the library organizer did us proud, and the Director of the St. Paul Public Library was there in person to officially accept our gift. Several people expressed interest in joining the Northwodes, a hoped-for side benefit. So, pats on the back all around! Our next meeting (sometime in May) is expected to be totally frivolous, before we start working on endowing another local library next year.

The Pale Parabolites
(Toronto and vicinity)
Contact: Peter M. Nixon
e-mail:

The Pale Parabolites—those who are seeking the Pale Parabola of Joy . . . whatever that may be. The Pale Parabolites’ motto is *nil admirari*. Like the Empress of Blandings, the Pale Parabolites take things as they come and marvel at nothing.

The Pelikan Club
(Kansas City and vicinity)
Contact: Sallie Hobbs

The Perfecto-Zizzbaum Motion Picture Corporation
(Los Angeles and vicinity)
Contact: Melissa D. Aaron
e-mail:

On February 16, at a Roaring Twenties evening at Maxwell's at the Argyle that featured period music, we were joined by members of the Art Deco Society of Los Angeles, the Eddie Cantor Society, and the International Al Jolson Society. There, oh glad tidings of great joy, we were able to spread the word about TWS and the upcoming Hollywood convention, reaching Wodehouse fans who were previously unaware of our existence. As for our regular meetings, PZMPCo has been having its usual spiffy time, often following up meetings with tea at the Chado Tea Room. We meet at 12:30 P.M. on the second Sunday of every month at Vroman's Bookstore, 695 E. Colorado St., Pasadena. Meeting dates: April 11, May 9, and June 13. This spring we will continue to discuss stories by the Master where animals play a central role, such as "Something Squishy," "The Story of Webster," and "Pig-hoo-o-o-o-ey!" At our June 13 meeting we will celebrate our fourth anniversary!

On June 27–July 2 the San Diego Vintage Dancers are putting on a Vintage Dance Week in Claremont, California. There will be a Ragtime Dance, a tea and croquet party, and a Jazz Age party on board the *Queen Mary*. One of the performers will be Ian Whitcomb, a ukulele/banjolele player and a big Plum fan, and Pat Tamburro and his accordion of many delights, something those of you from Toronto may remember. If you are interested in attending these events, please let Melissa Aaron know.

The Pickering Motor Company
(Detroit and vicinity)
Contact: Elliott Milstein

e-mail:
The Size 14 Hat Club
(Halifax, Nova Scotia)
Contact: Jill Robinson
e-mail:

The Soup & Fish Club
(northern Virginia area)
Contact: Deborah Dillard

Phone:
e-mail:

You Know You're a Wodehousian if . . .

(with apologies to Jeff Foxworthy)

BY AMY PLOFKER

This is a list that's been floating round my brain for a while, ever since I realized the wonderful excesses of eccentricity that are not just permitted but encouraged in Wodehousian circles. Now, my sister always describes the TWS convention as "like Star Trek conventions, without the Spock ears." In past times, I was offended and attempted a spirited defense, but then I realized: We have spats, which are just as good as Spock ears! Anyway, why should I defend us from the charge of being fun-loving, exhibitionistic, and enjoying a temporary escape from reality in congenial company?

My theory is that escaping via Wodehouse is more satisfying and far less character-sapping than other kinds of escapism. For one thing, it's not truly escaping reality in my opinion; the stories are full of domineering aunts, unsympathetic bosses, financial predicaments, and roadblocks to love—all the things that do so much to keep our own lives from being total vales of joy. The mitigating factors in Plum's stories are the delicate touch with which every crisis is treated; the theme of being saved by one's friends (friendship is far more prized by Wodehouse than romantic love, apparently); and, of course, the exquisite humor.

But there are many readers and appreciators of Wodehouse, you say, who are not precisely "Wodehousians." What IS the distinction? Over the last eight years of being happily associated with The Wodehouse Society, I've realized that there are certain milestones, shall we say, that enable one to say one is well and truly caught. The following list is biased toward my own experience, so please write in with your own milestones!

You know you're a Wodehousian if:

1. You own a lorgnette and long white gloves (if female) or spats and a top hat (if male).
2. You have a mental picture of what a "pale parabola of joy" is.
3. You feel the world is going downhill every time you hear Jeeves described as a butler.
4. You no longer feel proud of your extensive Wodehouse collection and instead feel naked if you

- don't own every book.
5. You wrote letters to the BBC badgering them to re-release *Wodehouse Playhouse*. You feel this could count as political activism.
 6. You pick up copies of "Sonny Boy" at garage sales as gifts for friends.
 7. You've expended more thought on choosing your "nom de Plum" than you ever did for your college major.
 8. You're cool and confident when pronouncing the names "Mapledurham" and "Fotheringay-Phipps."
 9. You know the difference between being "stumped," "caught," and "run out."
 10. You sincerely believe that Wodehousians are a higher life form.

(For our highly cultured, and non-American readers, Jeff Foxworthy is the comic whose signature routine is "You Know You're a Redneck if . . ." And, oh yes, Wodehousians ARE a higher life form.—Ed.)



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