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## Red-Hot Stuff—But Where’s the Red-Hot Staff?

BY MURRAY HEDGCOCK

*Murray Hedgcock, longtime journalist, author of Wodehouse at the Wicket, and a patron of the P G Wodehouse Society (UK) was, alas, unable to attend the Hollywood convention. Instead he sent Hilary Bruce, Chairman of the UK Society, and Robert Bruce, Chairman’s Consort and Accompanying Person, to deliver his talk for him—and a wonderful job they did, too.*

No student of the Press could resist that delightful quotation in *Service with a Smile* introducing us to Tilbury House, home of the Mammoth Publishing Company. This is, we learn,

that busy hive where hordes of workers toil day and night, churning out reading matter for the masses.

For Lord Tilbury’s numerous daily and weekly papers are not, as is sometimes supposed, just Acts of God: they are produced deliberately.

It sums up the essence of the popular Press, whether yesterday’s Yellow Press of New York or today’s Redtops of London. Even the most frivolous and rubbish papers are produced on purpose, to meet a popular demand.

But note that valid reference—it takes “hordes of workers” to produce even the rubbish. And this is utterly at variance with the general depiction of publications in Wodehouse.

Ever since discovering *Milady’s Boudoir*, *Cosy Moments*, *Wee Tots*, and specific Mammoth periodicals, I have puzzled over the astonishing productivity of their workers. None of these publications seems to have more than half a dozen staff; many have just one, perhaps two. Granted, I’ve been a newspaper man for a mere 56 years—but I still can’t fathom how they do it. I cite a well-known, long-lived literary and political weekly of today—whose editor is a patron of The P G Wodehouse Society (UK). He was kind enough to inform me that his weekly has 34 full-time staff, of whom a dozen are editorial.

So how many staff do Wodehouse weeklies employ? We start logically with *Milady’s Boudoir*, introduced in *Right Ho, Jeeves* (1934). Costing sixpence each Thursday, it is owned and edited by Bertie’s Aunt Dahlia. Contributors come and go, but Dahlia appears to handle production unaided. Tony Ring in the *Millennium Concordance* suggests she “seemed to practise her leader-writing skills by sending extensive and numerous telegrams to Bertie, and the ratio of their length to material content could perhaps explain the magazine’s relative lack of success.” Whether



*The Red-Hot Murray Hedgcock  
(photo courtesy of Tony Ring)*

*Milady's Boudoir* in fact has a leader [editorial] column is nowhere proven. Perhaps the weekly's fate is sealed when Jeeves succeeds in persuading the Littles' superb cook, Anatole, to move to the Travers household, so infuriating Rosie Little that she scraps her agreement to write that promised piece for Aunt Dahlia, "How I Keep the Love of My Husband-Baby."

Contributors are clearly the lifeblood of *Milady's Boudoir*. You feel it comes out almost in spite of its owner-editor, who spends far more time bouncing Bertie, consoling Anatole, cosseting husband Tom Travers, and dealing with associated problems, than in actually editing. Incidentally, we meet Aunt Dahlia in action as editor just once—when Bertie delivers his "What the Well-Dressed Man is Wearing" to her Covent Garden office.

In passing . . . the fact that we never see more than a couple of the briefest quotations from that lost Rosie M. Banks "Husband-Baby" epic is one of the three great losses from the Wodehouse record. The others, of course, are the story of Sir Gregory Parsloe and the prawns and that definitive sartorial study by Bertie.

Next in staffing significance on the British side of the Atlantic is certainly *Wee Tots*, whose editor, Bingo Little, must rank as one of the more improbable journalists of the Wodehouse or any world, not least as his entire work experience appears to consist of brief spells as a tutor. It is in *Eggs, Beans and Crumpets* (1940) that Mrs. Bingo announces an old friend, H. C. Purkiss, will consider Bingo as editor of his magazine for the nursery. Quite apart from the prospect of a regular salary, Bingo is bucked at being able to throw his weight about a bit: "He looked forward with a bright enthusiasm to getting fellow members of the Drones to send in contributions to the Kiddies' Korner, and then bunging them back as not quite up to his standard."

After inevitable misunderstandings, Bingo acquires the post, as Purkiss warns: "The work is hard"—to which Bingo responds: "No doubt I should have capable assistants." Informed "The salary is not large," Bingo comes back: "I'll tell you what. Make it larger." And there it is. Significantly, Purkiss makes no comment to that hopeful query about the presence of "capable assistants"—hence, we have no proof that they exist.

Purkiss does play some part in the running of *Wee Tots*, being signed up by Mrs. P. (to his protestations) to judge a bonny babies contest as publicity for the periodical, and he luses up personable American writer Bella Mae Jobson, creator of Willie Walrus, Charlie Chipmunk, and other fauna, in hope of signing her for his magazine. Later he again meddles, seeking to sign Kirk Rockaway, American author of juvenile

fiction about Peter the Pup, Kootchy the Kitten, and Hilda the Hen. We never learn whether Rockaway in time does write for *Wee Tots*, nor what happens to the publication in the long run.

It was as early as 1909 that the public first met a Wodehouse weekly, in *Psmith Journalist*, serialized in *The Captain* and to be published as a book in 1915.

One J. Fillken Wilberfloss is editor in chief of the New York-based journal *Cosy Moments*. (How could an editor with such a name ever lead an irreverent crew?) It is owned by an absentee proprietor, Mr. Benjamin White, was founded "as an antidote to yellow journalism," and is designed as "a journal for the home," to be read aloud by the father of the family "to his chicks before bed-time."

There is a minimal staff on view, consisting of office-boy Pugsy Maloney and sub-editor Billy Windsor. ("Subs" are the desk-bound journalists who process reports, write headlines, correct errors, and prepare pages for production. The American usage, "copy editor," is more logical, and it is odd that this is not used in *Psmith Journalist*, as the setting is New York.)



Hilary & Robert Bruce  
bring Murray's talk to life at the L. A. Convention

Billy is to take over when the editor in chief goes on his 10 weeks' "complete rest in the mountains." He had begun on "a local paper whose Society column consists of such items as 'Pawnee Jim Williams was in town yesterday with a bunch of other cheap skates. We take this opportunity of once more informing Jim that he is a liar and a skunk,' and whose editor works with a revolver on his desk, and another in his hip pocket. He had proceeded to a reporter's post on a daily in a Kentucky town, where there were blood feuds and other Southern devices for preventing life from becoming dull." And so to New York, where, as a hard-up freelance, he was relieved in time to gain the modest security the modest salary at *Cosy Moments* afforded him.

Billy had dreamed of a post on one of the big dailies. "The unfortunate thing was that *Cosy Moments* took up

his time so completely. He had no chance of attracting the notice of big editors by his present work, and he had no leisure for doing any other." So at least there is one journalist in the Wodehouse oeuvre who is fully employed—but even a flat-out sub-editor, encouraged by a work-wearied editor in chief, seems a thin staffing. The offices include "a small room, which would have belonged to the stenographer, if *Cosy Moments* had possessed one."

Billy Windsor meets Psmith, at a loose end since companion Mike Jackson is soon to continue American travel with an MCC team. Psmith has a bright idea: "I happen to have a certain amount of leisure. I am at your disposal. I have had little experience of journalistic work, but I foresee that I shall be a quick learner. I will become your sub-editor, without salary."

Psmith indeed learns quickly—much faster than the preferred British method of a university media studies course or the Australian four-year cadetship. He is inspired to make major changes, not least sacking all contributors, and *Cosy Moments* appears in a new guise, every page bearing the headline "Look out! Look Out!! Look Out!!! Look Out!!!!" and the note "Next week! See Editorial!"—this "snappy" effort being largely the work of Psmith, setting out the proposed changes. "I fancy I have found my métier. At last I have Scope." (You assume that the magazine sold primarily on subscription—anyone glancing through a newsstand copy would hardly have felt this issue to offer value for money.)

The departed contributors are replaced by Billy Windsor's friends, "certain stout fellows, reporters on other papers, delighted to weigh in with stuff for a moderate fee." What copy-processing is done is difficult to judge. Psmith is technically sub-editor—but "subbing" is, if not an art form, then a very specific craft. With no experience recorded, it is hard to see how Psmith handles the task—not least as he spends much of his time on his tenement crusade, dodging the baddies, and in linked activities.

However—in just three weeks, the paper "bounds ahead," Billy's friends doing him proud in their "best Yellow Journal manner," while *CM* also adopts the cause of boxer Kid Brady, pushing his claims for a title fight. The Kid's story, told by himself, is a major attraction. "He was grateful to Psmith for not editing his contributions. . . . The readers of *Cosy Moments* got Kid Brady raw." Again—imagination boggles.

The driving crusade of the weekly is sparked when Psmith discovers the plight of residents of a block of appalling tenements in the ironically named Pleasant Street. He launches a campaign to have them

brought up to decent standards, incurring the ire of the heavyweight businessman who owns the buildings. New York gangs are hired in a bid to persuade *Cosy Moments* to drop its embarrassing interest in the topic, Kid Brady and a friendly gang leader back up Billy and Psmith, and the story rages on.

We are halfway through the saga when we meet one other staff member—Wheeler, "the gaunt manager of the business side of the journal. . . . He had been with *Cosy Moments* from the start, but he had never read a line. . . . He was a distributor, and he distributed." And there is mention of the circulation staff who actually distribute the journal.

There is much mayhem, matters look bleak for Our Heroes—and then all is resolved when the tenement owner caves in, it is revealed that Psmith has bought the paper, Billy Windsor is re-engaged by his "late daily paper" in recognition of his efforts with *CM*—and Psmith returns to London, leaving J. Fillken Wilberfloss to usher *CM* back into its old ways, making maximum use of contributors, of course.

Next, as Tony Ring puts it in his studies of the saga, is *The Prince and Betty*, "written as a sickly love story which, for American book purposes, was beefed up by the journalism section from *Psmith Journalist*." This 1912 tale offers curious variants from the original. For example, *Cosy Moments* becomes *Peaceful Moments*, it is owned by the hard-to-love financier Benjamin Scobell, and has J. Brabazon Renshaw as editor in chief. "All matters of finance were in the hands of Mr Scobell's solicitors."

The weekly consists of just eight pages—but they would still need to be processed. It is no wonder that Renshaw is on the verge of a nervous breakdown and is ordered three months in Europe.

Rupert Smith is assistant editor—and it is he, in this case, who had that interesting entry into journalism after Harvard, working on the paper insulting "Jim Thompson" (not Williams) and boasting a heavily armed editor. Smith had graduated to New York and the staff of the *News*. "His presence in the office of *Peaceful Moments* was due to the uncomfortable habit of most of the New York daily papers of cutting down their staff of reporters during the summer." This is an intriguing twist to British experience, where summer regularly sees the hiring of extra casual staff as "holiday relief" to cover for reporters taking holidays while their children are on vacation.

Heroine Betty Silver arrives as stenographer and enlivens the world of the acting editor, who is increasingly bored. "He was practically nothing but an ornament. The staff of regular contributors sent in their

various pages. There was nothing for the man in charge to do.” There is one reference to editor Smith checking galley proofs, which have appeared from no stated sources—but no other mention of the vital production procedure.

Smith sacks his contributors. “You can’t write it all yourself,” says Betty. Smith responds: “I propose to apply to a few of my late companions of Park Row, bright boys who will be delighted to come across with red-hot stuff for a moderate fee.” A sporting section is added, devoted primarily to publicizing the hopes of Kid Brady to meet Jimmy Garvin for the lightweight title.

Betty discovers the disgraceful Broster Street tenements and fires off her crusading copy overnight:

Just a wail of pity, and cry of indignation, straight from the heart, and split up into paragraphs. Smith read it with interest, and sent it off to the printer unaltered.

An editor surely is doing no favours to his recruit, his publication, or the cause that has stirred his writer and himself, by failing to make obvious corrections. Also, Smith does not have the report “legalled”—that is, checked for libel or other risk by a specialist in newspaper law. Perhaps there was no such system in New York when PGW wrote *The Prince*. Anyway, we know “freedom of speech” is guaranteed under the First Amendment.

Smith hires as his new assistant John Maude, actually Prince of Mervo. We learn that “in their last year at Harvard, Smith and John, assisted by others of a congenial spirit, had published a small but lively magazine devoted to college topics, with such success . . . that on the appearance of the third number, it was suppressed by the authorities.” Eventually John decides to invest some of his fortune as Prince in buying the paper, and so it goes on.

In 1930 Plum rewrote for serialization the much-shortened version, *A Prince for Hire* (first issued in book form in 2003). This has a number of changes; in most cases it is difficult to see just why they were made. Editor J. Brabazon Renshaw (downgraded from editor in chief) has a staff of one stenographer and one office boy, all the material apparently submitted by contributors. Renshaw too is ordered three months in Europe, and reporter Rupert Smith, engaged as acting editor, hires his old classmate John Maude as “acting assistant editor” (at \$100 a week—not bad money in the Depression).

Why is Smith at liberty?

Owing to his enterprise in trying to beat the town on a story that unfortunately did not occur, a burglary planned by a friend of his which was interrupted by an unfeeling police force, Smith had been laid off by his paper . . .

There is a nice reminder of the methods of the Yellow Press—perhaps not altogether remote from those of the British equivalent, the “redtops.” But both sets of papers were or are run by highly skilled, professional journalists, while Smith’s friend Maude has no experience in the business.

“I’m not very good at editing,” admits Smith. He is, however, decisive enough—and the first duty of an editor is to take decisions—to sack all his feeble contributors. He sets out his policy: “*Peaceful Moments* . . . must make both sides so mad that both will read it in order to denounce it.” But there is no hint of new contributors—the crusading journalism of Betty and John appears adequate to fill the paper.

Hired as a stenographer, Betty Silver, again with no journalistic background, assembles “her first journalistic effort”—that scathing piece about slums. She appears to find inspiration, get interviews, assemble background material, and write her very first news report, all in a day (despite being able to use a typewriter “not awfully well”), staying late at the office. And acting editor Smith, tears in his eyes, agrees to print it as is, “mistakes and all.” Very strange.

John Maude adds to the explosive mix by writing on the profiteering of Prohibition, arousing “the ferocious indignation of the drys, the speakeasy interests, and the beer runners.” Circulation trebles—and it’s getting some advertising.” We also are told of “the startled business department,” in cordial agreement with the acting editor’s view that “the magazine was getting good.” And the staff is augmented by the appointment of Miss Bronson as stenographic successor to Betty.

In the end John Maude, Prince of Mervo, buys *Cosy Moments*, is set to marry Betty—and the story starts again . . .

Back across the Atlantic, we move into a less-controversial world of more straightforward publications—but again, they seem curiously understaffed. Take Oliver Sipperley at *The Mayfair Gazette* (in *Very Good Jeeves* [1930]). As well as having minimal staff, its premises are miserable, Bertie explaining that on entering a mouldy old building off Covent Garden, you found a small room where an office boy sat and another in which Sipperley “performs his labours” as editor. That’s it. No other offices. No more

staff. No reporters, no subeditors, no accountants, no circulation department, no advertising department, and no printing unit. (Granted that small magazines use contract printers, rather than run their own print works—a valid point for all Wodehouse publications except for those of Mammoth.)

Incidentally, that unseen proprietor sounds a bit of a goop. Here is Sippy bullied into slipping into *The Mayfair Gazette* contributions by his old headmaster Waterbury, quite at variance with the stated interests of the magazine. The intimidating Waterbury offers pieces about “the old school cloisters” or “Some Little-Known Aspects of Tacitus” to what is “supposed to be a paper devoted to the lighter interests of Society.” As Sippy explains: “The next thing that will happen is that my proprietor will spot one of those articles, assume with perfect justice that if I can print that sort of thing I must be going off my chump, and fire me.”

The proprietor hasn't noticed it already? I can report from personal experience that this is not the way today's media moguls operate—they keep a very sharp eye indeed on content.



In the finish, Sippy stands up splendidly to Waterbury. He rejects “that article on the Elizabethan dramatists you left here yesterday. This paper is supposed to be all light Society interest. What the debutante will wear for Goodwood, you know, and I saw Lady Betty Bootle in the park yesterday—she is of course the sister-in-law of the Duchess of Peebles, ‘Cuckoo’ to her intimates—all that kind of rot. . . . Keep your eyes open and see what editors need. Now just a suggestion, why not have a dash at a light, breezy article on pet dogs. You've probably noticed that the pug, once so fashionable, has been superseded by the Peke, the griffon, and the Sealyham. Work on that. . . .”

It's good, professional, commissioning editor stuff—but you still wonder how the *Mayfair Gazette* actually appears every week.

We turn to *Jeeves in the Offing*, in which Reginald “Kipper” Herring is “on the staff of the *Thursday Review*” (where he “has to click into the office at daybreak”). He has written 600 words of “impassioned

prose” reviewing a study of preparatory schools by his and Bertie's old headmaster, Aubrey Upjohn. There is no byline: “Ye Ed is not keen on underlings advertising their names.” (If no more than an underling, how come Kipper was allowed 600 prestigious words?)

Bertie refers to him as “an editorial assistant”—not a title that would normally allow scope on the review page, such employees being roughly the status of “Hey-You” gofers. Kipper's verbal comment on life with Upjohn is not intended for the printed page: “We have not forgotten the sausages on Sunday which were made not from contented pigs but from pigs which had expired, regretted by all, of glanders, the botts and tuberculosis.”

This shocking libel, helpfully added to the proof by Bobby Wickham, went straight into print—and where, one asks, were the subeditors? Not to mention the proofreaders? Or the lawyers? Were “editorial assistants” allowed the final say on what went into the magazine? I think we should be told . . .

Upjohn duly threatens to sue, and it takes Bobbie with her theft of his vital speech, aimed at sealing his endorsement as Market Snodsbury Conservative candidate, and her “Listen Buster” approach to blackmail a way out of the impasse.

So to *Bill the Conqueror* (1924), where we meet media magnate Sir George Pyke. He is founder and proprietor of the Mammoth Publishing Company, “that vast concern which supplies half—the more fat-headed half—of England with its reading-matter.” This includes everything from the *Daily Record* to *Pyke's Weekly*, the *Sabbath Hour* to *Tiny Tots*. Pyke's amiable but browbeaten son Roderick edits *Society Spice*—but “young Pilbeam, a thoroughly able young fellow, really runs the paper. . . . Young Pilbeam tells me that Roderick deliberately vetoes and excludes from the paper all the best items he submits,” grumbles Stinker Pyke. No other staffers are recorded.

*Sam the Sudden*, published in 1925, records how Sir George Pyke, now Lord Tilbury, seeks to butter up a business associate by taking on the associate's nephew, Sam Shotter, as a trainee. Sam protests feebly: “But I don't know anything about newspaper work”—to which Uncle John B. Pynsent responds: “You don't know anything about anything.” Sam attaches himself to the editorial staff of *Pyke's Home Companion*, its editor being Matthew Wrenn, guardian of the girl for whom he has fallen. Wrenn is pleased, saying he has been short-handed. What other hands he has, if any, are not apparent. The newcomer is immediately handed the Agony Aunt column—after which he gets the boot, discovers the cache of stolen loot, and is set

to marry his delightful Kay on the proceeds. It doesn't happen that way to many journalists.

We move on to *Heavy Weather* (1933) and Lord Tilbury's efforts to secure Galahad Threepwood's reminiscences for serialization. First, Lady Julia Fish invites the Mammoth boss to employ her son Ronnie. "Has he shown any aptitude for journalism?"

"No member of my family has ever shown any aptitude for anything except eating and sleeping," explains Ronnie's clear-sighted mother. And so to ructions when a sophisticated note is injected into *Tiny Tots* by assistant editor Monty Bodkin, in the absence of its editor, the Rev. Aubrey Sellick. There is no suggestion that anyone else is involved in production of this estimable journal.

What is most intriguing is the way Lord Tilbury himself takes charge of the attempt to snatch Gally's reminiscences, while willing to use intermediaries to do the actual dirty work. But media magnates rarely get involved in chasing serializations, or "buy-ups" as we call them in the trade, and this involvement of the Big Boss is another intriguing reminder of how thinly staffed the Wodehouse publication world always seems to be.

I offer also a pointer to what might be termed Plum's unfamiliarity with the methods of ordinary journalism, recorded in *Ukridge*—or is it presented that way for reasons of the plot? The narrator, Ukridge's friend James Corcoran, is a writer of sorts, commissioned for the occasional interview or feature, while penning short stories about everyone from dukes in their castles to the submerged tenth in their slums. But he has no idea of journalistic method, to judge by his agreement to help a young lady, "poor little Dora," regain her post as secretary-companion to Ukridge's formidable aunt Julia, the novelist. Posing as an interviewer for *Women's Sphere*, Corky visits Miss Ukridge, seeking to make such a hit with his unabashed admiration for her work that when he inquires about his "cousin" Dora's role in the household and learns she has just been sacked, he will be able to sweet-talk her former employer into recalling her.

However—Corky, claiming to be "a member of the outside staff" (a curious classification) has not checked the name of his editor, and he has not read any recent issues (in which case he would have discovered that an interview with Miss Ukridge had appeared only a fortnight earlier). Feeblest of all, he has not bothered to identify by name, let alone actually read, any of Miss Ukridge's novels. Any real reporter operating on this basis would soon be looking for more appropriate employment. It is distinctly odd that Plum should allow his sensible semi-hero to behave in such

fatheaded fashion.

So—do all those instances of weeklies run on an absolute shoestring staff simply reflect Plum's origins in journalism? Did this give him the feeling that newspapers revolved around contributors, rather than staff reporters? Certainly he became a staffer—but as a columnist, never a news reporter. You cannot imagine Plum covering a murder hunt, door-stepping a celebrity, scrabbling with the throng to hurl intense questions at political press conferences. It was not for him. He did have brief experience of working in a newspaper office when, in 1903, he took over the By the Way column in the London evening paper *The Globe*—a six-days-a-week job, hectic for two hours from 10 A.M. when he was required to pen humorous comments on the news of the day, including topical verses. Plum would have had to be newspaperman enough to know what was happening around him, and react accordingly. But again—he was not gathering the news; he was not a reporter. He was a desk-bound interpreter.

Be that as it may, Plum presents us with a swag of weeklies produced with minimal staff. He might be seen to make a case suggesting there was no need for Rupert Murdoch to move his Fleet Street newspapers to Wapping back in 1986, sacking 5,500 striking employees with the goal of breaking the power of the newspaper unions and slashing staff levels.

PGW, as we have so often discovered in life, got there first. Somehow, he resolved the problem of how to produce a newspaper or magazine with virtually no staff at all. Think of the economies, and the impact on the publishing industry, if only modern media magnates had taken time to read their Wodehouse.

## More PGW on Stage

In addition to the news about Musicals Tonight's staged reading of *Oh, Lady! Lady!!* in New York next spring (see page 28), Carey Tynan has brought two other Wodehouse-related theatrical productions to our attention. In Olney, Maryland, the Olney Theatre Center will be putting on *Anything Goes* on March 29–April 23, 2006; for further information, visit their website at [http://www.olneytheatre.org/season\\_2006.htm](http://www.olneytheatre.org/season_2006.htm). Meanwhile, from April 20 through May 21, the Washington Stage Guild (Washington, D.C.) will be presenting Wodehouse's adaptation of Molnar's *The Play's the Thing*, "where the theatre itself is the medium, the subject, the problem, and the solution." See the WSG's website at <http://www.stageguild.org/> for more details.

# First Things First

BY DANIEL LOVE GLAZER



The postman delivered to me the October issue of *First Things*, a journal “whose purpose is to advance a religiously informed public philosophy for the ordering of society.” The cover proclaims the issue’s major articles: “The Shame of Darfur,” “The Design of Evolution,” “The Supreme Court 2005,” and “God and Bertie Wooster.”

The last-named article, written by *First Things*’ editor, Joseph Bottum, is adapted from his introduction to “Joy Cometh in the Morning,” a volume in the Trinity Forum Reading series. “God and Bertie Wooster” is, in my opinion, one of the best pieces of writing on Wodehouse ever written; I would put it on a par with Roger Kimball’s discussion of Wodehouse in “Lives of the Mind: The Use and Abuse of Intelligence from Hegel to Wodehouse.” I will take the liberty of trying to highlight some of the essay’s salient points.

Bottum begins, “Suppose that words were all you had. Suppose the great edifice of Western civilization had collapsed around you—all its truths, all its certainties, all its aspirations smashed to meaningless shards. . . . But in those dark days of the twentieth century, in the middle of the apparent collapse of it all, there was at least one man who had the courage, the intelligence, and the sheer persevering goofiness simply to ignore the whole mess, frittering away his days by writing books like *Leave it to Psmith*, *Young Men in Spats*, and *My Man Jeeves*.”

Bottum of course cites Evelyn Waugh’s famous characterization of Wodehouse’s world as pre-lapsarian, but he doesn’t quite agree. Instead he says that “not even that boneheaded peer, Lord Emsworth, . . . entirely dodges original sin.” “Nonetheless,” he continues, “the characters do somehow manage to sidestep rather neatly most of the unpleasantness of the twentieth century.”

In conclusion, Bottum avers that Wodehouse “found with all his writing something worth more than words can say: a small, happy spot kept bright in a world that seemed only to be darkening around it. Surely that’s enough for one man.”

“God and Bertie Wooster” is now available online at <http://firstthings.com/ftissues/ft0510/articles/bottum.html>.

## Wodehouse Playhouse DVD Raffle

We have six complete sets (a complete set being all three seasons) of *Wodehouse Playhouse* DVDs to raffle off in support of the TWS convention fund. Said fund helps us pay early convention costs, such as hotel deposits, that would otherwise leave TWS short of the ready for regular expenses like *Plum Lines*. The DVD sets—which are in Region 1 format (that is, compatible with machines in the United States, U.S. territories, Canada, and Bermuda)—ordinarily sell for over \$70. They were donated to TWS by those dear, kind chaps at Acorn Media, and raffle tickets are \$5 each. You may buy as many tickets as you like, but you can only win one set of DVDs. The deadline for buying raffle tickets is February 28, 2006; winners will be announced in the Spring 2006 issue of *Plum Lines*.

For those of you worried about possible nobbling, please know that the winning tickets will be drawn by two fair-haired infants who cannot be bribed, except with Gummi worms. Send your oof and contact information (including an e-mail address if you wish to have your ticket purchase confirmed) to:

Amy Plofker  
111 Rice Ave., Fl 1  
Sleepy Hollow NY 10591-1937



You may send checks (made out to The Wodehouse Society), money orders (ditto), or—at your own risk—cash. Any Gummi worms received will be distributed to the judges anonymously.

## Wickedly Antic Worden

In the October 11 issue of *The New York Times*, there was an article about the late Gretchen Worden, an avid Wodehousian who was a much-loved member of Chapter One. Gretchen had been curator at the Mütter Museum at the College of Physicians (Philadelphia), and there is now a Gretchen Worden Room at the museum, filled with the “anatomical oddities,” including preserved organs, that Gretchen had worked to acquire for this unique museum. The article noted that Gretchen “made several appearances on David Letterman’s show, displaying a mischievous glee as she frightened him with human hairballs and wicked-looking Victorian surgical tools, only to disarm him with her antic laugh.” Gretchen’s fondness for oddball collecting included cow creamers, which formed the basis for her entertaining talk at the 2001 TWS convention in Philadelphia.

# Dear Cuppy

In the Spring 2005 issue of *Plum Lines* I wrote a piece on the eccentric and reclusive American humorist Will Cuppy for the occasional "Rivals of P. G. Wodehouse" feature. Wodehouse admired Cuppy's work and did an introduction for one of his books. PGW also tried to help Cuppy get his work published in England. Shortly after the piece appeared, TWS member Ray Steen sent me copies of two letters that Wodehouse had written to Cuppy. These letters had been sent to Ray by former TWS member Bill Carpenter, who had discovered them in the University of Chicago Library. Cuppy was a graduate of the U of C, and many of his papers are in the archives there.

Wodehouse was, of course, a prolific letter writer. But these letters, one written from Beverly Hills in 1931, the other from France in 1933, are exceptionally charming and apparently little known, even by Wodehouse scholars. We have received permission from A.P. Watt Ltd on behalf of The Trustees of the Wodehouse Estate and from the University of Chicago Library to reprint them in full.

In addition to being a humorist, Cuppy was for many years a reviewer of mysteries for the *New York Herald Tribune*, and he occasionally sent review copies to Wodehouse, who was a huge mystery fan. Plum discusses some of his mystery likes and dislikes in the letters. The names of Sayers and Hammett are known to everybody. J. J. Connington (pseudonym of Alfred Walter Stewart), whom Wodehouse liked, and Freeman Wills Croft, whom Wodehouse disliked, are not. Connington is entirely forgotten, while at least one of Wills Croft's books is still in print. The reference to I.M.P. was a puzzle. It turns out that she was Isabel Paterson, an influential and acerbic book reviewer for the *Herald Tribune* as well as a colleague and friend of Cuppy's, at least until they had a falling out, as Cuppy had with many of his friends. This information was sent both by Evelyn Hertzog and Jeremy Thompson. Here are the letters as written on Wodehouse's "poor old typewriter."

—Dan Cohen

1005 Benedict Canon

Beverly Hills

April 29, 1931

Cal.

Dear Mr Cuppy,

Thanks most awfully for sending me the two books. I immediately fell upon the Dorothy Sayers one, and loved it. It is extraordinary how much better she is than almost all other mystery writers. I started the Hammett one last night, as I find you have to be feeling pretty robust for him. When I read Powell Hammett I always feel like Bunky in Parlor, Bedroom and Sink. You know, the kid who goes about saying 'What people! What people!' (Sorry. It should be 'Such people!')

Hammett is out here now, by the way, but I have not met him. They tell me he gets tight pretty often and is rather tough when under the influence.

I'm delighted to hear that the New Yorker have taken the Ape article. (Incidentally, I am all for being credited with the invention of the whack).

Do you really mean to tell me that you have any difficulty in selling your stuff? I should have thought editors would have cried for it. Why don't you have a dash at fiction? Don't you feel like it? The only difficulty in fiction is dialogue, and your dialogue is great.

In re the Hermit, which I have just read right through once again. Apart from its gorgeous humor, what fascinates me about it is the atmosphere. I used to live on the south shore of Long Island, and I always felt what a wonderful retreat that sand bar across the Great South Bay would make. I don't know exactly where Jones Island is, but it must be somewhere near Bellport, where I settled in 1914.

Before the war, I had a cottage on the peninsula coast in England, just like your place. I just put in a bed and a few deal tables and chairs and let the furnishing go at that.

I wonder if the hermit really would be no good for England. Why don't you send a copy to my agent over there, - Miss Ella King-Bell, 18 Portico Street, Haymarket, London, S.W. and see if she can place it. It would need a little publicizing in spots and perhaps a preface, but otherwise it seems to me exactly the sort of thing the English public likes. Anyway, I shall keep on reading it two or three times a year.

How are you feeling now? I have just passed through one of those Eyroneic spells, caused principally by two days rain. In England, I love rain, but here it is an outrage. I brooded sulkily until yesterday, when I went for a seven mile walk at top speed in hot sunshine and sweated off about three pounds and had a swim in my pool and felt marvellous. I just

sat down and dazed off the last fifteen hundred words of a short story, and then immediately wrote a thousand words of a new one. Pure intellect - that was me.

Of course, if you have to read twenty-four detective stories at a stretch, I can see how life may seem a bit of a wash-out to you occasionally. I think there ought to be a law that all mystery stories should have an English setting. As soon as I come on the words 'precinct' or 'district attorney', all my interest goes. Murders ought to take place only in old English country-houses.

I see Dorothy Sayers has got a new one out in England, - The Five Red Herrings. If you want to get rid of your copy, shoot it along.

Well, so long. Do write again soon. I find I get far too few letters out here.

Yours ever

P. G. Wodehouse

Journal de la -reynere

Auribean

Feb 7, 1933

Francis A.M.

Dear Cappy.

Thanks awfully for I.E.P.'s book. I am reading it now, and it's great. I know I am going to like it all just as much as the early part. It was very good of you to send it.

Sorry I haven't answered your letter before. I have been having a hell of a time with a new novel. It's coming out nicely now, but I had to rewrite yards of it before I could get it straight, and my poor old typewriter, which I bought second-hand in New York in 1911, is at last showing signs of breaking up. I don't know what I shall do if it does, as I can't work on any other machine.

What a shame the detectif authors are snapping at your heels. Funny about Sidney Harler. He has just written a book called Writing For Money, in which he gives up four pages ~~unintentionally~~ to a stinker he once wrote to a reviewer who compared a story of his to the penny bloods, apparently he's a chap who does write and nurse critics.

Talking of d. stories, I have just got on to J.J. Pennington, whom for some reason I have always avoided, and he's darned good. The fellow I can't stand is Freeman, will

profits, who is the chap all detective writers swear by. I met Dorothy Bayars the other day and she spoke of him as a sort of master-mind. Well, of course, no doubt his blighted clues are all right and his detectives probably resemble real detectives, but what good is that if the stuff is DAMNED BULL? The worst of it is that I'm very soon afraid Bayars is getting infected by him. I suppose you read ~~Have the Carcase?~~ Jolly good, but would have been much better with twenty thousand words of clues cut out. How these devils do love to shove the story for a hundred pages while they discuss whether it's possible for a man to go by train to some place by catching a train from some other place.

Another thing. And this, mind you, is spreading. The detective asks somebody 'Did you see so-and-so pass here on Monday?' and the chap, instead of saying 'Yes', says 'Yes, I did. I remember it clearly because it was my little son's birthday and he asked me to carve him a doll and so I came to be sitting at my door - and so on for miles.

Well, anyway, thank God for detective stories. I can't read anything else except I.E.P.

Yours ever

P.S. All alone here. Wife gone back to open London house. Note address of same - 17 Norfolk Street, Park Lane, London W.1. That's our permanent address.

P.P.S. Having a nasty row with American income tax people at the moment. Hope it comes out all right.

## Ties that Bind

Just in time for Christmas or the holiday of your choice comes TWS's own special Drones Club tie! This delightful neckwear is handmade of pure silk, with black, gold, and plum-colored stripes. A sterling example of its superb Dronesian qualities can be found on page 16 of the last *Plum Lines*. President Pighooey tells us that her order of ties has arrived, and they are available for purchase *now*. So don't delay—order while supplies last!

Prices in *U.S. dollars*, including postage and packing, are as follows. For a 4-in-hand: \$42 in the United States and Canada, \$47 outside North America. For a bowtie: \$35 in the U.S. and Canada, \$40 elsewhere. Make your check or money order out to The Wodehouse Society and send your order—which should include your mailing address and email address or telephone number—to Jean Tillson.



The ordinary man, when circumstances compel him to murder a female acquaintance, borrows a revolver and a few cartridges and does the thing in some odd five minutes of the day when he is not at the office or the pictures. He does not bother about art or technique or scientific methods. He just goes and does it.

*Louder and Funnier, 1932*

# A New Approach to Conventions

BY ELLIOTT MILSTEIN

While preparing the program for the 2003 TWS convention, *Right Ho, Toronto*, I quickly typed a short piece (as we authors call them) on the history of these biennial gatherings. Requesting her services as fact-checker, I sent my squib to Elin Woodger, who, with her characteristic tact and charity, offered to clean it up a bit. I told her I would be glad of any little assistance she could provide, and, some fortnight later, she sent me a new draft that differed from my own effort only in its length, style, content, tone, completeness, and accuracy. Actually, she kept four of my original sentences and I must say I am very proud of those four sentences and if anyone would like to know which ones they are, I will be happy to point them out.

The piece was duly printed in the convention program and some wise member of the *Plum Lines* editorial board, recognizing its importance to the Society as well as its literary merit, made certain it was included in the Winter 2004 edition of *Plum Lines*. If you, dear reader, are one of those fortunate enough to have read it, you will have learned many interesting facts about the history of TWS's conventions—and no doubt forgotten most of them—but there are two aspects of particular importance I would now like to draw to your attention: (1) The conventions did not spring Athena-like from the head of our beloved TWS founder, Bill Blood, but rather evolved over time; and (2) the phrase “TWS convention” is a misnomer—the conventions have actually been big parties thrown by a regional chapter of TWS to which the membership at large (and, indeed, anyone else with an interest in Plum) has been invited.

Because of this, the planning and execution of TWS conventions has been a rather haphazard affair, and there have been some close calls as to whether the thing would come off at all. Fortunately, every convention so far has ultimately turned out to be a thing of beauty and a joy forever, but the wings of possible catastrophe were sometimes heard beating offstage, and sweetness and light have occasionally been in danger of being usurped by bitterness and gloom.

It is for this reason that the TWS Board of Directors, realizing the tradition of a national convention, now in its third decade, has become one of the cornerstones of our Society (putting out this fine journal being its preeminent purpose), has taken the drastic step of creating its first official task force, The Wodehouse Society Convention Steering Committee (TWS CSC).

This is an unprecedented undertaking, our Society's founders and organizers being justly famous for their allergic reaction to anything smacking of “serious purpose.” Things have come to the point, however, where such evils are believed to be necessary. Well, why not, eh what? I mean to say, if we can file a tax return, we can accomplish anything, what?

The TWS CSC's *raison d'être* is as follows:

1. To select a chapter from among those who want to host a convention
2. To provide guidance to the Host Chapter (eliminating the need for a chapter to reinvent the convention wheel every two years)
3. To facilitate the use of TWS funds for conventions
4. To fulfill the role of convention host in the event that no chapter volunteers

The CSC is comprised of TWS members who have previously hosted a convention, with the TWS president and treasurer helping to oversee expenditures and lend tone. Current members of the TWS CSC are Elin Woodger (chair), Elliott Milstein, and Jean Tillson. The basic *modus operandi* of the Committee is to appoint one of its numbers “Convention Facilitator” for each convention, this person then acting as the primary liaison with the Host Chapter. The other committee members function as a support system and reality check, ensuring the Convention Facilitator doesn't put on side or become an interfering busybody. It is hoped that, in the fullness of time, future Host Chapters' convention planners will join the Committee and become TWS CSC Facilitators themselves.

Note that item 3 above mentions using TWS funds. As our conventions have become larger and more elaborate, the need for a legal body capable of signing contracts, establishing credit, and tapping available funds has become evident. It is logical, meet, and just that the Society fulfills this function. From now on, therefore, TWS will write all necessary checks and sign all required contracts having to do with conventions (hence the need for the president and treasurer to work with the Committee). TWS is committed, however, to the idea that conventions should be self-funded. That is to say, all conventions must be carefully budgeted to pay for themselves so that the hard-earned simoleons

of members who do not attend a convention (though you really should, you know—they're quite fun) are not used to aid others in browsing and sluicing. This is another area in which the Committee members' convention-planning experience will greatly benefit the Host Chapter and TWS as a whole.

Another major change to convention planning is the timing and method of choosing the Host Chapter. Whilst in the past there has been an unofficial tradition of moving the convention site around the country (East Coast, Midwest, West Coast in turn), the selection process has been shrouded in mystery, with the announcement of the next site coming like a puff of white smoke at the preceding convention's business meeting. The decision-making process will now be more formalized, and the selection of a Host Chapter will be made well in advance of the next convention. This process would be a bit tedious to cite here in its entirety; therefore the full CSC Charter, including details of selection criteria, has been posted on the TWS website. It is also available by email or hard copy by applying to the Committee Chair, Elin Woodger. For those who may already be mulling the possibility of hosting in 2009, see Elin's addendum below.

Those TWS members for whom this complicated, legalistic mish-mash is a burden and a bore have, no doubt, long since given up on this article and moved on to more entertaining fare. Only those with a strong interest remain, so let me encourage both of you to visit [www.wodehouse.org](http://www.wodehouse.org) soon and read the entire TWS CSC charter, or write to Elin requesting a copy. I can tell you from personal experience that planning and executing a convention is one of the most frustrating, frightening, and fulfilling experiences you can imagine. Come join the fun!

## Applying for 2009

BY ELIN WOODGER

As Elliott has so eloquently noted above, the criteria for selecting a Host Chapter for conventions have changed. Full details are available in the CSC Charter, and if you are unable to get it from TWS's website for some reason, please write to me for a copy (see below).

The most important thing to note is that Host Chapter selection will be performed well in advance of the upcoming (already planned) convention. The CSC Charter mandates: (1) Any chapter wishing to host a convention must submit their bid to the Committee by nine months before the next convention. Therefore,

with the 2007 convention slated for October of that year, all submissions for the 2009 convention must be received by January 11, 2007. (2) The Committee will notify bidding chapters whether their bids have been successful at least six months before the next convention. Thus, chapters wanting to host the 2009 convention will be notified by April 11, 2007, whether their bid has been successful or not. (3) If the Committee receives no bids by the nine-month deadline, they will use those nine months to make their own convention plans—which may mean selecting a likely chapter and inviting them to play Persian Monarchs, with the honor of hosting the 2009 convention as the stakes.

Thus, it is to everybody's benefit not to wait until the last minute to submit a bid. Throughout 2006, *Plum Lines* will carry short announcements reminding all interested chapters of the January 2007 due date for 2009 convention bid submissions and where to send them. For full Host Chapter selection criteria, download the CSC Charter from our website, or write to me for a copy..

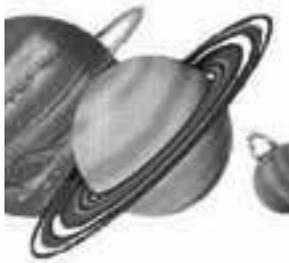
## Don't Ask Jeeves?

In late September, the Internet began buzzing with the news that the search engine Ask Jeeves will be dropping the picture of a valet that has been its logo almost since its inception due to "user confusion" over what the picture represents. The valet, of course, is our own Jeeves, who had received a makeover in 2004 to make him slimmer and more tanned, effectively bringing his appearance more up to date. But this, it seemed was not enough for Barry Diller, whose Inter-Active Corp bought the Ask Jeeves group in May this year. In addition to Diller's wanting Jeeves to go, Ask apparently carried out research on users' perception of Jeeves that, according to a BBC report, revealed "Jeeves was getting in the way of people realising that the search site had changed and that it can handle many more types of queries than just straightforward questions. 'As a result,' said the Ask statement, 'the character may be phased out as the prominent icon of the brand, although no timelines or details have been determined.'"

This announcement resulted in a protest launched by those who love the Jeeves icon and want to save him—see, for instance, <http://savejeeves.blogspot.com/>. As of this writing, Jeeves still graces the ask.com website, with no further word on his fate.

# World-Wide Wodehouse

BY JOHN GRAHAM



*World-wide today, who knows where tomorrow?*

Where do you keep your Wodehouse collection? Mine takes up three full bookcases in my office study. I use two faux-antique barrister-style bookcases (the ones with pull-down glass doors) to display my first editions and an ordinary 5-shelf bookcase to hold everything else—including assorted reprints, uniform editions, magazines, books and articles about Wodehouse, and related memorabilia (ranging from TWS coffee mugs to one junior-size cricket ball purchased at Lord's).

I find that McIlvaine's A-list of English and American first editions fit almost perfectly into my two 4-shelf barrister bookcases, but I go back and forth on the best way to arrange the books. Sometimes I isolate all the English firsts in one bookcase and all the American firsts in the other. The advantage of this setup is that it tends to group books by publisher (so you get to view a nice long run of Herbert Jenkins orange and Doran creamy-gray dust jackets), but the disadvantage is that since Plum's English output exceeds his American, the two bookcases are never quite symmetric. So most of the time, I follow McIlvaine's numbering scheme, intermixing English and American firsts in order of their publication.

Assuming I never acquire first American printings of all the early school books, I have just enough room now to shelve every first edition from *The Pothunters* to *Sunset at Blandings* (and have even managed to squeeze in four recent firsts unpublished in book form during Plum's own lifetime: *A Man of Means*; *The Luck Stone*; *Tales of Wrykyn and Elsewhere*; and *A Prince for Hire*). I suppose my third bookcase still has room for a few more magazines or even some thin books (such as another printing of *The Great Sermon Handicap*), but not too many. Sometimes I regret not starting to collect the new uniform editions now being published by Everyman in the United Kingdom and by Overlook Press in the United States, but I simply do not have

room for them—44 books as of this fall.

Maybe there is another way. Meet Bert Smeets from Utrecht in the Netherlands. Bert also collects Wodehouse, and his collection is far larger than mine—2,367 items and counting (as of June 20, 2005). Bert collects American, British, Canadian, Australian, and Indian editions, both with and without dust jackets. He collects first editions and later reprints as well as brand new editions in both hard and soft covers. He also collects any book by or about Wodehouse, translated into 23 different languages. By my count, his foreign collection ranges from 74 titles in Dutch, 72 in Swedish, and 71 in German down to three in Estonian, two in Latvian, and one (*The Prince and Betty*) in Esperanto. I was particularly surprised to see he has 29 Wodehouse titles in Bulgarian. Counting both English and foreign-language editions, Bert has 48 copies of *The Code of the Woosters*; 48 copies of *Thank You, Jeeves*; 46 copies of *Right Ho, Jeeves*; and 44 copies of *Leave It to Psmith*.

So how does Bert find the room to store all of these books? It's simple: Bert's collection is a virtual one—it exists only in cyberspace and he posts it on the World Wide Web portion of the Internet for everyone to see at a website called "A P.G. Wodehouse Coverage" (<http://www.freewebs.com/apgwc>). I'll let Bert tell you his own story:

I discovered Wodehouse in the 1970s. Really fantastic to read his books. Wodehouse isn't published in the Netherlands since the end of the 1980s, so most of the books that I have are second-hand. In 1998 I believe, I don't know exactly when, this website was started. First just the Dutch covers, later also the English and then also the other languages. It was just fun to surf the Internet for covers. Ebay and other auction sites are the biggest source for the covers. And then obviously the antiquarian booksellers. For the new editions you have of course the online bookshops.

Bert also invites interested viewers to contribute scans of additional covers for his web collection. Information on how and where to post your scans is provided on his web page. You can also e-mail Bert directly.

While we are on a trip around the world, there is collecting news to report out of Australia. John Loder, with the assistance of Bill Mathews, has just published a colorful 40-page booklet called *P.G. Wodehouse's Colonial Editions*, which catalogues all known Wodehouse editions that were published specifically for distribution in Canada, South Africa, Australia, New

Zealand, and/or India. (Copies of the booklet can be ordered over the internet at [www.citybasementbooks.com.au](http://www.citybasementbooks.com.au).) Up until World War II, British publishers like Herbert Jenkins and Methuen issued many of their books in colonial editions at the same time and from the same plates as their English firsts, although often in different-colored boards. To the extent known, colonial dust jackets were almost always the same as the English firsts, except that Jenkins would modify their green price oval to read: “Herbert Jenkins’ Colonial Library.” In her comprehensive Wodehouse bibliography, Eileen McIlvaine describes only a handful of these colonial editions; Loder is able to provide a complete description (often with a color picture) of 27 titles issued in colonial editions. Longtime collectors are likely to be most interested to learn about two early books on his list: *Love Among the Chickens*, issued in plain red boards by George Bell in 1906, and *Not George Washington*, issued in illustrated blue boards by Cassell in 1907. These two volumes are so seldom seen that neither one has yet to appear even in Bert Smeets’s collection.

## Delightful Poetry

The following haikus came to us courtesy of Ken Clevenger, who writes: “In reviewing *The Power of Delight*, John Bayley’s recently published collection of essays, Merle Rubin noted Bayley’s enthusiasm for the ‘wafer-thin divertissements of P. G. Wodehouse.’ We may take issue with this apparently limited characterization of the Wodehouse canon, but we cannot deny that most of Plum’s work is pure divertissement—and none more so than his delightful forays into poetry. With this in mind, the Capital! Capital! chapter of The Wodehouse Society had a presentation by Freda Kirkham and Ken Clevenger concerning Plum’s poetics and a contest among its members for writing light comic verse on a Wodehouse theme. The results, against all form, are presented herewith.”

There followed some nine pages of poetry, which left us in breathless awe of the talent in the Capital! Capital! chapter. But too much of a good thing can be—well, too much of a good thing, and filling *Plum Lines* with all those poems in one go would perhaps be a bit much even for our poetry-mad readers. Therefore the editors have decided to spread the wealth over future issues of *Plum Lines* and print the Capitalists’ poems as space allows.

That said, it should be noted that the first category

in the “Delightful Poetry” competition was haiku—and the winners are:

Drones Club Prize

*Aunt Agatha’s Eye*

or

*The Gimlet*

by Melissa Ennis

Drones in cyberspace.  
Eternally, Jeeves shimmers.  
Gin and subject limes.

Love Among the Chickens Prize

*Madeline*

by Mary Hinkle

Black velvet midnight  
Bright sparkling stars a-twinkle.  
Oh! God’s daisy chain!

Dog McIntosh Prize

*Haiku on Aunts*

by Elizabeth Fisher

Now bay at the moon  
And chew on broken bottles.  
The Bad Aunt arrives!

Yoicks to the Good Aunt  
Let Anatole strut his stuff.  
We shall man-jay well.



“I may as well tell you that if you are going about the place thinking things pretty, you will never make a modern poet. Be poignant, man, be poignant!”

*The Small Bachelor*, 1927

# Was Wodehouse a Gastronomer?

BY KEN CLEVENGER

P. G. Wodehouse should be considered a Gastronomer. I do not say “epicure” or “gourmet”; notwithstanding Plum’s stomachic rotundity (at times pronounced), there is no reason to suppose he was either of those. His rotundity may be confirmed by viewing some of the photos of Plum in Joseph Connolly’s and David A. Jasen’s biographies, several of which show Plum with tight coat buttons. And the David Low caricature of Plum, which graces *Plum Lines*, certainly suggests that Wodehouse was a man of measure and substance. In *P. G. Wodehouse: The Authorized Biography*, Frances Donaldson quotes Charles Graves, a British author and journalist: “As for P. G. Wodehouse, the photographs of him as a prisoner of war in Germany show that he has lost at least four stone in weight. At the outbreak of war he looked like a rubicund archbishop, now he looks like a Trappist monk!”

Four stone would be 56 pounds. Clearly Wodehouse was a man of good appetite regarding food.

But I think you will agree that Plum’s was not a trained gourmet palate, at least based on his dining experiences in English schools between 1886 and 1900. Consider this view in an early school story, *The Head of Kay’s*:

Kennedy . . . began to toy diffidently with a sausage, remembering, as he did so, certain diatribes of Fenn’s against the food at Kay’s. As he became more intimate with the sausage, he admitted to himself that Fenn had had reason. Mr Kay meanwhile pounded away in moody silence at a plate of kidneys and bacon. It was one of the many grievances which gave the Kayite material for conversation that Mr Kay had not the courage of his opinions in the matter of food. He insisted that he fed his house luxuriously, but he refused to brave the mysteries of its bill of fare himself.

Another example is from *The Luck Stone* by Basil Windham, a Wodehouse nom de plume:

Jimmy felt particularly bewildered at first, for he plunged straight into the middle of what seemed to be a sort of indignation meeting. Everyone in the big common-room of the house . . . was talking at the same time. Nobody seemed to be doing any listening at all. . . . He

turned to Tommy in bewilderment.

“What’s it all about?”

Tommy . . . explained in a shout.

“Forgot to tell you – indignation meeting. About the food Spinder gives us.”

Apparently Plum was not favorably impressed by the general level of browsing in the public schools of his youth.



Later in life, as a civilian internee held by the Germans from 1940 to 1944, Plum displayed his not-a-gourmet credentials. Wodehouse describes his meals while interned in Liège in this quote from Donaldson’s biography:

Breakfast, 7 a.m. Two large ladlefuls of coffee made of oats, no sugar or milk, and a slab of black bread with a dab of lard, jam or honey on it – and damned good it is when you get used to it.

Lunch, 11.30 Two large ladlefuls of thick soup, with rice or potatoes or macaroni in it. This is the star meal. Very hot and good. Not much salt in it.

Supper, 7 p.m. Same as breakfast.

It is amazing how this diet, which looks meagre, is really all one wants. . . .

Far from being a gourmet or epicure, I think Wodehouse only required plain food and enough of it. *Gastronome*, though, is defined in my Webster’s not merely as “a lover of good food” but “especially as one with a serious interest in gastronomy,” which is “the art or science of good eating,” or—and this is a key part of my thesis—“the art or science of culinary customs or style.”

I hope you are beginning to see the trend of my thinking. Surely an expert knowledge and understanding of the art and science of good eating and culinary customs and style is a key ingredient in the basic PGW fiction recipe. Here is Wodehouse on the science of good eating, from “My War with Germany,” an article

he penned while interned at Tost and later published in *The Saturday Evening Post*.

. . . The only thing I can suggest is that Germany and I get together at a round table and discuss the terms for a separate peace.

It should be simple to arrive at some settlement which would be satisfactory to both parties. The only concession I want from Germany is that she give me a loaf of bread, tell the gentlemen with the muskets at the main gate to look the other way and leave the rest to me.

In return for this I am prepared to hand over India and an autographed set of my books and to reveal a secret process for cooking sliced potatoes on the radiator known only to internee Arthur Grant and myself. This firm offer holds good till Wednesday week.

That is the tongue-in-cheek joke of an internee, lightheartedly describing his desire to be free, but certainly also a “secret process” for cooking potatoes on a radiator is a credible form of science.

But what of the art of good eating? Note the word picture Wodehouse paints of an upper-class picnic in “Jeeves and the Old School Chum.” Bingo is married to Rosie M. Banks, the celebrated female novelist, whose domineering guest is an old school friend, Laura Pyke, a notorious health-food nut. La Pyke has made Bingo’s life hell of late, as regards fine dining.

. . . young Bingo came up. I hadn’t seen him looking so jaunty for days.

“I’ve just been superintending the packing of the lunch-basket, Bertie,” Bingo said. “I’ve stood over the butler and saw that there was no nonsense.”

“All pretty sound?” I asked, relieved.

“All indubitably sound.”

“No carrots?”

“No carrots,” said young Bingo. “There’s ham sandwiches,” he proceeded, a strange, soft light in his eyes, “and tongue sandwiches and potted meat sandwiches and game sandwiches and hard-boiled eggs, and lobster and a cold chicken and sardines and a cake and a couple of bottles of Bollinger and some old brandy—”

Obviously Wodehouse fully understood what would comprise a high-society picnic luncheon—what one might call “The Art of the Picnic.”

But what of the art or science of culinary customs or style? This quote from *Something Fresh*, demonstrating that “there is only one Simpson’s,” proves Wodehouse’s mastery of culinary customs and style.

The God of Fatted Plenty has the place under his protection. . . . County clergymen, visiting London for the Annual Clerical Congress, come here to get the one square meal which will last them till next year’s Clerical Congress. Fathers and uncles with sons or nephews on their hands rally to Simpson’s with silent blessings on the head of the genius who founded the place, for here only can the young boa-constrictor really fill himself at moderate expense. Militant suffragettes come to it to make up leeway after their last hunger-strike.

. . . A restful Temple of Food. No strident orchestra forces the diner to bolt beef in ragtime. . . . There he sits, alone with his food, while white-robed priests, wheeling their smoking trucks, move to and fro, ever ready with fresh supplies.

Now that is the voice of the Master! Could other than an incredibly astute observer of culinary customs and style have authored those words? Who writes of manners, customs, and style better than Wodehouse? A few Restoration period plays, Sheridan, and Molière might be up there in the running, but I would give Wodehouse the silver prize pot every time.

Plum deserves the accolade of *Gastronome*, not for his personal devotion to his tummy or palate, but rather for his Art—his exquisite writing about food and dining. To demonstrate Wodehouse’s masterful use of food and dining in his writing, I will address four common elements of any fictional literary composition: first, to set a physical scene; second, to invoke mental images; third, to develop character; and fourth, to advance the plot.

Let us first examine Wodehouse’s use of food and dining to set a scene—that is, to convey to the reader a picture of the place where the action is happening. In “Jeeves in the Springtime,” Bingo, before he has met Rosie M. Banks, is in love with a waitress—again! And he wants Bertie to meet the girl “near the Ritz.”

He was geographically accurate. About fifty yards east of the Ritz there is one of those blighted tea-and-bun shops you see dotted about all over London, and into this, if you’ll believe me, young Bingo dived like a homing

rabbit; and before I had time to say a word we were wedged in at a table, on the brink of a silent pool of coffee left there by an early luncher.

At the other end of the social scale, here is a description of a London gentleman's club, from *Something Fresh*:

The Earl of Emsworth stood in the doorway of the Senior Conservative Club's vast dining-room, and beamed with a vague sweetness upon the two hundred or so Senior Conservatives, who, with much clattering of knife and fork, were keeping body and soul together by means of the coffee-room luncheon. . . .

Nobody appeared to notice him. . . . your Senior Conservative, when at lunch, has little leisure for observing anything not immediately on the table in front of him. To attract attention in the dining-room of the Senior Conservative Club between the hours of one and two-thirty, you have to be a mutton chop, not an earl.

Can't you clearly see a formal dining room filled with overly formal gentlemen, all heads down, tucking into their simple if overly nourishing meal?

Moving to the next course, no one tops Wodehouse in creating a striking mental image with his words. Consider this description of what love is like from *The Prince and Betty*: "It's like eating strawberries and cream in a new dress by moonlight, on a summer's night, while somebody plays the violin far away in the distance so that you can just hear it," she said."

Perhaps the image is less vivid if you are not female and have not ever lavishly indulged in fresh, ripe strawberries with lashings of cool, sweet cream on a warm English summer's evening.

But try to resist this image forming: In the novel *Cocktail Time*, Uncle Fred, aka Lord Ickenham, is clustering round a godson, Johnny Pearce. Johnny's girl, Bunny, is upset by Johnny's failure to "close" on their understood marriage deal. Lord Ickenham informs Johnny that he had seen Bunny the previous day: "Gave her lunch. Smoked salmon, *poulet en casserole* and a fruit salad. She toyed with them in the order named. In fact, the word 'toyed' overstates it. She pushed her plate away untasted." In this we see the lovelorn girl with the dapper Earl in a semi-posh London restaurant, her rejected meal the embodiment of her disgruntlement.

Clear scenes and vivid images are a large part of any Wodehouse fiction, but characters must people those scenes and help evoke the images. Here, too, gastronomy is used to perfection to portray and define

characters. Consider the infinitely complex character of Bertie Wooster in "Jeeves Makes an Omelette."

It surprises many people, I believe, that Bertram Wooster, as a general rule a man of iron, is as wax in the hands of his Aunt Dahlia, jumping to obey her lightest behest like a performing seal going after a slice of fish. They do not know that this woman possesses a secret weapon by means of which she can always bend me to her will – viz. the threat that if I give her any of my lip, she will bar me from her dinner table and deprive me of the roasts and boiled of her French chef Anatole, God's gift to the gastric juices. When she says go, accordingly, I do not demur, I goeth, as the Bible puts it, and so it came about that toward the quiet evenfall of Friday the 22nd inst. I was at the wheel of the old sports model, tooling through Hants with Jeeves at my side and weighed down with a nameless foreboding.

"Jeeves," I said, "I am weighed down with a nameless foreboding."

"Indeed, sir?" Jeeves replied.

"Yes. What, I ask myself, is cooking?"

And, later in the story, the depth and quality of Bertie's character, indeed the very steel in his soul, are shown in his answer to that rhetorical, if that is the word I want, question: "What is cooking?" Bertie now tells Aunt Dahlia:

"I have been giving considerable thought to this matter of Anatole's cooking, and I have reached the conclusion that the thing is one that cuts both ways. Heaven, of course, to chew his smoked offerings, but what of the waist-line? The last time I enjoyed your hospitality for the summer months, I put on a full inch round the middle. I am better without Anatole's cooking. I don't want to look like Uncle George."

I was alluding to the present Lord Yaxley, a prominent London clubman who gets more prominent yearly, especially seen sideways.



Another example of how gastronomy is used to describe the essence of character is seen in this quote from “Clustering Round Young Bingo,” describing Aunt Dahlia’s husband, the curmudgeonly but noble-hearted Tom Travers.

It was as good a dinner as I have ever absorbed, and it revived Uncle Thomas like a watered flower. As we sat down he was saying some things about the Government which they wouldn’t have cared to hear. With the *consommé pâté d’Italie* he said but what could you expect nowadays? With the *paupiettes de sole à la princesse* he admitted rather decently that the Government couldn’t be held responsible for the rotten weather, anyway. And shortly after the *caneton Aylesbury à la broche* he was practically giving the lads the benefit of his whole-hearted support.

And so we come to the last course: plot advancement through the medium of gastronomy. The story: Freddie Threepwood is having a spat with his wife, and Freddie beseeches his father, Lord Emsworth, to go to her and plead his case for him. That distracted peer demurs but later recalls that, if divorced, Freddie is likely to come live at Blandings Castle, a very disturbing prospect! So, in “Lord Emsworth Acts for the Best,” we read:

A man who has had a disturbed night is not at his best on the following morning. Until after luncheon Lord Emsworth felt much too heavy-headed to do himself justice as a pleader. But a visit to the flowers at Kensington Gardens, followed by a capital chop and half a bottle of claret at the Regent Grill, put him in excellent shape. The heaviness had vanished, and he felt alert and quick-witted.

I now offer my second and final example of gastronomy advancing the plot. This is again from *Cocktail Time*. The leading character, Cosmo, has been committed to gaol for 14 days without the option of a fine for some youthful indiscretion. The story requires Cosmo to meet another character, Oily, an American of no social distinction, to arrange to conceal some knowledge from a wealthy uncle, but where and how and why to meet?

During the past two weeks Cosmo, rubbing along on the wholesome but rather meagre prison fare, had given a good deal of thought to

the square meal he would have on getting out, and after considering the claims of Barribault’s, Mario’s, Claridge’s, and the Savoy, had decided to give his custom to Simpson’s in the Strand, being well aware that at no establishment in London are the meals squarer. As he hastened thither, with the picture rising before him of those whitecoated carvers wheeling around their massive joints, his mouth watered and a fanatic gleam came into his eyes, as if he had been a python which had just heard the dinner bell. It was one of those warm summer days when most people find their thoughts turning to cold salmon and cucumber salad, but what he wanted was roast beef, smoking hot, with Yorkshire pudding and floury potatoes on the side, followed by something along the lines of roly-poly pudding and Stilton cheese.

At Simpson’s, Cosmo begins to fret that Oily may have betrayed him, revealed the contents of a certain letter to his uncle, and at that moment be “on his way back to America, his pockets full of Uncle Raymond’s gold.”

But . . . Oily was not on his way to America. He was at this moment in the process of rising from a table on the opposite side of Chez Simpson’s, where he had been lunching . . .

After all, everybody’s got to eat!

Wodehouse’s work is replete with, if not redolent of, food and dining as the subject that pushes the plot along, illuminates the essential characters of the several actors in the tale, sets them in scenes perfectly suited for their action and, along the way, invokes some of the most vivid mental images ever created in the English language.

Plum (a food, I note) was definitely not a gourmet. By his own admission, as reported in Jasen’s biography, when at home on Long Island late in life, “[Plum] made his own breakfast, consisting of toasted black bread, jam, honey and five cups of tea . . .”

But he was a Gastronomer—indeed an absolute master of gastronomy, the art or science of good eating and culinary customs and style. And he used his expertise exquisitely to help make his writing a feast for the minds, eyes, and ears of his readers.



# Cruisin' Clifton's Chaotic Competition

BY DEBORAH DILLARD

I felt like someone had speared my hot-water bottle on a chilly autumn night. But what was a sweet-natured Plummie like me to do, up in front of a crowd of people, with no less than a mayor and state delegate hanging about along with the press, handing the trophy for Best Antique to . . . Wait! Hold on. I seem to have started at the end. Let me begin at the beginning.

I got the brilliant idea to spread the good word about Wodehouse by sponsoring "Best Antique" in the local Lions' Cruisin' Clifton Labor Day Car Show (Clifton, Virginia). This is a charity event at which the cars that enter compete for approximately 30 trophies in as many different categories, the number depending on how many sponsors the show has. Each sponsor ponies up \$100 for the privilege, the catch being that the money must be disbursed to a charity, often of the sponsor's choice. I decided to give the money to the local library to purchase works of the Master in the name of the Soup & Fish Club.

This gets very complicated, so please pay attention. Each sponsor picks the winner of his or her category, but since each vehicle entered in the show can only win once (with the exception of Best in Show), the sponsor must pick a first-, second-, and third-prize winner. If the first-place winner has already won in another category, then the second-place winner gets the nod; if that car has also bagged a prize, then it's the third-place vehicle that wins the coconut. If all three choices have won in other categories, then the Lion running the car show picks the winner. This way they spread the wealth and good feelings all around. A lot of these folks will see each other the next weekend when they are cruising some other local, and this keeps everybody pretty chummy with each other.

All clear? Got it? Right-ho, then, I'll move on. The first glitch in my cunning plan was Hurricane Katrina of all things, as a result of which other sponsors had decided to donate their ante to hurricane relief. Okay, I'm reasonable. Though one could pose a strong argument that what people need most in this world is a good laugh, even the most accomplished barrister would only argue that point after the requirements of food, shelter, and clothing were fulfilled. So my money went to the Red Cross.



*Deborah's choice for winning jalopy, which didn't actually win, though clearly a winner!*

Still optimistic that this was a good thing for the Soup & Fish Club and the Wodehouse Society, I set out to judge cars on the big day. Nearly 4,000 people had come to see the 251 entries in the Cruisin' Clifton Car Show (which ultimately raised almost \$20,000 for charity). My criterion for judging was to select vehicles that could have been driven by Wodehouse characters. To my delight, I found a baker's dozen. The top three were narrowed to a lovely 1930 Model A, designed with the lady golfer in mind. I do not jest. It was painted the color of gold silk and had a compartment for your woodies. In my persona of Mary Kent, I swooned. Choice number two was a 1928 Model A Ford pickup truck (original paint forest green), which you could just see a by-the-day gardener using to haul sacks of dirt. My third choice was a beautifully preserved 1936 touring car that had only been used and garaged at the Jersey shore, which the aunt of a sluggard could have gotten into much mischief with until she fell under the spell of Jimmy Mundy.

I was as excited as a bull terrier pup anticipating a bone when it was time to announce the winners. But there were wheels within wheels! The man tallying up the winners' sheet could have been the brother of John McEachern, former Capt. of Police and Jimmy Pitt's father-in-law. His stern jaw and watchful eyes made him one of the hardest boiled eggs I have ever encountered. So when his voice boomed that the "Best Antique" sponsored by the Soup & Fish Club was not one of my choices but a 1940 coupe, there was no arguing with him.

I own that I reeled. But then I found myself as described at the beginning, surrounded by photographers and local dignitaries—and the owner of the coupe nowhere in sight. It was just me, a trophy, and a state delegate mistakenly congratulating me for winning. I gathered my wits somewhat quickly and decided to hang about until the final winners were announced and speak to this hard-boiled egg. When I first approached the man, I was as gentle as the dew upon the rose. When he started to fob me off, I took the Aunt Agatha approach: “Look here. I did not pony up 100 of the hard-earned ones to see a trophy given to your wife’s cousin’s neighbor or whoever it was, who owns a car made the year Wodehouse was interned by the Germans. Talk about salt in the wound. Good God man, this is colossal mistake.”

He looked at me, blinked twice, and said something about my not having turned in my entries early enough,

## Supreme Choice

Following President Bush’s nomination of John Roberts to the Supreme Court, Wodehousians everywhere were delighted to learn that, as reported in the *Christian Science Monitor*, “Judge Roberts loves uber-Brit author P. G. Wodehouse, progenitor of Jeeves. ‘With hindsight, it seems perfect,’ says law school chum Charles Davidow, who’s traded Wodehouse books with Roberts for years. . . .”

This news excited interest on PGW-Net, where Elliott Milstein noted: “Wouldn’t it be great if [Roberts] would speak at a convention? ‘Wodehouse at the Bench: A study of the court cases in Wodehouse.’” Why not? Anything can happen—and often does.

It should be noted that Justice Stephen Breyer is also a Wodehouse fan, leading Daniel Love Glazer to speculate on the possibility of “dueling Wodehouse quotes to spice up majority and minority opinions.” Having two Wodehouse buffs on the Supreme Court is an encouraging trend; perhaps PGW books should be sent to the others to bring more sweetness and light to Court decisions?

But there’s more. TWS president Jean Tillson wrote to Chief Justice Roberts and Justice Breyer on behalf of the Society to congratulate them on their excellent taste in authors. As we go to press, she has received a standard “thank you for your letter” from Justice Roberts with, alas, no mention of Wodehouse, and has had no response from Mr. Breyer as yet. But we remain hopeful. Who knows what surprises may await us in Providence in 2007?

so he had to pick the winner. I Aunt Agathaed once more: “What do you mean not early enough! I was told noon. I handed it to the lovely young thing sitting next to you at 11:45.”

He blinked again. “The cars you chose all got other trophies?” he suggested.

“Nope, I checked.”

Then he smiled like a man reminded that the cheque had been cashed. “Ma’am, I’ll see what I can do.” And he scurried away, leaving me to drown my sorrows at the beer tent.

So—I was presented with a prize I hadn’t won for a car I hadn’t chosen owned by somebody who had gone AWOL, and my superb choices were all nullified by a man bigger than I was who clearly didn’t know his Wodehouse from his Wittgenstein. All in all a funny old day.

## Ebert’s Choice

Anne Cotton recently spotted an intriguing Wodehouse reference in critic Roger Ebert’s review of *Wallace and Gromit: Curse of the Were-Rabbit*, an animated feature film directed by Nick Park. After mentioning a line involving pigs, Mr. Ebert adds: “Speaking of pigs, some of my favorite books are the Blandings Castle novels by P. G. Wodehouse, in which Lord Emsworth dotes on his beloved pig, Empress of Blandings. I have always assumed the Blandings stories to be unfilmable, but now realize that Nick Park is just the man for them, with Wallace as Lord Emsworth, and Gromit as George Cyril Wellbeloved, his Lordship’s expert pigman. True, Gromit does not speak, but Wellbeloved is a man of few words, and if Gromit can solve the mystery of the Were-Rabbit, he should be able to handle a pig.”



# Sir Gregory

BY MIKE ECKMAN

*Mike, a member of the Northwodes, presented the following "treatment" at the Hollywood convention as part of The Great Wodehouse Movie Pitch Challenge. Mike had the unfortunate starter's position in the Challenge, and as a result he was probably subjected to the most abuse from the "producers." His treatment is a very clever and witty send-up of . . . well, see for yourself. We think you'll agree it has the mucus.*

*Opening Title* (No music)

Sir Gregory (White block letters on a black background)

Scene 1: English countryside (Somber music)

The camera moves over the English countryside to the large estate of Sir Gregory Parsloe-Parsloe. It is late evening, and there is a light on in only one room in Sir Gregory's house. The camera moves over the typical fields, gardens, and outbuildings of a large estate, including a pig sty.

Scene 2: Sir Gregory's house (Somber music)

The camera moves through the lighted window into the room where a dying man (Sir Gregory) utters, "The prawns!"—and dies. The attending nurse covers him.

Scene 3: Newspaper office (Lively music)

In a weekly society-newspaper office, the editor and staff discuss how to cover the life of Sir Gregory Parsloe-Parsloe. The editor wants an "angle," and Thompson, whose face will always be hidden or in shadow, is given a week to find the meaning of Sir Gregory's dying words. The editor assumes that the meaning of the dying words will explain much about Sir Gregory's life.

Scene 4: Sir Gregory's house

Thompson interviews members of the Parsloe-Parsloe family and household staff without result. The family members are particularly reticent to talk about Sir Gregory's past. They will not even confirm that "The prawns" were Sir Gregory's last words.

Scene 5: Outside Sir Gregory's house

In private and for a handsome payment, a young member of the Parsloe-Parsloe family, who is in need of some funds to place a bet on a horse, suggests that Thomson contact someone who has access to the Junior Ganymede Club's book. The young man says that the book is rumored to contain records of the adventures of gentlemen as written by their employees. He suggests

the Drones Club members as the source of a contact.

Scene 6: Drones Club (Popular music)

After some inquiries among the members of the Drones Club about the Junior Ganymede Club that also involves the purchase of several drinks and being hit by more than one bread roll, Thompson is advised that "Jeeves is the man."



Mike Eckman

Scene 7: Comfortable bachelor flat

Thompson approaches Jeeves and tries to bribe him to access the contents of the Junior Ganymede Club's book regarding Sir Gregory and the prawns. Jeeves declines for reasons of honor and does not even consider Thompson's generous offers of money. Thompson's argument that the public has a right to know actually causes Jeeves to raise an eyebrow and gently force him out the door.

Scene 8: Outside the block of flats

While leaving the block of flats, Thompson is waylaid by an unsavory-looking character identifying himself as Brinkley or Bingley, who offers to access the club book for an exorbitant price. Thompson does not believe such an ill-dressed and unpleasant-looking (and smelling) person could have such access and declines the offer.

Scene 9: Fleet Street pub (Popular music)

Thompson is consoling himself for his disappointing lack of progress in a Fleet Street pub and strikes up a conversation with a former employee of Lord Tilbury. The employee remembers that at one time a Threepwood was writing his reminiscences, which were to be published by Lord Tilbury. It was rumored that this Threepwood had knowledge of the past of many members of society and may know of the prawns. Thompson knows that the Threepwood family lives at Blandings Castle, the house nearest to Sir Gregory's.

### Scene 10: Blandings Castle

Thompson, experiencing great frustration, is interviewing Lord Emsworth—who he assumes to be the Threepwood who wrote his reminiscences—at Blandings Castle. He is not able to extract any useful information. The only references to Sir Gregory involve pigs and the stealing of pigs. He concludes that the pub informant was incorrect.

### Scene 11: Outside Blandings Castle

While exiting Blandings Castle, Thomson meets the retired butler Beach. In despair, Thompson mockingly asks if Beach has heard of the prawns. Beach only chuckles and advises Thompson to approach Lord Emsworth's younger brother, Galahad Threepwood.

### Scene 12: Blanding Castle

Galahad is more than happy to talk to Thompson and regales him with stories from the past involving Sir Gregory. First, Galahad gives Thomson a drink and takes another for himself.

### Scene 13: Gentlemen's Club (Popular period music)

Flashback to 1895. A young Gregory Parsloe-Parsloe wins £10 7s 6d from a young Galahad with a doctored spinning top.



### Scene 14: Blandings Castle

Galahad offers and Thompson accepts another drink.

### Scene 15: Pawn shop with young Galahad waiting outside (Popular period music)

Flashback to 1896. Gregory Parsloe-Parsloe is pawning Lord Burper's stolen false teeth in a shop in the Edgeware road.

### Scene 16: Blandings Castle

Galahad offers and Thompson accepts another drink.

### Scene 17: Cellar of a run-down building (Popular period music)

Flashback to 1897. Galahad's dog, fed steak and onions by Gregory Parsloe-Parsloe, rolls over and goes to sleep, causing Galahad to lose £100 to Gregory. The two had wagered whose dog would kill more rats.

### Scene 18: Blandings Castle

Thompson declines another drink and presses Galahad on the prawns. The week is drawing to a close, and Thompson's patience is running out. Galahad says only that the "Empress" has the story and she is gone from this world. Thompson is confused by the reference to royalty and questions Galahad more. Galahad, however, deflects the questions and totters off. The confused and frustrated Thompson shows himself out.

### Scene 19: Newspaper office (Less lively music than first newspaper office scene)

Thompson returns to the office, reports that he has not found the secret of the prawns and that he believes the entire exercise to be a waste of time. He has found the whole adventure to be unsavory, especially all of the references to pigs. The magazine goes to press without an explanation of Sir Gregory's last words.

### Scene 20: English countryside (Somber music)

Flashback to 1923. In a scene reminiscent of the opening, the camera pans over the countryside and passes a sign advertising the 1923 Shropshire Agricultural Show. The camera moves into an outbuilding.

### Scene 21: Outbuilding (Somber music)

A large pig, the Empress of Blandings, is eating a stack of paper, apparently a manuscript. The camera moves in to show that the heading on the page about to be devoured is "Gregory Parsloe-Parsloe and the Prawns." As the Empress prepares to eat the page, the viewer can make out the opening words: "It was at Ascot, the year Martingale won the Gold Cup. Young Parsloe . . ."

*Closing Titles and Credits* (Medley of the popular music from earlier scenes)

## The End

They had gone on to the opening performance at the Flaming Youth Group Centre of one of those avant-garde plays which bring the scent of boiling cabbage across the footlights and in which the little man in the bowler hat turns out to be God.  
*Service with a Smile, 1962*

# Uncle Fred in Academe

BY DAVID M. HARRIS

I suppose I've read *Cocktail Time* four or five times now. When I was active on the Wodehouse newsgroup, I used the "nom de Plum" of Howard Saxby (many participants use the names of Wodehouse characters), the literary agent in this novel. I can't count how much of Wodehouse's other material I've read. In fact, I was (for about a year) his literary agent (although he was dead at the time).

While there is endless pleasure in reading Wodehouse, he doesn't get much attention in the academy. I have to admit that there isn't a lot of depth in most of his characters; not Uncle Fred (the Earl of Ickenham and central figure in the work at hand) nor Bertie Wooster nor any of the residents of Blandings Castle ever change much. Once we know them—and we can know them pretty well in the first chapter or two in which they appear—we know them forever. The plots are not based on serious human problems; *Cocktail Time* is based on the author of a best-selling trashy novel needing to keep his identity secret so he can still run as a Conservative candidate for Parliament, with Ickenham's godson's need for five hundred pounds, to buy off his old nanny so she will get married and leave his employ so he can marry his fiancée without her having to be bullied by the nanny, as a major subplot. These are not exactly universal themes.

Nor are they meant to be. But they limit how much there is to be said in the classroom about the motives of the characters and how this relates to our own lives and all that other stuff that we teachers rely on to keep us going for a full period. Pleasure is just not sufficient for academic attention. (This doesn't mean that academics don't read Wodehouse. I was arriving on campus once and was accosted by the head of the writing program, who complimented me on my hat. I told him I had gotten it from James Lock, in London, which meant nothing to him until I explained that they were treated in Wodehouse as Bodmin's of Jermyn Street, and he knew exactly what I meant.)

But on this rereading of my favorite Wodehouse novel (probably because it has to do with writing and publishing, as so few of his books do), and possibly because I was reading it aloud, I realized that there is, in fact, something to say about (and learn from) Wodehouse. He really is a master of static characterization, which is not as useless a skill as you might think. Anyone writing a series, or a certain type of comedy, can make use of it. And his static characters



can be thought of as moments in a changing character. Granted, he never gets very deeply into, for example, Lord Ickenham's need to interfere in the lives of those around him, but the collection of quirks and attitudes (and typical quotations) gives us a detailed picture of the surface. Each character has a voice, if we pay attention, and we can often tell who is speaking without tags (which is just as well, since Wodehouse doesn't use tags much; there are big chunks of text without any attribution at all, so that when you are reading aloud you must learn to do voices).

Plum was also a master of the construction of scenes. Each chapter of *Cocktail Time* is a coherent scene, much like a scene in a stage play (of which he wrote, after all, a great many). It does not always have unity of setting, but it always focuses on a single character's actions and thoughts. If the emphasis is transferred to another character, another scene (and another chapter) begins. With as many major characters as Wodehouse has (in this book we have Uncle Fred, Beefy Bastable, Beefy's sister Phoebe Wisdom, Phoebe's son Cosmo, Fred's godson Johnny Pearce, Beefy's butler Albert Peasemarch, and the American confidence trickster Oily Carlisle, all of whom are at least briefly viewpoint characters), this gives the book a reader-friendly organization. I haven't really analyzed the scene structure of the book, but I daresay it could be charted profitably.

Now, all this doesn't help us much in understanding the action and its deeper implications. Wodehouse seems to have lived in fear of deeper implications, and shunned them vigorously. But it does help us as writers in understanding how to handle complex plots (and even in his short stories, Wodehouse uses complex plots) with lots of important characters. Many of us don't really understand scenes, but he sure did.

So Wodehouse's place in academia is rather paradoxical: not of much interest for literature courses, but invaluable for creative writing courses. And I don't think he'd mind at all.



# 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 (see Chapter One below). 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.

Another new chapter has been formed! Read more below about The Flying Pigs, a chapter for members in and around Cincinnati and beyond.

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



The Anglers' Rest met at the Elephant & Castle in downtown Seattle on Saturday, October 22, for discussions, birthday celebrations, much browsing and sluicing, and general frivolity. Attendees were encouraged to arrive early and tour Seattle's Central Public Library just a block or so away; tours start at 10 A.M. on Saturdays.

Our next meeting is January 28, 2006, at the Elephant & Castle. A paper will be presented by Stu Shiffman, door prizes will be distributed to a lucky few, and we will discuss a group read or homework assignment for the next meeting. Billiards may be played afterward in the lower level of the E&C. Show up and browse the false books on the walls of E&C—is there a Plum in the bunch? Come to the meeting to hear Stu's lovely paper! Pop in for the ale and fish and chips! Decide what we'll read for/at the next meeting! We'd really like to see you all. If you need transportation assistance, or more information, or just have questions in general, please contact Susan Collicott at [camelama@speakeasy.net](mailto:camelama@speakeasy.net) or Barbara Combs at [barbara@gravityshack.com](mailto:barbara@gravityshack.com).

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



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

On Sunday, October 15, 2005, The Broadway Special gathered at Porter's (named for Cole Porter, no less!), 216 Seventh Avenue in Manhattan, to celebrate the Master's birthday. The program comprised toasts, reports on the Los Angeles convention, and a memoir of Plum by David Jasen, his friend, biographer, and the only one of us to have known the Great Man personally. The rest was scarcely silence, for the Special is particularly enamored of browsing, sluicing, and Droning conversation.

Our next meeting, at The Players in Gramercy Park on December 2, will focus on *A Damsel in Distress*—and, of course, we are looking forward to the presentation in the spring of *Oh, Lady! Lady!!*, described on page 28.

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

The Buck-U-Uppo Bottling Co. celebrated Wodehouse's birthday on October 15, Sandy Rea, chief bottler, presiding. Jeremy Thompson regaled us all with his stories of haunting used-book stores in Los Angeles decades ago, looking for PGW books, and finding an autographed edition of one of the novels, owned by Hedda Hopper. Ray Steen handed "The Wodehouse Society" bumper stickers around. It is not too much to say that the Buck-U-Uppos are the first chapter to be completely bumper stickered. Tales were told and door prizes drawn. We heartily agreed to meet again in the spring.

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

On Sunday, October 2, Capital! Capital! met in a Washington, D.C., restaurant for an evening of good food and fine fellowship, as well as to hear the results of the Capital! Capital! Gang Rhyme Time poetry contest. The contest hosts, Col. Ken (The Beak) Clevenger and Ms Freda (Popgood & Grooley) Kirkham, had previously called for Wodehouse-related poetry submissions in haiku, sonnet, limerick, or vers libre formats. And submissions they got. The biggest applause of the evening was received by Joan Roberts, Melissa Ennis, Popgood & Grooley, and someone calling himself or herself Anon. Not that anyone cared who won, of course, because everyone was having so much fun. Some of the poems will appear in *Plum Lines*, see page 13 for the first batch.

Capital F.O.R.M.  
(Friends Of Ralston McTodd—Ottawa and vicinity)  
Contact: Megan Carton

Greetings to members everywhere from Capital G.F.O.R.M., the very latest thing in TWS chapters. We're a small but mighty group, and thus far our activities have been primarily along the lines of getting ourselves up and running. We had a gathering on October 15 to honour PGW's birthday. The gustatory theme was "Eggs, Beans and Crumpets," with a lively menu and even livelier chitchat. A highlight of the event is sure to be the distribution of our beautiful new TWSCC (cricket) badges, so kindly—and rapidly—provided by Jean Tillson. Many thanks, Jean! We are confident that these will impress and amaze all. We'd like to take this opportunity to extend an invitation to members everywhere to look us up should they find themselves in the Great White North. We'd be delighted to show off our beautiful city, Canada's capital, and stand you to tea, cocktails, and the like. We're tickled to be aboard.

Chapter One  
(Greater Philadelphia area)  
Contact: Susan Cohen

We devoted our September meeting to celebrating the August TWS Hollywood convention. There was lots of reminiscing. Dan Cohen gave a brief presentation on Wodehouse's Hollywood houses,

which some of the Chaps had driven around to see on Convention Friday. Then we cheered John Graham for coming in second in the Fiendish Quiz, and we praised him for his costume win, costume consisting of a ferocious black beard worthy of a pirate or a satanic Santa Claus, and a plummy purple cowboy hat.

The big event of the meeting was Debbie Bellew's reprising of her prize-winning performance in the Great Wodehouse Movie Pitch Challenge. The Chaps loved her sales pitch and they loved her delightful movie poster featuring Julia Roberts as Jeeves. Debbie held her Oscar aloft to thunderous applause. At our meeting on November 13, we had a reading of the famous 1970s *Paris Review* interview with Wodehouse, featuring Herb Moskowitz as Wodehouse and Will Jordan as the interviewer.

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

Our 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 City Lit 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  
1515 Shasta Drive, #4210  
Davis CA 95616-6692  
Phone: 530-747-6110

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 Junior Bloodstain will be on Saturday, January 14, 2006, at 12:30 P.M.; location yet to be announced.

The Drone Rangers  
(Houston and vicinity)  
Contact: Toni Rudersdorf

Susan and David Garrett won the Most Topping Couple costume prize at the LA convention. And marvelous they both looked! Susan was still fizzy about winning when she showed up at the September Drone Rangers meeting, and the self-deprecating David said the white-coated tux he'd worn was a little excessive. One could tell, however, that he, too, was pleased with the win, and both loved the color photo of themselves in the last issue of *Plum Lines*. All the Drone Rangers who went to the convention said they'd had a wonderful time.

Toni Rudersdorf gave a presentation on *A Prince for Hire* at the September meeting and also read portions of *A Prince and Betty*. Our next get-together was on October 29 at the Spaghetti Warehouse in downtown Houston, overlooking Buffalo Bayou. November 5 was the date for our annual video party at the home of Tom and Natalia Glidden, who have hosted this event for five years. Tom makes a fabulous Brandy Alexander! Our piano player was there to help us sing along to the music of Irving Berlin, Cole Porter, and others. It's always a treat to those watching videos in the next room to hear us singing and tossing Brandy Alexanders over our tonsils.

The Flying Pigs  
(Cincinnati area and elsewhere)  
Contact: Susan Brokaw

A newly formed chapter based in Cincinnati, the Flying Pigs have a regional mindset that would encompass interested Wodehouseans in southeastern Indiana, northern Kentucky and southwestern Ohio. Our name comes from Cincinnati being known in the 19th century as "Porkopolis" for all the slaughterhouse and rendering facilities in the area. Now Cincinnati is home to the annual Flying Pig Marathon, and sculptured flying pigs sit atop all poles in Sawyer Point, a gateway to the city along the Ohio River.

An initial meeting with seven attendees was held on Sunday afternoon, October 7, in the bar parlor of a cozy historic hotel that is steeped to the gills in "Ye Olde English" decor and ambiance. The seven were Bob

Elliott, Susan Pace, Bill Scrivener, John and Eleanore Dial, Susan Brokaw, and Dirk Wonnell, who all agreed to be the new chapter's founding members. We will next meet on Sunday, January 22, at 5:00 P.M. at Southerby's, located in the Mariemont Inn in Mariemont, Ohio. If you'd like to join us, please contact Susan Brokaw for further details.

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

The Mottled Oyster Club of San Antonio and South Texas meets on the second Thursday of each month, more or less. Every other month, under our nom de guerre of the Jellied Eels, the group meets at a restaurant for dinner. On the alternate months, the Mottled Oysters gather at the Barnes & Noble on Loop 410. Interested or traveling Wodehouseans are always welcome.

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

We had a delightful day at the Landmans' house in Lexington, Massachusetts, on October 1—perfect weather, lots of good food and wine, and lots of old friends. We did not get a story read, however, as we got too busy thinking feverishly about the next TWS convention, which will be held in Providence in 2007. Further word on convention activities will of course appear in *Plum Lines* in the future, but even now we can tell that a splashing time will be had by all who can attend.

Our last meeting of the year was the traditional holiday bash at the Swansons' on December 3. Again, there was lots of food, drink, and chatter; a gift exchange; a wee bit of planning for the spring's events; and a couple of stories to read aloud: "How's that, Umpire?" and "Lord Emsworth Acts for the Best." (Whether we read one, the other, both, or neither was uncertain at press time.)

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



On October 15—an appropriately idyllic day, packed to bursting with blue skies and scarlet

maple leaves—the Northwodes gathered at the University Club in St. Paul for the annual Birthday Toast to Wodehouse. Toasts there were, from the short but dignified one cadged from the convention banquet, to a bit of original doggerel contributed by Dave Fritz. Also harking back to the convention, Mike Eckman presented his Citizen Kane spoof, “Sir Gregory,” one of the top three entries in the Hollywood Movie Pitch Challenge (see page 20). Unhampered by the interruptions of those free-associating moguls: Glutz, Fishbein and Schnellenhamer, Mike was able this time to read his scenario as written, with its fade-away shot of the Empress consuming a manuscript bearing the fateful words “The prawns.” A convivial dinner followed (the first time we have merited a private dining room) with old and new members joining in the feast of reason and flow of soul. The cry went round, “We want another dinner!” Luckily, there’s one on the calendar for January 26th, in conjunction with the University of Minnesota Libraries.

Meanwhile we continue our monthly book discussions (10/19, 11/16, 12/14, 1/18 at Amore Coffee on Grand Avenue in St. Paul). Lots of lead time has been given for the January assignment, so people can absorb the Wodehouse biography of their choice at a leisured pace.

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 Pelikan Club has been inactive of late. If you live in the Kansas City/Liberty area and would like to get together with other Wodehousians, let Sallie know!

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

We meet the second Sunday of every month at 12:30 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 promise that it’s very low traffic. NB to Plumies in Southern California, whether domiciled or just passing through—come up and see us.

*Summer Moonshine* was read for the September meeting. October: Two Golf Stories—“Chester Forgets Himself” and “The Letter of the Law.” November: *A Damsel In Distress*. December: Holiday Tea and “Jeeves and the Yuletide Spirit.” In December, Vroman’s devotes all available space to shoppers, so this meeting usually takes place at the home of a PZMPCo member. We also occasionally attend events of interest, such as the Avalon Ball on Catalina Island, an Art Deco dance in the fabulous Casino (which was scheduled for October 22), and the Lanterman House Tea, a ragtime-era event planned for November 12, as well as ukulele festivals, silent movies, etc. Subscribers to our email 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 Board of Directors of the Pickering Motor Company met the evening of October 15 at a local Irish pub to celebrate the birthday of our beloved Plum. Fortunately, the Board Room was some distance removed from the general area where the level of drinking and merry-making would have made the conducting of business impossible. It was hard enough as it was when U of M won the football game with a touchdown with one second to go!

The group acknowledged the absence again of vital Pickering member Noreen Markley and expressed strong wishes that she make the next meeting. The Master was toasted and then toasted again. A Powerpoint presentation of the TWS Convention “Hooray For Hollywood” was played to the cheers of all, and more toasts were made. Discussion was then to center on *Uncle Fred in the Springtime* and *Laughing Gas*, but by this time too much Irish whiskey, pale ale, lager, bitters and mild had been consumed and, much to Dicron’s regret, the discussion was severely

curtailed. But not before Elliott pointed out the obscure reference to Mustard Pott in *Laughing Gas* and Michael asked once again why the dentist has the same name as the studio magnate. No one had an acceptable answer. Conversation became general and rollicking. The group broke up with a promise to return again to The Claddaugh and to read *Uneasy Money* before the end of November. But first we will make sure Noreen can make it! Anyone else care to join?

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

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, and she occasionally tackles other projects to spread the word about Wodehouse—for example, sponsoring a trophy at the Clifton Lion's Labor Day Car Show. Read all about it on page 18.

## Book the Bide-A-Wee!

Max Pokrivchak tells us that while exploring California before the Hollywood convention in August, he encountered the Bide-A-Wee Inn in Pacific Grove by Monterey. The Inn promises a “relaxing and peaceful stay.” Pets are accepted, of course, but you must call ahead.



From NEWTS president Anne Cotton comes word that a professor in Newtonville, Massachusetts, is offering a course entitled “The World of P. G. Wodehouse.” The course description notes: “An effervescent stylist and canny plotter, Wodehouse provides more pleasure on a single page than most authors do in a lifetime. We’ll explore the magic of his comic style, review attempts to translate his writing to the stage and screen, and test the relation between the idyllic world he created and the tumultuous world in which he lived.” The course starts on February 1, and the first class will discuss *The Code of Woosters*. The instructor, Daniel Pollack-Pelzner, is described as “a lifelong Wodehouse devotee” as well as an experienced teacher and a member of Harvard’s British Literature Colloquium who is “currently researching the literary context of Wodehouse’s novels for his doctoral dissertation.” The course will be held over five Wednesdays at Newton North High School in Newtonville (how appropriate is that?), at a cost of \$95 per person or \$166 per couple. However, Wodehousians who mention “NEWTS” during registration will be granted a \$5 waiver on their registration fee. For those who live in the area and want to attend, the number to call is 617-557-6999—and remember to say “NEWTS”!

## *Oh, Lady! Lady!!*

in New York

BY M. E. RICH

Thank goodness for New York's Musicals Tonight! series. When it comes to Plum, director Mel Miller is a real peach. He advises that next year's season will conclude with a revival of the musical *Oh, Lady! Lady!!*, scheduled from April 25 to May 7, and, as always, we can expect an intimate, effervescent production in staged-reading format with all the original songs.

This show, the last Princess collaboration of the trio of musical fame, was Wodehouse's favorite, and in his usual resourceful fashion he transposed the libretto into the 1927 novel *The Small Bachelor*. TWS's New York chapter, The Broadway Special, will attend the matinee performance on May 6 and will arrange a pre-theater luncheon. Contact Philip Shreffler for details. Tickets may be purchased at [www.smarttix.com](http://www.smarttix.com), and further information is to be found at [www.musicalstonight.org](http://www.musicalstonight.org).



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## Contents

- 1 Red-Hot Stuff—But Where's the Red-Hot Staff?
- 6 More PGW on Stage
- 7 First Things First
- 7 *Wodehouse Playhouse* DVD Raffle
- 7 Wickedly Antic Worden
- 8 Dear Cuppy
- 9 Ties that Bind
- 10 A New Approach to Conventions
- 11 Applying for 2009
- 12 World-Wide Wodehouse
- 13 Delightful Poetry
- 14 Was Wodehouse a Gastronomer?
- 18 Cruisin' Clifton's Chaotic Competition
- 19 Supreme Choice / Ebert's Choice
- 20 Sir Gregory
- 22 Uncle Fred in Academe
- 23 Chapters Corner
- 27 Book the Bide-A-Wee!
- 27 Educational Directory
- 28 *Oh, Lady! Lady!!* in New York

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