

## Convention Time: August 11–14

Only two months to go, but it's not too late to send in your registration for The Wodehouse Society's 13th International Convention, *Hooray for Hollywood!* The site of this year's gathering is Sunset Village on the grounds of the UCLA campus, a beautiful location with easy access to Westwood, the Getty Museum, and so much more. And if you're worried about the climate, don't be: Informed sources tell us that we can expect warm, dry weather in Los Angeles in August, making for an environment that will be pleasurable in every way.

Still can't make up your mind? Perhaps these enticements will sway you:

- A bus tour of Hollywood that includes a visit to Paramount Studios
- A Clean, Bright Entertainment that includes songs, skits, and The Great Wodehouse Movie Pitch Challenge
- Chances to win Exciting Prizes that include a raffle, a Fiendish Quiz based on Wodehouse's Hollywood, and a costume competition
- A weekend program that includes erudite talks, more skits and readings, and even a film from talented chapter members
- Browsing and sluicing opportunities that include a cookout, a fabulous sit-down dinner, and the traditional

farewell brunch

- Fun times that include reading stories with other Wodehousians, visiting booksellers' and Chapters Corner tables, plenty of singing, and most of all cavorting with fellow Plumies from all over

What—you want to know more? Well, then, how about our speakers, who include:

- Brian Taves: "Wodehouse on Screen: Hollywood and Elsewhere"
- Hilary & Robert Bruce: "Red Hot Stuff—But Where's the Red Hot Staff?" (by Murray Hedgcock)
- Chris Dueker: "Remembrance of Fish Past"
- Melissa Aaron: "The Art of the Banjolele"
- Tony Ring: "Published Works on Wodehouse"
- Dennis Chitty: "The Master's Beastly Similes"



*Brian Taves provided this poster; see the article about Brian's book on page 2, and hear him speak at the convention!*

Right—you're in? Good! Then let's review what you need to know.

(1) A registration form is enclosed with this issue of *Plum Lines* and covers everything from convention fees to accommodations to parking. With everything paid for in advance, all you'll need is a plane ticket, possibly a car (see the article on transportation on page 15),

and some pocket money.

(2) *Details about accommodations* on the UCLA campus can be found in the Winter 2004 issue, pages 2 and 5, and our roommate-matching scheme is described on page 5 of that issue and page 23 of the Spring 2005 issue (as well as on our website at [www.wodehouse.org/TWSHollywood.html](http://www.wodehouse.org/TWSHollywood.html)).

*Remember:* Reservations for rooms must be made by July 22! After that you are on your own.

(3) *The Saturday banquet main course* will be a tasty dish called Chicken Castro Villa. If you want the vegetarian option instead, please write this in on your registration form.

(4) *Do you have a nom de Plum?* If so, please write it on your form so we can include your nom on your name tag.

(5) *Attention, chapters!* If you want some table space to strut your stuff or sell your wares to make money for your chapter, then write to Missy Ratcliffe. Space is limited, so make your reservation now, and be sure to let Missy know what you plan to sell, if anything.

(6) *Attention, booksellers!* Tables will be available on both Friday and Saturday; the fee is a mere \$25 for the weekend. If interested, write to Gary Hall.

(7) With a deadline of August 1 for entries, there's still time to enter The Great Wodehouse Movie Pitch Challenge! Details can be found in the Winter 2004 *Plum Lines* on page 16, in the Spring 2005 issue on page 3, or on our website at [www.wodehouse.org/TWSHollywood.html](http://www.wodehouse.org/TWSHollywood.html).

Finally, detailed information on the what, when, where, and how of our weekend will be mailed to all registrants well ahead of the convention. So—see you in Los Angeles!

## PGW and More than Hollywood

There is another important Wodehouse book on the horizon. The author is Library of Congress film archivist Brian Taves, a TWS member who spoke at the 2001 Philadelphia convention and will be a featured speaker at the Hollywood convention this year.

The title of the book is to be *P. G. Wodehouse and Hollywood*, which Brian admits is a bit of a misnomer because it covers a lot more than that, including foreign films and TV adaptations: “Wodehouse has been part of film and television history in a number of different ways. He spent two sojourns during the 1930s in Hollywood as a scriptwriter, which in turn led to a dozen novels, short stories and autobiographical memoirs, exposing Hollywood characters and the studio system with a comic twist. His more than 70 novels, and even more numerous short stories, have been adapted into some 150 movies and television productions in many countries beginning in 1915, through such hit series as *Jeeves and Wooster*. While the careers of many writers reflect one or two of these strands, none has covered all three or matched the span of Wodehouse’s 45 years of writing about Hollywood.” Brian adds that this aspect of Wodehouse’s career has been largely neglected.

The book will include reproductions of movie advertising, photos, notes, index, and complete credits on all Wodehouse films and television shows (with details on each Wodehouse series episode) from around the world. Much of the information will be new, even to ardent Wodehousians. For example, how many have heard of the 1988, 10-part Indian adaptation of *Leave it to Psmith*, played in Hindi by an Indian cast? Blandings Castle becomes a palace in Rajasthan, “The Effici Baxter” [sic] is an Indian bureaucrat, and Psmith has been renamed Rambo! The series, apparently, was not a great success.

The foreword to the book will be provided by the actor Richard Briers, who has appeared in Wodehouse adaptations on film, television, and radio—the only actor to have done Wodehouse in all of these media—and is also president of The P G Wodehouse Society (UK).

The publication date and price have not yet been announced. The publisher will be McFarland ([www.mcfarlandpub.com](http://www.mcfarlandpub.com)).



*The illustrious Brian Taves*

She had a latent conviction of the immorality of all artists.

*The Coming of Bill* (1920)

# Blandings on Screen

BY BRIAN TAVES

**B**landings Castle has in many ways had a more varied and interesting series of screen incarnations than the Jeeves stories. Although not as frequently a subject of television series, Blandings has inspired its full share of feature films among Wodehouse adaptations. Regrettably, these are not as widely seen as they deserve and are almost unknown among Wodehouse aficionados, partly because they have been largely produced for domestic consumption in England, Germany, and India; several are inaccessible and are probably lost to posterity.

Beginning in 1932, two Wodehouse stories appeared in quick succession, both produced by British International Pictures and starring Gene Gerrard, Molly Lamont, and Tonie Bruce. Each has been preserved by the British Film Institute. First was the weak *Brother Alfred* in 1932, but the second outing, *Leave It to Me*, was made with vastly more skill. It was given a lavish production, with elaborate settings, elegant costumes, and appropriate makeup. The credited source was a play Wodehouse had written with Ian Hay while in Hollywood, which utilizes the basic plot of the novel for which it is named, *Leave It to Psmith*. The stage version makes such alterations as changing Clarence's name to the Earl of Middlewick and eliminating all the plot strands tying in the novel to earlier stories of Psmith and Mike Jackson. Most notably, its comic dialogue far surpasses the very gentle, subtle humor of the novel. *Leave It to Me* may be said to roughly follow the theatrical outline, and hence also the novel, and does revert to the use of the Emsworth name, but at the same time novel, play, and film each make their own set of variations and details on the story, straying steadily further from the source.

Less faithful than their first film, *Brother Alfred*, the company's scenario for *Leave It to Me*, by Gerrard, Frank Miller, and Cecil Lewis, takes its cue from the play, filling the movie with amusing lines and gestures. Coming in rapid pace under Monty Banks's direction, *Leave It to Me* fulfills the basic purpose of a Wodehouse movie, although frequently veering too much toward slapstick. The interplay of the large number of characters is effective, although naturally some must be slighted in a movie of 76 minutes, and nearly all the performances are appropriate. Gerrard, as "Sebastian Help" in place of Psmith, is a lively figure, keeping up a continuous patter that represents almost a turn toward the manic Marx Brothers mode, emphasized by a harp recital—

unlike Gerrard's comparatively subdued performance as George in *Brother Alfred*.

Help heads a large, frenetic but unsuccessful office, Help, Ltd. Finally winning a promise of employment from a mysterious figure meeting him at a club, on the way he manages to ensnare a flower pot with his cane, echoed later when Help drops one on Rupert Baxter (Gus McNaughton). On the way, he meets and falls in love with Miss Eve Halliday (Lamont), who will arrive later at Blandings, and the two share the first of two singing duets. Help is hired to keep an eye on the jewels of Lady Constance (Bruce) and finds the perfect cover when the poet, Siegfried Veleur (Peter Godfrey, the character's name changed from Ralston MacTodd in the play and novel), scheduled to read his poetry at Blandings, asks Help to impersonate him. On the train, Help meets his friend Freddie Threepwood (Melville Cooper), Lord Emsworth's son. A mix-up in suitcases with the criminal Ed Coots (George Gee) when the train arrives first makes butler Beach (Syd Crossley) suspicious, for Help's bag is filled with tools of the burglary trade, and he informs Baxter, who realizes Help is an imposter. Ed is linked with Lida (changed from Alison Peavey, and played by Olive Borden), another undercover guest at Blandings who is after the jewels.

Help must continue the pretence of being the poet Veleur and recite his work in an amusing scene that maintains the satire of poets found throughout Wodehouse generally but which is not crystallized fully in any particular scene in the original play and novel. Halliday places Constance's necklace in the flowerpot, observed by Ed; she is suspicious of Help. Baxter and Beach behave like police in the subsequent investigation, Baxter firing his pistol at Help but hitting only flowerpots as Help escapes into the rain. In an entirely new climax having no basis in either source, Help trails Lida and Ed, enabling Halliday and Freddie to follow as the necklace is saved just as the crooks are about to leave on a vessel going overseas—until Help tosses the necklace to Freddie, who drops it into the sea. Despite its use of many of the incidents from the stage and novel versions of *Leave It to Psmith*, this ultimate departure from its narrative places *Leave It to Me* as a lesser, if still worthy, member of the canon of Wodehousian screen adaptations.

The same year that *Leave It to Me* was released, 1933, another Blandings novel, *Summer Lightning*, was produced by British and Dominions Film Corporation. Unfortunately, this 78-minute movie, reissued in 1937, is not available, although the results were described as "slow" by the *Film Pictorial* review

of October 21, 1933. Maclean Rogers directed Ralph Lynn as Hugo Carmody, Winifred Shotter as Millicent Keable [sic], Dorothy Bouchier as Sue Brown, Miles Malleson as Beach, Helen Ferrers as Lady Emsworth, Esme Percy as Baxter, Gordon James as Pilbream, and Horace Hodges as Lord Emsworth. In 1935, Lynn would commission Wodehouse to write a stage version of the novel *Hot Water*, to be retitled *The Inside Stand*, which had a disappointing run. *Summer Lightning* was again filmed, later in the decade, as *Blixt Och Dunder* in Sweden in 1938. As adapted by Hasse Ekman with Anders Henrikson directing, the names were changed, the Empress becoming “Helen of Troy” and Emsworth becoming Hagerskiold.

The first British Wodehouse television presentation was *Lord Emsworth and the Little Friend* in 1956, produced by Rex Tucker. The 28-minute dramatization by C. E. Webber of “Lord Emsworth and the Girl Friend,” while rearranging the narrative for length and dialogue, remains entirely true to its spirit and demonstrates what a brief television adaptation of one of the stories could achieve. The incidents of the original provide a perfect amount of plot for a small-screen presentation of this length, and each member of the little-known supporting cast was ideal. The conflicts between Emsworth (John Miller), Beach (Raymond Rollett), MacAllister (Rufus Cruickshank), and Lady Constance (Joan Sanderson) are brought to life, as Emsworth tries to avoid confronting the authoritarian personalities around him, while they try to determine his clothing, his garden, and the responsibilities of his position. As played by Miller, Clarence emerges as a meek, tentative, somewhat absent-minded figure, with an amiability that retains sympathy while not losing the eccentricity that gives the characterization its delight. As in *Leave It to Me*, where Emsworth was slightly but not excessively daffy, showing off his chrysanthemums, in *Lord Emsworth and the Little Friend* he is possessed of a gentleness that contrasts with those around him, especially MacAllister’s control of the garden and refusal to allow any of its flowers to be picked. As a result, Clarence is situated as the admirable figure, and his alliance with Gladys (Margaret McCourt) is a model of effectiveness but also innocence and probity.

The breakthrough success of *The World of Wooster* quickly spawned two other series, filmed as *The World of Wodehouse* (1967). This six-part series of half-hour episodes from the Blandings Castle short stories was scripted by John Chapman. The series starred Ralph Richardson as Lord Emsworth, his wife Meriel Forbes as Lady Constance, Stanley Holloway as Beach the butler, and Jack Radcliffe as McAllister the gardener

browbeating his master. Again produced by Michael Mills and Frank Muir, the same team behind *The World of Wooster*, Muir also provided the sounds of Emsworth’s prize pig, the Empress of Blandings.

Muir considered the Blandings stories “the most autobiographical of Plum’s works. Certainly Plum put much of himself in the character of Lord Emsworth: the agony of having to dress up and waste time being social; the disinclination to argue . . . the dislike of facing the human race, singly or in bulk, at any time. And the sublime unworldliness, mind absent on higher matters . . .” The Blandings series was described as having more charm than laughs, with the many exteriors shot in Penshurst Place, Kent. The opening episode was a remake of “Lord Emsworth and the Girl Friend.” Sadly, *The World of Wodehouse* is lost today, one of many British television series of the time deliberately destroyed as lacking further commercial value.

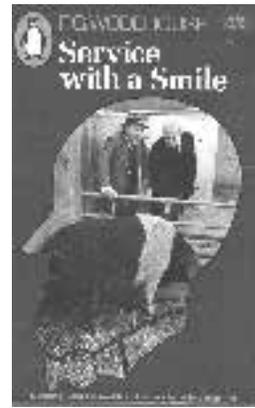
Blandings appeared on the German television screen in 1974 as *Blut Floss Auf Blandings Castle* and again there in 1977 with a presentation of *Oh Clarence* on the German screen as *Der Lord Und Seine K Nigin*.

In 1988 state television Doordarshan in India put on a 10-part film of *Leave It to Psmith*, entitled *Isi Bahane* (“On This Excuse”), played in Hindi by an Indian cast. The verdant Blandings Castle was changed to the palace in desert Rajasthan of an indolent rajah. The story was brought up to date: Freddy Threepwood has a Sony Walkman. Lady Constance is the wife, rather than the sister, of Lord Emsworth, and becomes a tragic character, having been forced into marriage. “The Effici Baxter” is a typical Indian bureaucrat, and Psmith was renamed Rambo. Blighted love and the need for money were two key themes. *Isi Bahane* was not popular with critics and Indian Wodehouseans because of its crude dialogue and production.

Not until 1995 was the first internationally shown Blandings production made, and the best overall to date. This was a television version of *Heavy Weather* in 1995 produced by Verity Lambert and filmed on a six-week schedule using locations at Sudeley Castle, Gloucestershire. The 90-minute Cinema Verity-Jupiter Films production for BBC combined fidelity to the original text with an elegant period recreation, simultaneously recognizing that the Wodehouse characters were musical-comedy types from a make-believe realm. They were played to the hilt by a stellar cast, most notably Peter O’Toole in what he regarded as a “dream role” as an impeccably balmy Lord Emsworth. Two Wodehouse screen veterans costarred: Richard Briers as the sagacious and kindly Galahad Threepwood and Richard Johnson as publisher Lord

Tilbury. The script by Douglas Livingstone interweaved the conflicting and overlapping motives that were such a strength of the Wodehouse narrative. Jack Gold's direction maintained the atmosphere of genial looniness, at the same time succeeding in achieving the maximum comedic effect of many of the situations.

As the only tale of the Empress of Blandings among the surviving screen versions of the saga, *Heavy Weather* was bound to seem even more eccentric than the other surviving non-porcine tales. *Heavy Weather* and *Leave It to Me* offer two elegantly produced, equally amusing but fundamentally divergent interpretations of Blandings, while *Lord Emsworth and the Little Friend* offers a third, more modestly scaled alternative. All three indicate the various ways to treat, on screen, the second favorite Wodehouse saga (after Jeeves and Wooster). *Heavy Weather* veers toward caricature, while *Leave It to Me* goes in the direction of slapstick; *Lord Emsworth and the Little Friend* did not veer excessively in either direction to instead rely purely on the dialogue and situations. Each focuses on different characters the other overlooked, such as Psmith in *Leave It to Me* versus Clarence in *Lord Emsworth and the Little Friend* and *Heavy Weather*. His imperious sister Constance is key in both of the latter but a minor figure in *Leave It to Me*. The two features suffer from discordant, excessively dramatic scenes—Baxter's interrogation in *Leave It to Me* and the lovers' tiff in *Heavy Weather*. Gerrard's Psmith of *Leave It to Me* verges on wacky



Groucho Marx-style behavior in his reliance on one-liners and zany humor. Peter O'Toole's Emsworth in *Heavy Weather* pushes Emsworth to the brink of obsessive idiocy, perched precariously on the fine line as the farce of absent-mindedness verges on feeble-mindedness and near senility. *Lord Emsworth and the Little Friend* provides a milder view of Clarence, a deferential, tentative figure evading the world, between the self-effacement of *Leave It to Me* and the utterly daft characterization of *Heavy Weather*. *Lord Emsworth and the Little Friend* offers a balance between *Leave It to Me* and *Heavy Weather* that comes close to the ideal of what can be achieved with the Wodehouse characters and words. One can only wish longingly that the lost Ralph Richardson *World of Wodehouse* series was available for comparison of its possibilities.

The best-laid plans of mice and men end up on the cutting room floor.  
*Pearls, Girls and Monty Bodkin* (1972)

## Piccadilly Jim At It Again

BY PHILIP A. SHREFFLER



Piccadilly Jim *costar Austin Pendleton and director John McKay*

The first cinematic treatment of *Piccadilly Jim* since the 1936 Robert Montgomery version premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival in lower Manhattan on April 22, 2005. In it, director John McKay has produced a work that is at once remarkably faithful to the PGW novel yet at the same time unnervingly stylized.

McKay is quoted as saying, "I was sure that everyone had had enough of respectful British period movies. Plus the material was about a charming and outrageous womanizer chasing the one woman who doesn't want to know him, so there was no reason for us to make it dusty and respectful. We decided to create our own version of the 1930s—a parallel universe."

Viewers expecting dapper Wodehousian bright young things bedecked in the "form-fitting" and set against the backdrop of warmly paneled upper-class houses and clubs are likely to be jarred by costumes and

sets reflecting an admixture of 1930s deco and 1970s disco. Tweed waistcoats coexist uneasily with bell-bottom trousers, for example, and Jimmy Crocker's inevitable wide-collared dark shirts—always open at the first two buttons—belong to the latter-day Big Apple rather than the halcyon-day Plum. Even Jimmy's motor at first appears to be a classic 1930s Morgan but is in fact a 2003 "concept car."

But if one can get beyond these iconoclastic anachronisms—and they pervade the film—there's no gainsaying screenwriter Julian Fellowes's fidelity to the Wodehouse plot. We won't endeavor to summarize it here, since halfway through the novel even Jimmy himself admits "that his position was a little complicated—he had to use a pencil and a sheet of paper to show himself just where he stood."

Sam Rockwell, as a smooth but love-struck Jimmy Crocker, dominates the film, and he captures well the seemingly supercilious Jimmy who nevertheless has deep wells of emotional devotion. His obvious bonds with the brilliantly cast Tom Wilkinson (as Bingley Crocker), Geoffrey Palmer (as Bayliss), and Austin Pendleton (as Peter Pett) provide a foundation that makes Jimmy's passion for Francis O'Connor's Ann Chester seem natural for his character.

In the screenplay it is Ann Chester, rather than Nesta Pett, who is the crime novelist—the young woman having been driven to a hard-boiled detective writer's view of the world by Jimmy's attack on her verse five years earlier. Perhaps Miss O'Connor plays her part more like a disillusioned 21st-century feminist than a stubborn, firm-of-purpose Wodehouse ingénue.

But never mind: Hugh Bonneville's Lord Wisbeach is actually a German spy out to purloin the explosive created by Willie Partridge, played by Tom Hollander as a rumpled nerd who might spend his time at Dungeons and Dragons when not in the laboratory.

Brenda Blethyn as Nesta Pett is actually balletic in her domination of her household as she sweeps through her scenes, and Allison Janney's ambitious Eugenia Crocker, while icily committed to her husband's peerage, is so ebulliently attractive that one does not fear her. The result is that neither actress seems to portray the familiar Draconian Wodehouse aunt, even though each character is fully realized.

Two characters rather down the list of dramatis personae, however, are real scene-stealers. Pam Ferris as the coarse detective Miss Trimble is a sheer delight. And not enough can be said for young Rupert Simonian's repellent Ogden Ford, who is the very incarnation of those children in Wodehouse who deserve to be strangled and then sold into slavery.

Taken altogether, even with its quirks, McKay's *Piccadilly Jim* is a worthy tribute to Plum. If one considers the novel to have been the original play, then this film is like a stylish modern revival. And it is upon those merits that it should be judged.



*Philip Shreffler, John McKey, and Austin Pendleton*

## A Couple of Quick Ones

As we all know, after leaving Dulwich College Plum worked briefly, and not altogether happily, at the London office of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank, the only nonwriting job he ever had. William Horn has forwarded a clipping from the North American edition of *The Daily Telegraph*. It seems that Dulwich has now established a college in Shanghai. The article says, "Dulwich cannot accept mainland Chinese nationals, and so many pupils are Hong Kong and other 'overseas Chinese.'" Is this a case of "life following art" or something like that?

Your editor is always on the lookout for the right drink to celebrate any occasion. I was trying to find something appropriate to toast the royal couple of Charles and Camilla and came across just the thing, at [www.thatsthespirit.com](http://www.thatsthespirit.com). It might be called The Queen Mum's Tipple and is most fitting for a Wodehousian: Pour 2½ oz. gin and the same amount of Dubonnet Rouge into a cocktail shaker with ice. Shake royally. Serve in a highball glass with ice and garnish with a lemon twist.

This was reputed to be the Queen Mother's favorite cocktail, and she had one every day before lunch. The story may be apocryphal since it was supplied by someone from Dubonnet. But it's quite a nice drink, though I do not recommend it before lunch if you want to get anything else done that afternoon.

# Collecting Books about Wodehouse

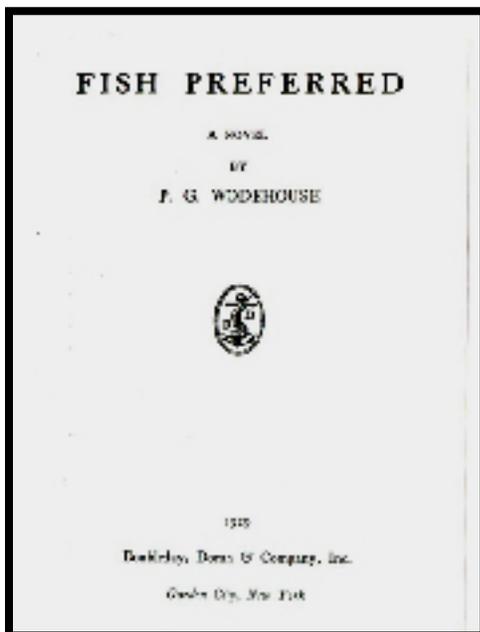
BY JOHN GRAHAM

Even the most casual reader of Wodehouse eventually comes around to asking himself: Have I read this one before? Putting aside the difficulties caused by recurring characters and familiar plot lines, Plum and his editors didn't help matters much by their limited choice of titles such as *Big Money*, *Money in the Bank*, and *Money for Nothing*. After a while, *Something Fresh* can start to smell of *Something Fishy*. On top of this, one has to contend with untangling those transatlantic title twists: By logic, *How Right You Are, Jeeves* should be the U.S. equivalent of *Right Ho, Jeeves*; in fact, the former was called *Jeeves in the Offing* in the United Kingdom while the latter was *Brinkley Manor* in the United States. What's a reader to do?

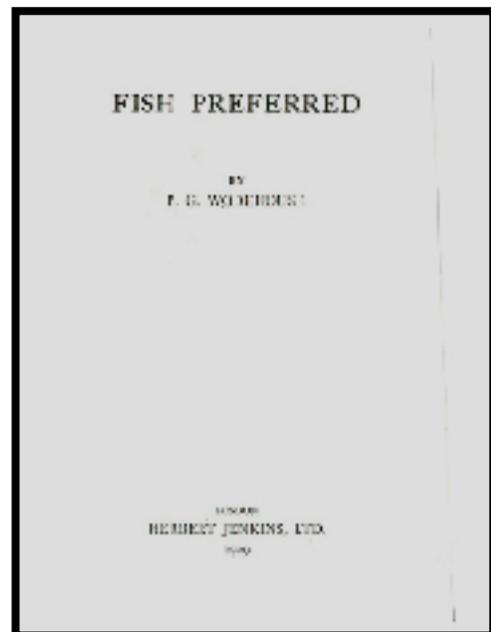
The answer, of course, is: Buy another book. Only this time, make it one *about* rather than *by* The Master. In the November 2004 issue of *Book and Magazine Collector* (BMC, U.K.), Tony Ring surveys more than 40 books devoted to the world of Wodehouse, ranging from 1961's *Wodehouse at Work* by Richard Usborne to last year's (dare I say, definitive) biography by Robert McCrum. A recent guide to Wodehouse I quite like is Usborne's *Plum Sauce* (Overlook Press, 2003) which is a slight variation on his earlier *Penguin Wodehouse Companion* (Penguin, 1988), itself an expanded version of his *A Wodehouse Companion* (Elm Tree Books, 1981). Of these three, the Elm Tree Books entry has by far

the most interesting dust jacket, featuring a front-cover color illustration by Brockbank taken from a famous 1951 *Punch* cartoon which was reprinted January 1959 in a short-lived American periodical called *Horizon*. But this 1981 book has one fatal flaw: On page 43 it mistakenly omits *Meet Mr. Mulliner* from its otherwise complete summary of Wodehouse novels and short story collections. In the end, I suppose that if I had to recommend just one book to a casual reader, it would be *Who's Who in Wodehouse* by Daniel Garrison. Although it is currently out of print, used paperback copies can be found on the Internet for about \$20.

If the casual reader can get by with just one or two Wodehouse guides, the serious collector is likely to want every title on Tony's recent BMC list. But I'm willing to bet there are two items on his list that many collectors value above all others, and both owe their existence to the efforts of the late James H. Heineman. At number two is *P. G. Wodehouse: A Centenary Celebration*, published by Oxford University Press in 1981 to accompany the Wodehouse exhibit at the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York City. It contains 25 short essays, each one penned by a distinguished scholar; the list of names runs from Isaac Asimov to Alec Waugh, and along the way includes Maureen O'Sullivan on "The Wodehouses of Hollywood." The book ends with a bibliography of 100-plus pages prepared by Eileen



*The New York version . . .*



*. . . and the London version*

McIlvaine. This volume was published in both hard- and soft-cover editions. Secondhand copies sell in the \$200–\$500 price range today.

At number one, the *sine qua non* of books about The Master is: *P. G. Wodehouse: A Comprehensive Bibliography and Checklist*, edited by Eileen McIlvaine, Louise S. Sherby, and James H. Heineman, published in 1990 (hereafter simply called McIlvaine). I suppose I've mentioned this book at least once in each of the columns I've written for *Plum Lines*, but it is impossible to give it too much press or too much praise. With over 18,000 Wodehouse items to choose from on abebooks.com alone and with asking prices as high as \$15,000, the serious collector needs help separating the wheat from the chaff. McIlvaine is simply the Bible (or sticking with my agricultural theme, perhaps I should say Whiffle) for Wodehouse collectors. It is not infallible, mostly because of its all-too-frequent omissions, but its actual mistakes are few and far between. To end this column, I want to examine two long-suspected errors in McIlvaine. One of them turns out to be a real blunder; the other is shown here—for the first time, I believe—not to be an error at all.

As we all know, Ukridge made his debut in Wodehouse's first novel written for adults, *Love Among the Chickens*. It was published by Newnes in the United Kingdom in 1906 and by Circle in the United States in 1909, making it Plum's first book printed in America. It is safe to say that Plum never thought very highly of it. We know this because he said so, and because he rewrote the story in the early 1920s. The new version was released in June or July 1921 by Herbert Jenkins, who was quickly becoming his U.K. publisher of choice, having already issued six of his books (*Piccadilly Jim*, *A Damsel in Distress*, *The Coming of Bill*, *Indiscretions of Archie*, *A Gentleman of Leisure* and *Jill the Reckless*). As discussed in my previous collecting column, identifying Jenkins first editions from this period can be challenging; we have to rely on things like the color of the boards and the list of previous titles—in short, the sort of information that usually makes McIlvaine worth its high price. (Originally published at \$135, the book sold out quickly. This April a copy was listed on eBay for \$500.)

McIlvaine's description of the 1921 Herbert Jenkins *Love Among the Chickens* calls for green boards and a list of six previous titles ending with *Jill the Reckless*. This description has puzzled and alarmed many a collector over the past 15 years, because no one had ever seen such an edition, not even Jimmy Heineman, whose collection formed the basis of the bibliography. There are known copies with six titles, but in these the

list always ends with *Archie* rather than *Jill*. Moreover, some copies with these six titles have blue rather than green boards. In the August 1994 issue of *Book Source Monthly*, Charles Gould wrote a wise and witty essay, "Bibliography Among the Chickens," in which he concludes, quite rightly in my estimation, that the true first should have blue boards and a list of six titles ending with *Indiscretions of Archie*. I would only add that if you are risk averse, you might also want to own the copy with green boards.

Last spring, in my column celebrating the 75th anniversaries of the first editions of Doubleday Doran's *Fish Preferred* and Herbert Jenkins's *Summer Lightning*, I wrote: "According to . . . McIlvaine, Jenkins may also have issued an early edition using the American title," and then quickly added that no one I know has ever seen such a copy. McIlvaine's description of this book (item A41b2) is brief, and merely mentions a possible copy in the British Library. I had long believed this must surely be a mistake on her part, or at least an error in the library's own catalogue. Tony Ring agreed to do some legwork for me. After several unsuccessful attempts, he finally had the item traced to a British Library storage facility at Boston Spa in Yorkshire. The staff kindly provided us photocopies of the book covers and preliminary pages. The covers are identical to those on the U.S. edition (right down to the name *Doubleday Doran* on the spine), and the text appears to use the American sheets. Indeed, at first glance you might say this is the U.S. edition—until you take a careful look at the title page, which is reproduced on page 7, along with the U.S. title page. So it seems McIlvaine was right all along—there really was an early Herbert Jenkins edition of *Fish Preferred*. Now if I can only get my hands on a copy!



## The Hitchhiker's Guide to Wodehouse

Gary Hall sent a quote from Roger Ebert's April 28 review of the movie version of Douglas Adams's *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*: "My good friend Andy Ihnatko . . . considered the late Douglas Adams to be one of only three or four people worthy to be mentioned in the same breath as P. G. Wodehouse. Adams may in fact have been the only worthy person."

# Six Degrees of P. G. Wodehouse: The Supporting Actors

BY DAVID MCDONOUGH

Back by popular demand (that is, someone once said casually, “Hey, you ever going to finish that Six Degrees of Plum thing?”), here is the final installment of the seemingly endless quiz. You know the rules: We give you the names of all Oscar winners (this time, the Best Supporting Actors, omitting those who have also won Best Actor awards). You connect them to Plum by the fewest names possible. Broad hint: Knowing a lot about David Niven’s career helps. Answers are on page 17.

1. Walter Brennan
2. Joseph Schildkraut
3. Thomas Mitchell
4. Donald Crisp
5. Van Heflin
6. Charles Coburn
7. Barry Fitzgerald
8. James Dunn
9. Harold Russell
10. Edmund Gwenn
11. Walter Huston
12. Dean Jagger
13. George Sanders
14. Karl Malden
15. Anthony Quinn
16. Frank Sinatra
17. Edmond O’Brien
18. Red Buttons
19. Burl Ives
20. Hugh Griffith
21. Peter Ustinov
22. George Chakiris
23. Ed Begley (Sr.)
24. Melvyn Douglas
25. Martin Balsam
26. Walter Matthau
27. George Kennedy
28. Jack Albertson
29. Gig Young
30. John Mills
31. Joel Grey
32. John Houseman
33. George Burns
34. Jason Robards Jr.
35. Christopher Walken
36. Timothy Hutton
37. John Gielgud
38. Louis Gossett Jr.
39. Haing S. Ngor



Walter Brennan



Anthony Quinn



Joel Grey

40. Don Ameche
41. Michael Caine
42. Sean Connery
43. Kevin Kline
44. Joe Pesci
45. Jack Palance
46. Tommy Lee Jones
47. Martin Landau
48. Cuba Gooding Jr.
49. Robin Williams
50. James Coburn
51. Benecio Del Toro
52. Jim Broadbent
53. Chris Cooper
54. Tim Robbins
55. Morgan Freeman



Morgan Freeman

## *Psnobisme?*

*As Elin Woodger reports in her Letter from England (page 15), Norman Murphy recently discovered this poem, by A. A. Sykes, which originally appeared in Punch, February 15, 1905. It is preceded by an explanation of why it was written. Note that Rupert Psmith made his first appearance in print in April 1909. Coincidence? You decide!”*

—Ed.

[It is stated that a gentleman of the name of SMITH proposes, by way of differentiation, to adopt the signature of “Psmith,” on the analogy of the mute *p* in “psalm.”]

HEAR, all ye countless SMITHS and SCHMIDTS,  
Who long have exercised your wits  
In numerous ways to mask or mimic  
Your world-pervading patronymic!

Ye SMITS and SCHMITZES, SMYTHS and SMYTHES  
Or SMIJTHS (whereat my tongue-tip writhes),  
A Mr. PSMITH had added lately  
His variant, which arrides me greatly.

It shouts aloud, this silent *P*,  
A patent of gentility,  
To match, with little extra trouble,  
Those small initial *f*’s writ double.

Soon in the Landed Gentry books  
We shall be meeting PNOKES and PSNOOKS,  
And last, with rival ardour whetted,  
PTOMPKINS and PTUBBS will get Debretted!

# Wodehouse on the Boards

BY TONY RING

*Part 1 of 2 from Tony's talk at the 2003 Toronto convention. Tony will speak at the Los Angeles convention on the topic "Published Works on Wodehouse."*



Tony Ring

Wodehouse never claimed that he was as proficient a playwright as he was a novelist; indeed, in a number of letters he said just the opposite. For example, in April 1951:

I know my limitations so well as regards stage-work. I think my dialogue is good, but, left to myself, I am apt to fall down on the story. I have never had a success on the stage when I have written the story, and I have never had a failure when the story has been supplied by someone else.

In my view, this is clearly confirmed by the quality of the novels he wrote from plays, for it is noticeable how regularly such titles as *If I Were You*, *Doctor Sally*, *The Old Reliable*, and *Ring for Jeeves* are mentioned in discussions of which were his least successful books between 1920 and 1960. Nobody could criticise his lack of effort, though, and he was involved in the production of more than 20 straight plays and a number of sketches for revue or variety. And as with the fiction of his mature years, much of his work for the stage seems to have had several versions.

Plum was never one to restrict his options, and this was equally true when writing for the stage. Some of his work was performed first in England, some in America. Some, including much of his most successful work, was adapted from translations of the plays of continental

European authors. Most of the rest was also written in collaboration with a coauthor, of whom Guy Bolton was the most prominent, although at one stage it looked as if this honour would go to the British novelist and playwright Ian Hay. There was just one novel, *Hot Water*, which Plum both wrote and dramatised on his own—as *The Inside Stand*.

As with most areas of his work, Wodehouse's career as a provider of the spoken word for the stage started experimentally. As early as 1907 he was offering a sketch entitled "Cricketing" to the London revue market. The typescript, which fortunately still exists, has a number of his own annotations, including drawings using the matchstick men figures of which his old headmaster, A. H. Gilkes, was so scathing. We have no evidence that this sketch was ever performed, but, then, few collectors of revue and variety programmes from the early 20th century are actively on the lookout for Wodehouse accreditations.

A second sketch he wrote around this time, 1910 or 1911, is *After the Show*. Again I have seen no evidence that it ever appeared on stage. If you have read most of his fiction, this would give you a feeling of déjà vu, as it was the stage equivalent of the short story *Ahead of Schedule*, which appeared in *Grand* magazine in the U.K. in 1910, one of his first uses of a smart valet.

Wodehouse's first important stage production was *A Gentleman of Leisure*. His novel *The Intrusion of Jimmy* had been published in May 1910, and he was approached by a John Stapleton for permission to adapt it for the stage. It is unclear how much time Plum put into the adaptation, but he does seem to have been involved to some degree, for he later had a terrific row with Stapleton when it came to selling the film rights. *A Gentleman of Leisure* was staged in New York in 1911, starring Douglas Fairbanks, and reprised in Chicago in 1913 as *A Thief for a Night*, with a young John Barrymore. For both men, Jimmy Pitt represented their first leading role.

*Brother Alfred* was written jointly with Herbert Westbrook and, starring Lawrence Grossmith, managed 14 performances at the Savoy Theatre in London in April 1913. In correspondence with L. H. Bradshaw, Plum laid the blame at Grossmith's feet:

Grossmith made me write and rewrite till all the punch was lost, and it ran just a fortnight to empty houses.

He then received a credit for "additional scenes" in the "second edition" of a revue for C. B. Cochran at the London Pavilion in 1921, called *London, Paris and*

*New York*, but so far I have not been able to clarify exactly which of the sketches were his, although we know that his lyric "Sir Galahad" appeared in the original production. Indeed, this seems to have been just another experiment with the straight theatre, undertaken as a diversion, hopefully money-spinning, from his novels, short stories, lyrics, musical comedies, and casual journalism. And the author and producer Arthur Wimperis was an Old Alleynian.

I believe Wodehouse's experimental period in the theatre finished about 1925. For between 1926 and 1930 he wrote four novels and over 40 short stories, contributed part of the libretto and or lyrics to five musical comedies, and, in addition to the rest of his workload, still found time to write or adapt seven plays for the West End or Broadway. Of these, four were adapted from a European original and three were cowritten with Ian Hay. To the extent that he had a purple patch as a playwright, this was it.

So this is, I believe, an appropriate point at which to mention the fundamental difference between Wodehouse's own writing and much of what he was to write for the stage in this period and later.

When you think of Wodehouse the author, you think of Jeeves and Wooster, Blandings Castle, the Oldest Member, Mr. Mulliner, Ukridge, the Drones. Casting the mind a little further afield you think of the aunts, the spirited young popies, and the blonde bimbo airheads, the vacant minds of the bachelors and the scheming uncles. What you don't think of, generally, are bedrooms, sexual relationships, adultery. Wodehouse, prolific author as he was, kept out of the bedroom, except to make an apple-pie bed, or put frogs or fretful porpentines between the sheets as a punishment or practical joke.

But many of his successful plays were adaptations of the work of a spirited assortment of continental European playwrights: Ladislaus Fodor, Siegfried Geyer, Ferenc Molnar, Sacha Guitry, and Jacques Deval. And what all these continental playwrights liked to write about was sexual relations. You only need to read *Candlelight*, *The Play's the Thing*, *Don't Listen Ladies*, or *Her Cardboard Lover*, and you'll see that Wodehouse did not shy away from writing about extramarital affairs and infidelity.

The question of censorship was very important to playwrights in England, for until 1968 any play performed on the public stage had to be cleared by the Lord Chamberlain's department. Even after approval had been received, any changes made to the script had also to be notified and cleared. Fortunately, the British Library has retained most of the copies of plays and

libretti submitted for clearance, and has in addition a substantial, though incomplete, collection of the correspondence files maintained for each play.

Although there were widely held arguments in favour of censorship, the Lord Chamberlain's office was excessively picky, and today its approach would be viewed with contempt. It employed a number of readers whose job it was to report on each submitted play, commenting on whether any aspects whatsoever might be considered liable to corrupt the morals of those attending a performance, and the words *corrupt* and *morals* seem each to have been given the widest possible interpretation.

In commenting on *The Inside Stand*, the 1935 play adapted from Wodehouse's own *Hot Water*, the department's reader took a dig at contemporary American slang:

It is all harmless. 'Cheese' is an occasional exclamation, but as 'Gee' is always passed we need hardly trouble about it.

The reader for *Don't Listen Ladies*, a postwar Wodehouse adaptation, wrote:

I think 'God's trousers' is a delightful oath, but I think it might offend some of even a Sacha Guitry audience. Regretfully, I think it should be altered.

He added an aside:

Sartorially incorrect, too, according to conventional ideas.

Wodehouse's first major success as a playwright was his adaptation of Molnar's *The Play's the Thing*. Plum explained to Malcolm Muggeridge in 1948 how he had come to adapt it from the Hungarian:

Gilbert Miller asked me to do the adaptation in 1926 when I was in the process of putting on *Oh, Kay!* I saw it would be an easy job, so I took the one and half per cent which he offered without bothering about it. I could easily have got two or even two and a half if I had stuck out, and the darned thing ran a year in New York and two years on the road. My consolation is that I wrote the adaptation in three days, so I suppose I've been well paid for my time.

*Part Two of Tony's talk will be published this fall.*

## Comments on *Wodehouse: A Life*

In the Winter 2004 issue of Plum Lines, we asked readers to share their impressions of the latest biography of Wodehouse, written by Robert McCrum. Two reviews follow, and we welcome more, whether high-brow, low-brow, or in-between. Send your comments—anywhere up to 600 words—to Gary Hall (address on back page).

Gary Hall writes:

Here in the high mountains of Estes Park, Colorado, we have a fine library, and a finer librarian. Knowing my bibliophilic (and Plummy) tendencies, the Lady in Charge recently informed me that the library had procured a copy of *Wodehouse: A Life*.

I must say that it's a tremendous piece of work. McCrum gives us a sweeping history of early American musical theatre and a fascinating list of the many luminaries with whom Wodehouse consorted during his long career. Remember those movies where a personal story is set against an epic historical backdrop? This book has that feel. I was aware of many of the details, but have now been enlightened to a much greater level. And Mr. McCrum interweaves so many bits of Wodehouse's works that one never has to go long without being tossed a Plummy nugget. The narrative is never dry, and the humorous clips are extra gems in the rich mine of well researched history.

The points I would debate are few. McCrum does attempt to analyze and understand Wodehouse, using evidence from many sources. But when he says (page 300) that Wodehouse "had become the jester whose jokes were no longer funny," I must disagree. Wodehouse never became unfunny. The world (or much of it, at least) simply lost its sense of humor for a period of time. Even Lear in his madness kept The Fool around; unfortunately, there were those in the 1940s who couldn't see beyond the madness of the time. Of course, I have to agree that, as an innocent apolitical figure, he was taken advantage of by the Nazi machine.

I also thought the comparison of the experience of the Silesian prison camp to Wodehouse's early days at Dulwich was a bit of a stretch (pages 281, 288). McCrum compares the stoicism that Wodehouse developed in Dulwich, and the presence of the all-male society there, to the mental requirements and condition of the war camp. I feel instead that one's whole life experience comes into play in such a new and stressful situation. Remember that Wodehouse was almost 60 when he was interned. The school experiences 40 years earlier

were influential but ancient threads in the tapestry of his life wisdom by then; he'd seen so much, moved so often, and met so many people that he had learned to adapt to even radically changing conditions.

Finally, in the early part of the book, McCrum mentions that the remarkable opposite natures of Wodehouse and his wife Ethel find "an unconscious echo in several aspects of Jeeves and Bertie's rapport." I would contend that it would be very difficult to prove how unconscious that parallel was. While the artist often pours out the content of the conscious and unconscious mind, that same artist may well intuit or intellectually decipher the personal events and relationships that led to his own creative output. Was Plum too close to his characters to see what forces from his own life gave birth to those people? If I have to err on one side or the other, I'll err with the argument that he usually knew of what he spoke.

All in all, though, an absolutely topping biography—essential reading for the Wodehousean in all of us.

David Landman writes:

Robert McCrum's psychological approach to Wodehouse situates the biographer at an admirably subtle balance point between the school that regards Wodehouse as inherently divorced from reality and the school that regards him as an astute observer of "real life" who, knowing where his strength lay, cannily chose to cloak himself in the myth of arrested development. A moment's reflection will demonstrate, however, that with regard to what is meant by "reality," the propounders of these notions—as, I dare say, the vast majority of people on the planet—share an implicit epistemology. The so-called "real world" is as they feel it, and they assume everyone feels it as they do. It requires neither analysis nor definition. And in the 20th and 21st centuries it has become difficult and increasingly so not to feel it as nasty and brutish. It is this "reality" that Wodehouse is deemed either *out-of*, psychologically *incapable of*, or disingenuously *into*.

And yet, I cannot dismiss the words of a 17th-century Buddhist philosopher, Toju Nakae: "The real nature of man's mind is delight." Both views can't be right. And if, as I believe, Toju is correct, we approach a philosophical dilemma: Whether a delusion shared by *everyone in the world* becomes by default reality. Fortunately, we do not have to face that problem because of the improbable and miraculous appearance of P. G. Wodehouse in our time. Just as the Dalai Lama, Mother Teresa, and other profound practitioners validate the world of the spirit, Wodehouse by instinct and perhaps

fortunate spiritual endowment, single-handedly as far as I can tell, validates the secular world by maintaining, despite bitter personal experience, merry compassion.

To fault such men because they do not take up arms against manifest evil is to ask them to be other than they are. In an older, clearer time where every man was not asked to exhibit every personality type—scholar, sage, artisan, warrior, merchant—it would be understood that a preeminently warrior temperament—which has an excellence of its own—would be devoted to preserving the conditions from which beings such as Wodehouse emerge and flourish.

Wodehouse fans of my acquaintance do not read him to escape from painful “reality” into a fleeting cloud-cuckoo-land. They do not rise from reading him to a bitter reflux of rigor, but to a fresh, less convulsive perspective. This is so, I believe, not because of what has often been misconceived as the infectiousness of his habit of mind, but rather because he disinvests his reader in the nightmare of “reality” and allows recognition of one’s own real nature.

McCrum, as all biographers before him (and he is one of the very best), perceives something of this. He notes Wodehouse’s “exceptional good nature and . . . profound humanity,” his “understated tolerance of human frailty,” but does not arrive at the insight of Toju. I, however, take my stand with the sage. If the real nature of man’s mind is delight, then Wodehouse—not so much in the loopy world he writes about as in the golden temper that animates it—has the firmest (because unselfconscious) grasp of reality of any writer of the 20th century, and the biography that says so rather than making excuses for him still remains to be written.



“How about the earthquakes?”

Mr. Trout . . . stared like one who is having difficulty in believing his ears.

“Earthquakes are absolutely unknown in California.”

*Bachelors Anonymous*, 1973

## Rivals of P. G. Wodehouse: Owen Johnson

BY DAVID MCDONOUGH

Owen Johnson is one of the most unusual authors in our series for one reason: He rivals Plum in only one field, the school story. He wrote other novels, about love and marriage and war; of his 10 “adult” novels we shall say nothing (and we may note that the literary world has felt the same, as most have not passed the test of time). We will speak only of the five books known collectively as *The Lawrenceville Stories* and of one sequel.

Owen McMahon Johnson was born in 1878 in New York City, the son of Robert Underwood Johnson, poet and editor of *Century Magazine*. The younger Johnson was sent to Lawrenceville, a New Jersey “prep,” or boarding school. Although the school seems a venerable institution now, it was only 12 years old when Johnson graduated in 1895. In some ways Lawrenceville corresponds well to Wodehouse’s alma mater, Dulwich. Although the majority of boys would go on to Ivy League colleges, there were more than a few middle-class students and very few of the old-money types, who were more likely to find themselves attending New England prep schools as legacies. As Plum once said of Dulwich, “Bertie Wooster would never have gone there, but Ukridge might.” There were few Astors or Vanderbilts at Lawrenceville, but the spirit of Ukridge lived in characters like Johnson’s entrepreneurial genius, William Orville Hicks, aka “The Prodigious Hickey.”

After Johnson’s graduation from Lawrenceville at 16, he received permission to stay on as Lawrenceville’s first postgraduate student and to establish a student literary magazine, the *Lit*. He once spoke of its origins: “The first batch of contributions were concentrated mainly on the love entanglements of the upper crust of High Society, and the lower crust of the desperados of the Underworld. I was frightfully depressed. The stories lacked the background of conviction. I laid down the first law of the *Lit*. Don’t invent—interpret. Write from your own experience.” Johnson was setting the course for the most important part of his own literary career.

He graduated from Yale in 1901, married (the first of five wives, a distinctly un-Wodehousean part of his life), and moved to Paris, where he began what looked like an undistinguished literary career. He published three uninteresting novels of life and love, and then, finding himself at loose ends, began to dig into his

Lawrenceville experiences for inspiration. His first school stories were published in the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1907, and they were an instant hit. The public clamored for more, and the cry went round, "Johnson has found his niche."

Johnson's humor focused on the sheer animal spirits being kept penned in by an institution. Like Plum's schoolboys, his heroes function in their own little society, with its rules and conventions. Schoolmasters function mostly as annoyances and inconveniences, as in Wodehouse's stories, but unlike Plum's works, in Johnson's world a great deal of the comic hostility is aimed directly at the masters. As Johnson said, "I wrote of the era before the lion had laid down with the lamb. Between masters and students there was an armed and exceedingly wary neutrality. Nothing was taken for granted on other side. It was a battle of wits and the rule of the master was sternness tempered with mercy."

In Johnson's stories, sports are as important as they are in Wodehouse, and working like a fiend to achieve high marks is frowned upon or dismissed as insignificant. One of the main distinctions, however, is to be awarded a really good nickname. No "Gazeeka" here; Johnson's world (and he swore the names were based on fact) is populated with the Triumphant Egghead, the Tennessee Shad, the Waladoo Bird and the Uncooked Beefsteak. In "The Hero of an Hour," George Barker Smith has achieved fame by falling off the roof of the Upper House and surviving with nothing more than scars from the gravel path. Having desired a nickname since his entrance to the school, he wonders what his reward will be.

Only yesterday he was plain George Barker Smith, tomorrow he might be . . . What would the morrow bring? Who would name him? Would it be Hickey, Doc MacNooder or Turkey Reiter, or would some unsuspected classmate find the happy expression? He hoped it would be something picturesque, but a little more dignified than the Triumphant Egghead. He tried to imagine what the nickname would be. Of course, there were certain obvious appellations that immediately suggested themselves, such as Roofie, Jumper, or better still, Plunger Smith. There were also Tadoo and Rubber and Sliding, but none of these seemed to measure up to the achievement, and in this delightful perplexity Smith fell asleep.

The name that Hickey comes up with is "Old

Ironsides."

As we have seen, it is not just athletic prowess that brings fame in Johnson's world. Hungry Smeed, for example, rises to greatness when he sets a school record for eating 49 pancakes at Conover's Cottage, entitling the whole school to unlimited free pancakes, and he does it despite dirty work at the crossroads rivaled only by Sir Gregory Parsloe's nobbling of Gally's Towser.

A new interruption came from the kitchen. MacNooder claimed that Mrs. Conover was doubling the size of the cakes. The dish was brought. There was no doubt about it. The cakes were swollen. Pandemonium broke loose. Conover capitulated, the cakes were rejected. . . . Conover, vanquished and convinced, no longer sought to intimidate him with horrid suggestions. "Mr. Smeed," he said, giving him his hand in admiration, "you go ahead; you make a great record."

Between 1908 and 1911, Johnson published four popular books about Lawrenceville School: *The Prodigious Hickey* (aka *The Eternal Boy*), *The Humming Bird*, *The Varmint*, and *The Tennessee Shad*. After his service as a war correspondent in World War I, he returned to familiar territory with one more Lawrenceville tale, *Skippy Bedelle*, in 1922. Most of his school stories appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post*, just around the time that Plum began to contribute to that magazine. But Plum had moved on from school stories by the time he hit the American market; he had published his last school book, *Mike*, in 1909, and none of his school stories had ever been published in the United States. It is doubtful, although not impossible, that Johnson was familiar with Plum's school stories; there is almost no doubt that Wodehouse knew of Johnson, although we have no record of the two meeting, or of Plum commenting on Johnson.

One of Johnson's most widely read books was 1910's *The Varmint*, the saga of Dink Stover's transformation from glib school outcast to thoughtful (albeit mischievous) school leader. One year later Johnson published *Stover at Yale*, a more serious look at Dink's travails in New Haven, with an explicit attack at the Yale Secret Society system. It was for this work, as the years went by, that Johnson became best known. He published little after 1931 and became involved in politics, running unsuccessfully for Congress in 1936 and 1938. In 1950 the Dink Stover stories were filmed by MGM as *The Happy Years*, starring child actor Dean Stockwell. Johnson died at his Massachusetts home in 1952.

In 1967 one of Simon & Schuster's headmen, the late Peter Schwed—Plum's publisher, a graduate of Lawrenceville, and a longtime member of TWS—brought out a volume called simply *The Lawrenceville Stories*, containing *The Prodigious Hickey*, *The Varmint*, and *The Tennessee Shad*. In the introduction, humorist Cleveland Amory says, "Writing from the inside out, with high good humor but with depth and understanding too, with rare modern insight combined with plain, old-fashioned storytelling, Owen Johnson has here created, out of his own experiences at school, the truly classic stories of the American boy."

Most of Johnson's work is out of print, with the exception of the Stover books and Schwed's edition, all in paperback. In 1987 *The Lawrenceville Stories* became a PBS miniseries; it was issued on VHS in 1992.

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The pre-convention packet you get will include directions for finding the shuttle of your choice at LAX and for where to go once you get to UCLA. While you don't need to book ahead when traveling *from* LAX, it is a good idea to make the booking anyway for your peace of mind. And bookings are definitely necessary for returning to the airport from UCLA, so be sure to arrange that in advance.

Questions? Phone or e-mail Beth Miles (see the first paragraph of this article). Happy traveling!

## Hooray for Hollywood: The Transportation Angle

In the last *Plum Lines* (page 2), Beth Miles of the Perfecto-Zizzbaum Motion Picture Corporation pointed out that transportation issues in Los Angeles make it advisable to rent a car to get to the convention at UCLA. To help, Beth is running a matching service whereby Plummies who wish to rent a car for the weekend can be matched up with others of like mind, thus saving on costs. If this interests you, then get in touch with Beth. Directions for driving to the campus will be provided in a packet of material that will be sent out prior to the convention. In the meantime, those with Internet access can go to <http://www.ucla.edu/map/UCLA> to get an idea of the area.

*If you prefer not to rent a car*, take heart! There are other ways of getting to UCLA from the airport. Alas, we do not recommend taking a train. Beth writes: "The route involves three trains and two buses! Save some time and take the bus instead if you are considering this option."

Your best alternative is to take a shared-ride van, i.e., a group taxi for people traveling to or from the same area of Los Angeles. Shuttle services charge a flat rate for the trip regardless of how many passengers are in a vehicle (which generally takes up to nine), and they are, we are told, very reliable. There are two services that operate out of the Los Angeles airport (LAX):

Prime Time Shuttle  
800-262-7433 / 800-733-8267 / 310-342-7200

## Letter from England

BY ELIN WOODGER

Well, as winters go it was about average here in jolly ol' you-know-where, and I'd have very little to report if it weren't for a small burst of activity in February. It was the mid-part of the month when it seemed you couldn't move without stumbling over a Wodehousian reference of some sort or another. This, of course, was mainly due to the 30th anniversary of PGW's death on Valentine's Day, February 14. Several newspapers here noted the fact, and there was one article in particular that eloquently expressed the essence of Wodehouse. I'll get to that in a minute.

The same week that members of the press were all agog about Wodehouse, members of the U.K. Society were converging on the Savage Club in London. On February 15 there was the first of this year's three regular gatherings, and as usual the place was packed with chattering Plummies enjoying themselves thoroughly and sluicing away like mad. When the proceedings were finally called to order, one item of business was Norman's announcement of a particularly pleasing discovery made just the day before. Curious to see what Wodehouse may have been up to a century ago, Norman was glancing through an old *Punch* dated 15 February 1905, and on page 109 he found, to his delight, a poem entitled "Psnobisme" by one A. A. Sykes. Oliver Wise read it

aloud to thunderous applause, and if you turn to page 9, you will see for yourself just why it tickled our fancy.

The star attraction of the Savage gathering was Christopher Owen, a writer-actor who has previously played Lord Emsworth in an original, one-man stage show based on the Blandings stories. I had the very pleasurable chance to hobnob with Christopher in the social hour before the “official” part of the program began, and I learned that he has no plans to revive his show in the near future. This is a pity, because Norman and I never managed to see it, and the sample that Christopher provided us with that night left us thirsting for more. Tall, rangy, and dressed in tweed, he conveyed Lord Emsworth in every detail, right down to the woolly-headed manner. His monologue retained a lot of the original Wodehouse words, linked together with smooth, Owen-written bridges of material as well as songs such as “Nesting Time in Tooting,” brilliantly done. He came very close to remembering that famous pig call although didn’t quite get there, and I think the audience was prepared to refresh his memory. We were all rapt, so perfectly did he evoke our Lord Em., and I am keeping my fingers crossed that his show will make it back to the stage before long.

Several of us Wodehousians returned to the Savage a few nights later to attend a special performance (sponsored by the Savage) of another Wodehouse-inspired stage show, called *Plum Sauce*. The performers were to be the husband-and-wife stage team of Jonathan Cecil and Anna Sharkey, but unfortunately Miss Sharkey could not be present, leaving Jonathan on his own—and without her he could not perform *Plum Sauce*. So instead he gave us a monologue reflecting on his career in show business, in addition to a song or two. Now, if his name seems familiar to you, that is because you have probably listened to at least one, and probably more, of the dozens of Wodehouse stories he has recorded for books on tape. Jonathan told us that making the tapes has been a memorable experience for him—and rewarding as well: Back in 1996 he won the Earphones Award for his work from some U.S.-based group. As Norman wrote in his report of the evening for the U.K. Society’s website: “[Jonathan] described his pride in this achievement and his eager wait for the trophy. Would it be like an Oscar? Would it be like the earphones telephone operators wore in those old 1930s films? Perhaps they would be gold-plated? Surely at least they would be gilded? Perhaps they came on a stand? But, as he concluded lugubriously, since the award had been made in 1996 and he’d received nothing so far, his hopes of a tangible token of the honour were beginning to fade.” Jonathan then moved

on to other aspects of his far-ranging career, and his talent for mimicry was well in evidence as he called to mind several of the British show-business legends with whom he has worked, including Peter Ustinov, Robert Morley, and John Gielgud. All in all it was a delightful performance, followed by a delicious supper, during which certain folks in attendance conducted Society business. As Norman wrote reassuringly to website readers, “Your Committee never rests.”

But getting back to those articles I mentioned at the top, of all the ones published on February 14 to mark Wodehouse’s death 30 years ago, two were of particular interest. One, published in the *Independent*, had to do with Wodehouse’s famous claim in *Bring on the Girls* that he would mail letters by simply tossing them, stamped, out of his window, confident that passers-by would pick them up and drop them in a mailbox. Such was his faith in humankind that he never doubted the efficacy of this system—although, as the article pointed out, whether or not his letters ever reached their destinations depended on the efficacy of the post office. But was Wodehouse telling the truth? In fact, he appropriated the story of his mailing habits from Fred Thompson, a playwright, lyric writer, and friend who apparently didn’t mind Wodehouse’s claiming the tale for his own.

More delightful, though, was an article in *The Times* entitled “What ho today, St Gussie?” The author was Patrick Kidd, who begins by noting that “while the bores at the Romantic Novelists’ Association have this week predictably nominated *Pride and Prejudice* as the greatest novel of all time, surely P. G. Wodehouse is long overdue recognition as one of our finest romantic treasures.” He goes on to wax rhapsodically about that Wodehouse style we all love so much and makes particular note of the role that love plays in the canon: “You cannot move for men falling over each other in an attempt to woo.” Kidd then gets to the nub of his argument: “Wodehouse is often dismissed as being frivolous, but that is the point. Love shouldn’t be some angst-ridden chore, it should be whimsical with a capital W.” How true!

I would I could provide you with the full article—maybe that can be arranged for a future *Plum Lines*—but I shall end this letter with the concluding paragraph from Kidd’s article. I think it speaks for all of us:

We ought to honour the achievements of this most romantic of writers today. A tradition should be started for lovers to give each other a Blandings or a Jeeves book every February 14. And perhaps the day’s name should be changed from St Valentine’s to St Gussie’s.

# Answers to the Six Degrees Quiz

1. Walter Brennan was in *The Story of Vernon and Irene Castle* with Fred Astaire, who was in *A Damsel in Distress*.
2. Joseph Schildkraut was in *The Shop Around the Corner* with Frank Morgan, who was in *Piccadilly Jim*.
3. Thomas Mitchell was in *The Immortal Sergeant* with Reginald Gardiner, who was in *A Damsel in Distress*.
4. Donald Crisp was in *The Charge of the Light Brigade* with David Niven, who was in *Thank You, Jeeves*.
5. Van Heflin was in *The Three Musketeers* with Frank Morgan.
6. Charles Coburn was in *The Road to Singapore* with Bing Crosby, who was in *Anything Goes*.
7. Barry Fitzgerald was in *Going My Way* with Bing Crosby.
8. James Dunn was in *Bright Eyes* with Shirley Temple, who was in *The Little Princess* with Arthur Treacher, who was in *Thank You, Jeeves*.
9. Harold Russell was in *The Best Years of Our Lives* with Myrna Loy, who was in *Night Flight* with Robert Montgomery, who was in *Piccadilly Jim*.
10. Edmund Gwenn was in *Green Dolphin Street* with Frank Morgan.
11. Walter Huston was in *Yankee Doodle Dandy* with Joan Leslie, who was in *The Sky's the Limit* with Fred Astaire.
12. Dean Jagger was in *12 O'Clock High* with Gregory Peck, who was in *On The Beach* with Fred Astaire.
13. George Sanders was in *Rebecca* with Joan Fontaine, who was in *A Damsel in Distress*.
14. Karl Malden was in *On the Waterfront* with Marlon Brando, who was in *Bedtime Story* with David Niven.
15. Anthony Quinn was in *The Guns of Navarone* with David Niven.
16. Frank Sinatra was in *Anchors Aweigh* with Gene Kelly, who was in *Ziegfeld Follies* with Fred Astaire.
17. Edmond O'Brien was in *Julius Caesar* with Marlon Brando, who was in *Bedtime Story* with David Niven.
18. Red Buttons was in *18 Again* with George Burns, who was in *A Damsel in Distress*.
19. Burl Ives was in *Just You and Me, Kid* with George Burns.
20. Hugh Griffith was in *How To Steal a Million* with Peter O'Toole, who was in *Heavy Weather*.
21. Peter Ustinov was in *The Purple Taxi* with Fred Astaire.
22. George Chakiris was in *633 Squadron* with Cliff Robertson, who was in *Two of a Kind* with George Burns.
23. Ed Begley (Sr.) was in *Odds Against Tomorrow* with Harry Belafonte, who was in *Island in the Sun* with Joan Fontaine.
24. Melvyn Douglas was in *Ghost Story* with Fred Astaire.
25. Martin Balsam was in *The Taking of Pelham One Two Three* with Walter Matthau, who was in *The Sunshine Boys* with George Burns.
26. Walter Matthau was in *The Sunshine Boys* with George Burns.
27. George Kennedy was in *Death on the Nile* with David Niven.
28. Jack Albertson was in *Miracle of the 34th Street* with Edmund Gwenn, who was in *Green Dolphin Street* with Frank Morgan.
29. Gig Young was in *The Gay Sisters* with Bette Davis, who was in *June Bride* with Robert Montgomery.
30. John Mills was in *Bright Young Things* with Peter O'Toole (directed by Stephen Fry).
31. Ben Johnson was in *Bite the Bullet* with Ian Bannen, who was in *Private's Progress* with Ian Carmichael, who was in *The World of Wooster*.
32. Joel Grey was in *Man on a Swing* with Cliff Robertson, who was in *Two of a Kind* with George Burns.
33. John Houseman was in *Ghost Story* with Fred Astaire.
34. George Burns was in *A Damsel in Distress*.
35. Jason Robards Jr. was in *Once Upon A Time In The West* with Claudia Cardinale, who was in *The Pink Panther* with David Niven.
36. Christopher Walken was in *The Anderson Tapes* with Margaret Hamilton, who was in *The Wizard of Oz* with Frank Morgan.
37. Timothy Hutton was in *French Kiss* with Kevin Kline, who was in *A Fish Called Wanda* with Stephen Fry.
38. John Gielgud was in *Plenty* with Hugh Laurie.
39. Louis Gossett Jr. was in *The Deep* with Eli Wallach, who was in *How To Steal A Million* with Peter O'Toole.
40. Haing S. Ngor was in *The Killing Fields* with Julian Sands, who was in *Nocturne* with Anton Rodgers, who played Ukridge in the BBC series *Ukridge*.

41. Don Ameche was in *In Old Chicago* with Alice Brady, who was in *The Gay Divorcee* with Fred Astaire.
42. Michael Caine was in *The Wrong Box* with Ralph Richardson.
43. Sean Connery was in *Dr. No* with Ursula Andress, who was in *Casino Royale* with David Niven.
44. Kevin Kline was in *A Fish Called Wanda* with Stephen Fry.
45. Joe Pesci was in *JFK* with Jack Lemmon, who was in *The Notorious Landlady* with Fred Astaire.
46. Jack Palance was in *The Professionals* with Claudia Cardinale, who was in *The Pink Panther* with David Niven.
47. Tommy Lee Jones was in *The Betsy* with Laurence Olivier, who was in *Richard III* with Ralph Richardson, who played Lord Emsworth in the BBC series *Blandings Castle*.
48. Martin Landau was in *Pork Chop Hill* with Gregory Peck, who was in *On The Beach* with Fred Astaire.
49. Cuba Gooding Jr. was in *The Rat Race* with Rowan Atkinson, who was in *Blackadder* with Stephen Fry and Hugh Laurie.
50. Robin Williams was in *The World According to Garp* with Glenn Close, who was in *101 Dalmatians* with Hugh Laurie.
51. James Coburn was in *Charade* with Audrey Hepburn, who was in *Funny Face* with Fred Astaire.
52. Benecio Del Toro was in *Che* with Ryan Gosling, who was in *Gosford Park* with Stephen Fry.
53. Jim Broadbent was in *Tooth* with Stephen Fry.
54. Chris Cooper was in *My House in Umbria* with Maggie Smith, who was in *Gosford Park* with Stephen Fry.
55. Tim Robbins was in *IQ* with Stephen Fry.
55. Morgan Freeman was in *The Shawshank Redemption* with Tim Robbins, who was in *IQ* with Stephen Fry.

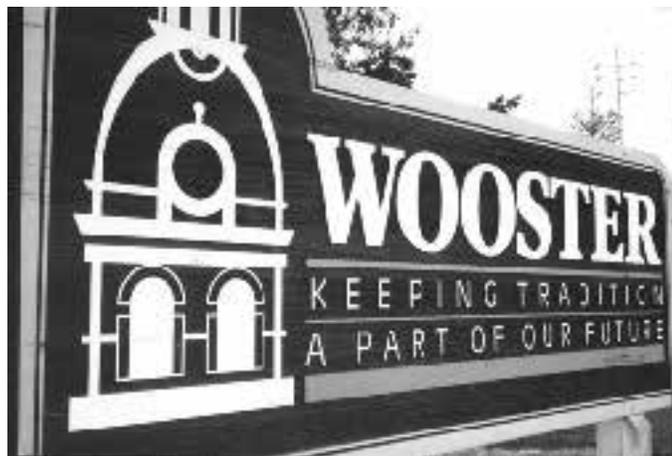
## Wooster Shire?

*David Wiesenbery, of The Wooster Book Company, in the appropriately named town of Wooster, Ohio, has a vision. He hopes that some day, some TWS folks might drift through town and have a "Find the Wooster" contest while breaking from browsing and sluicing duties.*

*While we were unable to print the full set of photos that David provided to fuel such a competition, here's a couple to whet the appetite of TWS travelers who may someday cruise through the mighty small town of Wooster. Thanks, David!*



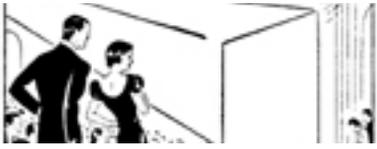
*And how many PGW volumes are in town?*



*A fine idea, we think!*



*Of course, there must be one that says PLUMLVR?*



# 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 can get in touch with the contact person listed.

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

Our winter outing of dinner and then *Piccadilly* at the Paramount went off splendidly. *Piccadilly* is a silent movie, released in 1929, starring Anna May Wong and Gilda Gray. It should not be confused with the 1936 movie *Piccadilly Jim* [nor the 2005 version of the same name—Ed.]. We never did find the two new folks who were waiting for us in the theater crowd. We'll try to do better with the “so what do you look like and what will you be wearing?” issues next time, as there were quite a few people there with flowers in their buttonholes who weren't Plummies—imagine that! We topped off a delicious pan-Asian-PNW-fusion meal (don't ask, it's a Seattle thing) with free coffee and chocolate from Starbucks, good old-fashioned movie popcorn, and great seats. The organ playing was incredible, Anna May Wong's acting was spellbinding, and the film was given high marks by all.

Our next big outing will be a walking tour with the Seattle Architecture Foundation—a behind-the-scenes tour of some of Seattle's truly stunning historic theaters—on May 28. We plan on taking another tour with the same group later this year, when the subject will be the Roaring Twenties. We'll see how Northwest imagery was incorporated into downtown Seattle's early 20th-century architecture as we view rich interior lobbies, ornate commercial buildings, and more. In April or early May we hope to have a casual get-together to enjoy one another's company, browse and sluice, and

have fun being silly. Isn't that what Plummies do best?

Blandings Castle Chapter  
(Greater San Francisco Bay area)  
Contact: Ed and Missy Ratcliffe

We dedicated artists are earnestly preparing our skit for the August convention. The production is acquiring a dazzling polish. Some of us even recognize our speeches, when we come across them in the script. Rehearsals are well underway, and videotaping will begin just as soon as director Dave Smeltzer can find his megaphone, his riding boots, and the little folding chair that has DIRECTOR printed on the canvas.

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

On February 26 The Broadway Special, en masse, attended a screening at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) of the 1937 musical film *A Damsel In Distress*, starring Fred Astaire, Joan Fontaine, George Burns, and Gracie Allen. This was the only Wodehouse film adaptation with which Plum actually assisted, and while it basically followed the book's plot, it was (naturally) found wanting to some degree. However, songs from the Gershwins (including “Nice Work if You Can Get It” and “A Foggy Day”) surely enhanced the experience. Viewing of the film was preceded by browsing and sluicing at Allegria Ristorante, 66 West 55th Street, and this combination made for a dashed agreeable evening.

The number of Broadway Specials who have rallied round already for the next two events (which, no doubt, shall have occurred by the time readers leave their eye-tracks all over this report) exceed in number even that of the MoMA film presentation. The first of these is the world premiere, on April 22 at Robert DeNiro's Tribeca Film Festival, of the eagerly awaited film version of *Piccadilly Jim*—about five months

ahead of its general release. The film is directed by John McKay with a screenplay by Julian Fellowes, and it stars Sam Rockwell as Jim Crocker; Brenda Blethyn, Tom Wilkinson, and Allison Janney also star. The Special will put on the nosebag in advance of the film (while being quizzed on the Plum novel) at The Dekk, 134 Reade Street, before ankling round to the Stuyvesant High School auditorium, 345 Chambers Street, one of the festival's venues, for the evening's feature.

The 7th of May shall see (or shall have seen, from the reader's perspective) a large contingent descending like Drones on the 45th Street Theatre (354 West 45th Street) for the American premiere of the Wodehouse-Kern musical *The Beauty Prize*—83 years after its opening in London in 1922. A part of the "Musicals Tonight!" series, this centers on one Odo Philpott, the "prize" who is won by an heiress on the day she is to wed another. Songs include "You Can't Make Love by Wireless," "Playing Mah-Jong," and "Non-Stop Dancing." If The Broadway Special can divine how one indeed might make love by wireless, especially while playing mah-jong and dancing nonstop (certain to be a topic of the most intense intellectual exchange at Robert Emmet's Restaurant, 44th Street and 8th Avenue, before the performance), we shall report it faithfully.

Buck-U-Uppo Bottling Company  
(Seaside, Oregon, and vicinity)  
Contact: Sandy Rea

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

The big news from Capital! Capital! is the "Wodehouse on Poetry" contest to be held sometime next fall, with Ken Clevenger in charge. Entries will be read aloud, and nominal, even more nominal, and barely nominal prizes will be awarded. Entries are due by the end of the English August bank holiday fortnight. All late entries will be accepted anyway. Chapter members can submit anonymously, if their stuff is sufficiently hot!

The competitive poetry categories are haiku, limerick, sonnet, and vers libre. Ken has come up with examples

of each category. His haiku entry begins with "Plum wine?" Limerick: "What ales you?" Sonnet: "Do I read thee?" Vers libre: "Bertram. Do Aunts? Do Aunts? But gentlemen don't." Now, there's something to brood about, Ralston McTodd.

Chapter One  
(greater Philadelphia area)  
Contact: Susan Cohen

Chapter One meets on a Sunday afternoon once every two months except in the summer. Place: The Dark Horse Restaurant, Headhouse Square, Philadelphia. New members are welcome.

We had to cancel our January meeting because of bad weather, and we met instead on February 13. Since the next day was both Valentine's Day and the anniversary of Wodehouse's death, there were many clever Valentine's Day toasts to the Master, and we also honored Chapter One member Ed Whittaker, who died on Valentine's Day 2003. We collected money to adopt our newts at the Philadelphia Zoo, as we do every year. Then we did something we've never done before. We held a contest to decide which Chaps had the most original Wodehousian and *non*-Wodehousian collections. Denise Nordheimer did a wonderful job emceeing this event, reading notes about each collection and asking us to guess whose collection it was. Naturally, we had our share of very fine PGW book collections, pig collections, and cow creamer collections. The non-Wodehousian collections were surprising and fascinating: toy steam trains—Charlie Chaplin memorabilia—funny cocktail stirrers—Oz books—Disneyana—dog art—antique fountain pens. Evelyn Herzog won a newt stuffed with Hawaiian sand for her wombat collection—yes, I said wombat collection. The rest of the winners got Valentine's Day candies. "Guess Who Collects What" was a great success, and I suggest other chapters might like to play this particular game.

There was more on collecting at our April meeting. Longtime TWS member Carolyn Pokrivchak spent 25 years putting together a complete reader's collection of Wodehouse's books without spending a fortune. Punctuating her talk with many charming and amusing anecdotes, she told us how she began collecting, how she found her way to dealers, got hold of magazines, and tracked down books here and abroad, even sneaking

into disreputable bookstores to find copies of *Playboy* with Wodehouse stories in them. Now, there's a devoted collector for you. Our next meeting will be on May 15, when we'll do a group read-aloud of a Wodehouse story. After that, we break for the summer.

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

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 potluck supper and read Wodehouse. Sometimes we meet in an Irish pub where there's good browsing and sluicing. We enjoy theater outings followed by dinner at a restaurant, and every time the City Lit Theatre does a Wodehouse production, we are in the audience. We go to the Chicago Botanical Gardens to stroll through the English garden there while reading excerpts from Wodehouse. We play miniature golf together and have one grand croquet game every year.

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

Senior Bloodstains are held at Wodehouse Society conventions. Junior Bloodstains are held every January, part of the big annual Sherlock Holmes celebration in New York. The meetings are always great fun. One does not have to be a Client to attend; anyone interested in both Holmes and Wodehouse is welcome. The next Senior Bloodstain will take place at 5–6:00 P.M. on Friday evening, August 12, at the Los Angeles convention, meeting place to be announced on the day. A small playlet by Anne Cotton ("Norton" among the Clients), entitled "Sherlock Holmes and the Unsettling Smile," will be performed. There will be a contest to see who can do the best smile in the style of Adrian Mulliner. The winner will read the role of Adrian. Can anyone out there smile as dreadfully as Scott Monty, who won the role at the Junior Bloodstain? We shall see.

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

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

The Mottled Oyster Club of San Antonio and South Texas is now meeting on a more or less stable schedule. On the second Thursday of each month we meet at a bookstore to discuss Wodehouse. Every other month, under its nom de guerre of the Jellied Eels, the group meets at a restaurant for dinner. Interested or traveling Wodehousians are always welcome.

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

The NEWTS met at our now-traditional spring meeting place, chez Bill and Jo Claghorn, in Princeton, Massachusetts. We are madly rehearsing our Los Angeles convention skit before each meeting starts; once the official Nottle is on, it's mostly eat, drink, and be merry. But we did find time, on a rather decent late winter day, to read (collectively) "The Luck of the Stiffhams," a quite educational tale of the Drones. Our next Nottle will be held on Sunday, May 15, at the home of Ellen Donovan and Bob Norberg in Dedham, Massachusetts. We'll have another story to read ("The Heel of Achilles," a golf tale) unless we are too busy simply greeting spring. Newts do love the springtime. And of course we will be rehearsing the skit (yes, it will indeed be in costume as usual, thanks largely to Jean Tillson). There is even a pool available; we all know how Newts love water.

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

The Northwodes have continued a stepped-up meeting schedule, with monthly book discussions sandwiched in-between quarterly social gatherings. February's topic of study was *Meet Mr. Mulliner*. At a Sunday afternoon get-together we listened to the BBC radio dramatization of "Honeysuckle Cottage." *Right Ho, Jeeves* was our book for our March meeting, and *Leave It to Psmith* was discussed at our April 18 meeting. *Blandings Castle and Elsewhere* is on the docket for May 16, to help us bone up on the Hollywood stories in advance of the convention. All these titles are included in the Basic Wodehouse Library we defined when making our inaugural library donation last year. This year we're turning our attention to the Minneapolis Public Library, with Comrade Meyer directing our efforts. Any visitors who might be in the area are encouraged to join us. Book discussions are held on different dates but always at 7:30 P.M. at the Wilde Roast Cafe. The times and locations vary for social gatherings. So check with Kris Fowler first to see what's planned and where.

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

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

We are looking forward to the convention next summer and hoping that all the Wodehousians who come will learn to love dear Dotyville-on-the-Pacific as much as we do. We meet the second Sunday of every month at 12:30 P.M. at Vroman's Bookstore, 695 E. Colorado, Pasadena. The readings change every month and can be found by checking our calendar or subscribing to our mailing list. We also occasionally attend events of

interest in the area. Subscribers to our e-mail list can be kept abreast of such local amusements. Information about our mailing list and important links can be found at our website: [www.lahacal.org/wodehouse](http://www.lahacal.org/wodehouse).

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

The Pickering Motor Company is alive and well and looking for new members to join in the browsing, sluicing, chatting, and overall fun of being a Wodehousean in Detroit (and environs). The chapter met last month at a centrally located coffeehouse where the main topics of discussion were *Piccadilly Jim*, book and upcoming movie, and TWS conventions, past and upcoming. There was some decidedly serious literary discussion, but hilarity was more the order of the day. All members are excitedly making plans for Los Angeles this August, but we all agreed that we had to meet again at least once or twice before then. Our next book for discussion is *Leave It to Psmith*.

As we were leaving the coffeehouse, we were discussing where we should meet next, when the manager of the place chimed in: "Come back here! We all really enjoyed your discussion." Hmmmm. Perhaps we will find some secret Plummies amongst the Beans and Crumpets of Caribou Coffee.

Rocky Mountain Plums  
(Rocky Mountains area)  
Contact: Gary Hall

The Size 14 HAT CLUB  
(Halifax, Nova Scotia)  
Contact: Jill Robinson

Given that our Patron Saint Jeeves was himself an angler, as are most of our club members, and knowing full well how much contemplative time is offered by this sport, The Size 14 Hat Club will be meeting during May to deal with the results of a challenge issued for the purpose by The Most Irritating Member, to wit: limericks to rhyme with Spinoza (proper nouns disallowed, extra points awarded for entries being as

Plummy as possible). Bearing in mind centuries of anguish over the word *orange* for similar purposes, we feel we may be making history here. Guest contributions welcome; results will be posted.

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

The noble aim of The Soup and Fish Club is to bring the joy of Wodehouse to the younger generation. The chapter's head and sole member, Deborah Dillard, aka Mary Kent, visits school librarians to talk them into letting her give presentations on the master's great works to their students. This one-woman brass band is extending her range of activities and can now be found at the Clifton Farmers Market, in Clifton Virginia, on Sunday mornings—sort of like being in Market Snodsbury. If you live in the Clifton area, or plan to visit it, you will find Deborah at her daughter's flower stand, "The Flower Girl." Look for The Soup & Fish Club sign. As this is a market where people stroll around in a leisurely way and then sit and drink coffee while waiting eagerly to hear a good story, Deborah is convinced she will make some converts to Wodehouse there. A lovely way to spend a summer Sunday morning, and who knows? Maybe The Soup and Fish Club will double or even triple its membership.

The Spink Bottle Supper Club  
(Southern East Coast)  
Contact: Lara James

Devotees of Plum will recognize our name deriving from Aunt Dahlia's nickname for Gussie Fink-Nottle. Since our members live in separate states, unfortunately with no bally chapters nearby, we have created our own. East Coasters without a chapter and willing to travel to meetings are welcome to join at any time!



## The Care and Feeding of Chapters

BY AMY PLOFKER

Do you

- run, or help run, a TWS chapter?
- wish there were a chapter near you?
- have bright ideas for making your chapter bigger and/or better?

Then come to the meeting at the Los Angeles convention to discuss all things chapter-related. Specifically, that's Friday, August 12, 4–5:00 P.M. While most attending will probably be those who currently run chapters, or who want to start chapters in the near future, the meeting is definitely open to all with an interest (provided you are not addicted to monologues as we've only got an hour to discuss a lot).

We know each chapter has its own quirks—some charge dues, most don't—some require TWS membership, most don't—some meet in members' homes, others in bookstores, still others in restaurants. A few chapters have been ticking along for 10 years without changing, and some are still fledgling. This summit is a good chance to talk to someone from a chapter sort of like yours (even though none can be truly like yours!).

In addition to mastering the secrets of cold fusion and perpetual motion, we hope you'll:

- see what works with other chapters
- get ideas for new activities
- talk about chapter growth and/or publicity
- understand the symbiotic relationship between national TWS and chapters
- help and encourage those who want to start or revitalize chapters

If you're interested in attending, e-mail me, so I can include you on any updates prior to the convention.

## H. P. and P. G.

A collection of H. P. Lovecraft stories was reviewed recently in *The New York Times Book Review* by Daniel Handler, aka Lemony Snicket. Lovecraft, for those of you who don't know him, was a pulp magazine writer who died in 1937 and is now recognized as an American master of over-the-top horror fantasy. Handler writes, "Lovecraft out-cloaks, out-daggers and out-ravenous-monsters them all, but after four or five of these stories the effect is bludgeoning. Lovecraft has mastered, paralyzed and annihilated the reader, and now the reader's ready for a little P. G. Wodehouse, thank you very much."



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## Volunteer Officers

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Membership Manager (new-member inquiries, dues payments, contact information changes) & Treasurer:  
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Shamim Mohamed, AKA Pongo

Thanks to Brian Taves for the old poster of *Piccadilly Jim*.

Thanks to Philip Shreffler for the photos of his inimitable self, and of the director and costar of *Piccadilly Jim*.