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# Under the Influence of *Laughing Gas*

BY CURTIS ARMSTRONG

*Not only a phenomenal talent of the Silver Screen, but a topping inside-Hollywood historian, Curtis gave this talk at the Hooray for Hollywood convention in Los Angeles, August 2005.*

Serial mayhem, drug use, alcoholism, alcohol and tobacco abuse by minors, violation of child-labor laws, child abandonment and endangerment, kidnapping, assault with a deadly weapon, juvenile delinquency, child-on-child violence, unwanted sexual contact.

Hollywood is responsible for much of what we see on television and in films. It is attacked like clockwork by the arbiters of public morals for corrupting American youth, inciting violence, diminishing attention spans, dumbing down our intellects, and encouraging the violent overthrow of our duly elected government—when we have one. Our seasonal earthquakes, floods, fires, and mudslides are considered a righteous judgment on a modern-day Cities of the Plain. As Wodehouse himself might put it, it's the kind of city that makes one wonder whether man is really God's last word. Let's face it, as far as many Americans are concerned, Hollywood might as well be France.

But the litany of violence and corruption I have listed above comes not from the latest hit series or erotic thriller, but from P. G. Wodehouse's 1936 novel *Laughing Gas*.

“Ah, Hollywood, Hollywood! Bright city of sorrows, where fame deceives and temptation lurks, where souls are shriveled in the furnace of desire, whose streets are bathed with the shamed tears of betrayed maidens! Hollywood! Home of mean glories and spangled wretchedness, where the deathless fire burns for the outstretched wings of the guileless moth and beauty is broken on sin's cruel wheel.”

Theodore Dreiser? No, it is P. G. Wodehouse, preeminent spreader of sweetness and light and—sometimes—hard-hitting commentator and trenchant social observer. Wodehouse's Hollywood stories and novels are rife with stark examples of an industry with a soul like something out of a Hogarth painting. It is not, I think, too much to claim that *Laughing Gas* does for show business what Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* did for slaughterhouses. Sinclair's devastating exposé on conditions in the meatpacking industry caused a national scandal. *Laughing Gas* performs much the same function for the movie business, which has long given the phrase *meat processing* a whole new meaning.



*Curtis Armstrong makes merry with wine rather than laughing gas, while sporting a classy Drones Club tie!*

It must be said that the public outrage to Wodehouse's revelations was considerably less vocal than it had been to Sinclair's. In fact, my research has revealed no public outrage at all. Nevertheless, *Laughing Gas* lays bare the Hollywood of the 1930s for all to see. As an outsider, Wodehouse saw behind the glamorous mask of Tinsel Town, and this novel, unique in the canon, reveals what lay behind that mask. And it wasn't pretty.

Consider this bleak monologue, a speech made even more horrifying when we realize that the words are coming out of a little boy's mouth—a little boy with golden ringlets:

“You betcher I'd strike a woman. Yessir, she'll get hers. And there's about six directors I'm going to poke in the snoot, and a whole raft of supervisors and production experts. And that press agent of mine. I'm going to poke him in the snoot, all right. Yessir! Matter of fact, you'd have a tough time finding someone I'm not going to poke in the snoot, once I'm enough.”

Truly, the resemblance between Joey Cooley and Russell Crowe is unmistakable.

The plight of child actors in Hollywood is well known, thanks to the widely publicized case of the young actor upon whom Joey Cooley was based, right down to his initials: Jackie Coogan. Coogan, at one time the highest-paid child actor in the world, grew to man's estate ignorant of the fact that his mother had embezzled every cent he ever made. The resultant Jackie Coogan Law was enacted to protect young talent from being robbed blind by their nearest and dearest. Sadly, there were no watchdogs in place for young Joey Cooley or his peers. By the time we meet them in *Laughing Gas*, Wodehouse paints a grim and pitiful picture of Joey's predecessors at the top of the ladder: Tommy Murphy and Orlando Flower—former child stars thrown on Hollywood's ash heap once their usefulness has ended, leaving them to roam the mean streets of Beverly Hills like a pack of young coyotes, turning savagely on alpha male Joey in sequences that remind us of something out of a National Geographic special.

The truth is, Hollywood in the Thirties glamorized its Temples, Coogans, and Cooleys publicly while exploiting them ruthlessly behind the scenes. The public never saw Shirley Temple roused from bed at 3:00 in the morning to have her flaxen locks forced into hot curls. They were blissfully unaware of Judy Garland being force-fed diet pills by the studio to keep her weight down. But Wodehouse tips us off to all these abuses in *Laughing Gas*. Joey tells Reggie:

“Know what a serf is? . . . I mean what's downtrodden and oppressed and gets the dirty end of the stick all the time. That's me. . . . Shall I tell you something? . . . I'm not allowed to play games, because I might get hurt. I'm not allowed to keep a dog, because it might bite me. I'm not allowed in the swimming pool because I might get drowned. And, listen, get this one. No candy, because I might put on weight.”

A *cri de coeur* if ever we've heard one.

If there's one thing people can't get enough of these days, it is reading about the private peccadilloes, personal secrets, and hidden perversions of their favorite stars, and the more lurid and disgusting they are, the better they like them. As *Laughing Gas* shows, it was ever thus. But the increased appetite of today's public for the graphic details of celebrities' private lives has had a predictable effect. Stars must now work especially hard at keeping their personal lives increasingly salacious just to keep up with market demand. Back in Wodehouse's day, alcoholism was a popular celebrity scandal of choice, because it was something the average American could relate to. Indeed, alcohol abuse was so widespread during Hollywood's golden age that a cottage industry sprang up to support it. Everyone has seen the little kiosks that advertise Maps to Stars' Homes, but few realize that these were originally established to help intoxicated stars find their way back home after a night on the tiles. Domestic violence, drug addiction, bestiality, or pedophilia were less sympathetic failings, which just goes to show how far we've come. In *Laughing Gas*, Wodehouse uses great subtlety in showing, even then, Hollywood's obsession with weight loss by substituting prunes for Benzedrine. Perfecto Prunes, to be precise. Joey Cooley is forced to eat them with every meal, as a diuretic, to keep his weight down. Then, to add insult to injury, the prunes are widely publicized in an early example of product placement. Of course, it could be argued that prunes were unlikely to be addictive, but that would have been cold comfort to Joey Cooley.

These days, you hear a lot of talk in Hollywood about the “fly-over.” Some of you may not be familiar with this term. The fly-over is a Hollywood expression that refers to the whole of the continental United States, excluding New York and Los Angeles. In Wodehouse's day, it was called the sticks, the boonies, or God's Country. Joey Cooley hails from the heart of the fly-over: Chillicothe, Ohio, where hearts are pure and men are men, at least according to him. People in Hollywood have highly conflicted reactions to the fly-over. Joey's comment of

“I don’t care if Pittsburgh chokes. And that goes for Cincinnati, too” certainly reflects the opinion of many in Hollywood today—particularly those who were born and raised in places like Pittsburgh or Cincinnati and don’t like to be reminded of it. At the same time, the importance of the fly-over to the bottom line in the industry is undeniable—hence Beulah Brinkwater’s hiring of Eggy Mannering as an elocution coach to rid their star of his Ohio accent, which she claims “you could turn handsprings on.” In other words, in Hollywood it’s okay to come from Ohio as long as you don’t sound like you come from Ohio.

This rule of thumb remains true today: Some of you on the bus tour [during the Hollywood convention] may have noticed signs posted here and there that read: “Accent Elimination: Speak American like a Native”—which I don’t think is technically what they mean to say, but it does show the degree to which people here tend to forget just how much country lies outside the cultural capitals of New York and Hollywood, if “cultural” is the word I’m looking for. Even Wodehouse has Ann Bannister arrange to take Joey back to his Ohio home “in a car,” as if Chillicothe were down by the beach or something. Hollywood types are often accused of this kind of sunny geographical ignorance. In Christopher Guest’s Hollywood satire *The Big Picture*, the studio executive, played by the late J. T. Walsh, asks the young would-be screenwriter where he comes from. “Chicago,” the writer replies. “Oh,” says the executive, “I have family in Ohio.”

Wodehouse’s geographical chops are a little suspect even as regards Hollywood and its environs. In *Laughing Gas* he refers to “going down” to Malibu, when he means “up.” Likewise, in *Performing Flea* he talks about going “down” to Santa Barbara, which is even further “up” than Malibu. But this sense of disorientation is common to people in my business. That’s why chauffeured limousines were invented.

As for unwanted sexual contact, *Laughing Gas* delivers. Imagine the shame and humiliation a healthy young man would feel when he is told by an attractive young woman to take off his clothes at once because she wanted to give him a bath. Okay, bad example. Imagine the shame and humiliation a healthy young man would feel when he is told that 600 women from Michigan are lining up to kiss him, and he has to pretend to enjoy it. I understand that this sort of thing occurs even today in Hollywood, though God knows it’s never happened to me and I come from Michigan. Nevertheless, it’s just this sort of behavior that gives everybody in town a black eye, once the press gets hold of it. Let me just say right now that I’ve been in Hollywood for over 20

years and I’ve never once been to a sex party or even been offered so much as a friendly threesome among friends.

And speaking of the press, its sinister machinations give *Laughing Gas* a critical plot point and gives us an interesting glimpse into Wodehouse autobiography. Everyone is familiar with Wodehouse’s ill-considered interview with Alma Whitaker of the *Los Angeles Times*, an interview that, according to Plum, resulted in his premature departure from Hollywood in 1931. *Laughing Gas*, written some five years later, replays this curious misstep in Wodehouse’s life by introducing reporter Pomona Wycherly of the *Los Angeles Chronicle*. You may recall that this Wycherly is at April June’s house when Reggie Havershot, still in the body of Joey Cooley, narrowly escapes his tormentors, the former child-star thugs Murphy and Flower. Wycherly takes advantage of his breathless, rattled condition to get an interview, an interview made even more newsworthy by Joey’s thoughtlessly smoking a much-needed cigarette and downing a purely medicinal snort or two. Reggie/Joey, pictured glass in hand, cigarette in mouth, is quoted as saying he’s actually 27 and prefers a pipe. All of which winds up on the front page of the Sunday edition, just as Wodehouse’s interview did. The article effectively destroys the young actor’s career in Hollywood, which is just fine by him, as it seems it was just fine for Wodehouse when it had happened to him.

But clear-eyed and razor sharp as Wodehouse’s satire is throughout *Laughing Gas*, the sequence that tops them all is that which features April June’s gang-for-hire, George, Eddie, and Fred. In a town clogged to the back teeth with hyphenates, these three stand alone: kidnapper-screenwriters. But as bad as kidnapping is, it’s what they do to their victim once they have him under wraps that’s truly monstrous: They pitch him a movie they’re writing. I know what most people think when reading this part of the book: “Funny, yes, but that’s a little much, isn’t it?” Well, some 10 years or so ago, a disc jockey here in Los Angeles sent one of his people to a corner in Beverly Hills at lunch time and had him stop people—completely at random—and ask them, “How is the screenplay coming?” Eight out of ten people had an answer.

Back in the Thirties, when the Golden Age of Hollywood was cresting and countless actors and playwrights from New York were surging west like some great race movement of the Middle Ages, a friend of playwright George S. Kaufman sent him a cable. This friend had already transplanted himself from New York to Hollywood and was writing to encourage his

friend to do the same. "There are piles of gold in the streets, just waiting for you." Kaufman cabled back: "You mean I have to bend over and pick them up?"

Bending over and picking it up was pretty much how Wodehouse described his time in Hollywood. Of his work on *Rosalie*, he remarked: "No one wanted me to hurry. When it was finished, they thanked me politely and remarked that as musicals didn't seem to be going so well, they guessed they would not use it. That about sums up what I was called upon to do for my \$104,000. Isn't it amazing?"

And to Townend he wrote: "I am sort of an Ogre to movie studios now. . . . I don't care personally, as I don't think I could do picture writing. It needs a definitely unoriginal mind." Plum took considerable pride in claiming he did so little work he had time "to write a novel, and nine short stories, besides brushing up my golf, getting an attractive sun-tan and perfecting my Australian crawl."

In *Wodehouse: A Life*, Robert McCrum claims Wodehouse mythologized his year in Hollywood, particularly his exit from it. Plum's self-mythologizing looms large in McCrum's book, but in this case, I think he's mistaken. What strikes me as so interesting about Wodehouse's account of his exile from Tinsel Town is how similar it is to his account of his exile from the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank so many years before. You all remember that one: The Pirandelloesque short story written on the blank page of the new ledger about the opening of the new ledger, the page then torn out, the subsequent discovery by the office manager, who had it in for the stationer; the office uproar, the beleaguered stationer claiming only an idiot would tear a page out of a new ledger, have you an idiot working for you? The manager saying, "Well, we do have P. G. Wodehouse." Poor Plum called onto the carpet and grilled and finally coming clean, the nibs forming a hollow square and drumming him out of finance forever. Now that's mythologizing. What's really amazing about life in Hollywood is how hard it is to mythologize something that is so unreal to begin with.



*Jackie Coogan in his early days of Hollywood serfdom*

## A Unique Wodehouse Tour

Young men, starting out in life, have often asked me, "How can I become an Internee?" Well, there are several methods. My own was to buy a villa in Le Touquet on the coast of France and stay there till the Germans came along. This is probably the best and simplest system. You buy the villa and the Germans do the rest.

So, in typically comic fashion, did P. G. Wodehouse describe the beginning of the strangest, most dangerous, and most controversial episode in his long life. Wodehouse fans have often made pilgrimages to places associated with his life. This August they will be given the opportunity to visit some of the places where Plum was either interned or stayed during the war years. The tour has been arranged by TWS member and travel professional Patrick Hinchy and is being operated by Travel Editions of London.

The tour will begin on August 20 in Krakow with a Welcome Dinner. The following day there will be a visit to Tost and the mental hospital that became an internment camp where Plum spent 10 months. Then it's on to Germany, where the highlight will be a tour of the Harz Mountains and a visit to Degenershausen, the place where Plum spent his happiest times during this period. The tour finishes up on August 24 in Berlin with the evening Farewell Dinner held in the hotel where Plum and Ethel often stayed.

This is clearly a unique opportunity for Wodehouse fans. The tour will cost approximately \$850 plus airfare. Additional information and tour brochures can be obtained by contacting Patrick Hinchy.

"Haven't you ever heard of Sister Lora Luella Stott?"

"No. Who is she?"

"She is the woman who is leading California out of the swamp of alcohol."

"Good God!" I could tell by Eggy's voice that he was interested. "Is there a swamp of alcohol in these parts? What an amazing country America is. Talk about every modern convenience. Do you mean you can simply go there and *lap*?"

"I was speaking figuratively."

"I knew there was a catch," said Eggy, disappointed.

*Laughing Gas* (1936)

# The Maestro's Beastly Similes

BY DENNIS CHITTY

Dennis presented this audience-participation quiz at the August Hollywood Convention. The character to be identified appears in **bold** type. The novel or story in which the simile appears is in parentheses ( ). There were three similes that Dennis himself was unable to identify, and since the convention Gary Hall was able to find numbers 7 and 33. If you can identify both the character and the work in number 20, give yourself two points and a pat on the back—and please let Dennis know! Answers on page 18.

We all use similes such as “quiet as a mouse” and “mad as a wet hen.” Wodehouse uses such familiar similes now and then but generally invents his own. I have selected some of both kinds and invite you to score one point for each of the characters you recognize.

1. We start with the lowest form of life in the following passage:  
Sneaking off and landing him with these two disease-germs [Wilfred and Old Stinker] might have seemed culpable: but what he felt at that moment was the **Queen** could do no wrong. (“The Passing of Ambrose”)
2. Now to invertebrates:  
**He** was still crouching in the wardrobe like a weevil nestling in a biscuit. (*Money in the Bank*)
3. **She** gave him a fleeting look, the sort of look a good woman gives a caterpillar on finding it in her salad. (*Pigs Have Wings*)
4. I'm sorry I called you a miserable worm. (*The Code of the Woosters*)
5. We now move up the zoological ladder:  
With a faraway unseeing look in **his** eye, not unlike that which a dead halibut on a fishmonger's slab gives the pedestrian as he passes. (*Cocktail Time*)
6. **He** gave me a look, a kind of wide-eyed, reproachful look, such as a dying newt might have given **him**, if **he** had forgotten to change the water regularly. (*The Code of the Woosters*)
7. With the least lovable traits of a ghila [gila] monster. (*A Damsel in Distress*)
8. **She** was an attractive woman, but there were times when she could look more like a cobra about to strike than most cobras do. (*Money in the Bank*)
9. The fact that **he** had heard Horace Davenport speak of his uncle Alaric as a baldheaded old coot . . . had enabled **him** to identify the newcomer without difficulty. (*Uncle Fred in the Springtime*)
10. “**You**'re as tight as an owl.” This was a wholly unjustified slur on a most respectable breed of bird, for owls are as abstemious as the most bigoted temperance advocate could wish. (*Pigs Have Wings*)
11. **His** eyes had taken on the look of cautious reserve which you see in those of parrots, when offered half a banana by a stranger of whose *bona fides* they are not convinced. (*Joy in the Morning*)
12. “Coo,” he said again, and was urged by **his uncle** to make up his mind whether he was a man or a pigeon. (*Cocktail Time*)
13. **Her** voice was soft and tender, like that of a hen crooning over its egg. (*Joy in the Morning*)
14. **He** uttered a sound like the death rattle of a dying duck. (*The Code of the Woosters*)
15. [I]n appearance **she** resembles . . . a well-bred vulture. (*Joy in the Morning*)
16. **My** impulse, on encountering a rabbit, is to offer it lettuce. (“Unpleasantness at Bludleigh Court”)
17. **To my family**, on the other hand, a rabbit seems incomplete without a deposit of small shot in it. (“Unpleasantness at Bludleigh Court”—name the head of the family)
18. I uttered a stricken cry, like a cat to whom the suggestion has been made that she part with her newborn kitten. (*Joy in the Morning*)
19. In less than five minutes he had reduced this ravening [**man**] from a sort of human wild cat to a positive domestic pet. (*Thank You, Jeeves*)
20. Like a sheep that's had the misfortune to encounter a potted meat manufacturer. (Unidentified— one point each for naming the character and the novel or story.)
21. [**She** was] one of those girls who enjoy in equal quantities the gall of an army mule and the calm insouciance of a fish on a slab of ice. (*The Code of the Woosters*)

22. **He** wears the mask, preserving throughout the quiet stolidity of a stuffed moose. (*Right Ho, Jeeves*)
23. **You** amaze me . . . it was as if a bevy of expectant wolves had overtaken a sleigh and found no Russian peasant aboard, than which I can imagine nothing more sickening. For the wolves, of course. (*Uncle Dynamite*)
24. **He** roared like a lion which had just received an ounce of small shot in the rear quarters while slaking its thirst at a water hole. (*Uncle Dynamite*)
25. Sir Aylmer was feeling cheerful; as cheerful as a Colosseum lion which after a trying day when everything has gone wrong has found itself unexpectedly presented with **a couple** of Christian martyrs. (*Uncle Dynamite*; one point for each person)
26. **He** would greatly have preferred to enter the cage of a sleeping tiger and stir it up with a short stick. (*Cocktail Time*)
27. Few coots could have had less hair than **this man**, and any walrus would have been proud to possess the moustache at which **he** was puffing. (*Uncle Fred in the Springtime*)
28. **He** was looking like a monkey which observes a couple of other monkeys trying to chisel it out of a banana. (*Money in the Bank*)
29. It was during this chat that Beach was struck by **her** resemblance to a gorilla with stomach ulcers. (*Pigs Have Wings*)
30. “Coo!” **he** said, directing at Oofy the sort of look a thoughtful vulture in the Sahara casts at a dying camel. (*Uncle Fred in the Springtime*)
31. **She** is like an elephant—not so much to look at . . . but because she never forgets. (*Joy in the Morning*)
32. **He** felt entitled to be a little severe, as some knight of old may have been, who preparing to save a damsel from the dragon, found she had already knocked it cold with her distaff. (*Money in the Bank*)
33. Like a mastodon striding over some prehistoric plain. (“Feet of Clay”)
34. [**He**] always looked like a pterodactyl with a secret sorrow. (*Right Ho, Jeeves*)

*A final note:* Gardeners have faulted Wodehouse for mistaking flowering times in the gardens at Blandings. He also makes a few zoological mistakes:

- Chimpanzees do not have tails.
- Newts and toads are amphibians, not reptiles.
- There are no jackrabbits in Australia.
- There are no jaguars or cassowaries in Africa.
- There are no wapiti in Africa or pumas in India.
- There are no coconuts where gorillas live.
- Bees chase pollen, not honey:  
     The dogs chase fleas  
     The bees chase honey  
     And we are all chasing money  
     And when it shows  
     Anything goes.



*Dennis Chitty rattling off the similes, like a hen cooing over its egg*

A full-throated baying, a cross between a bloodhound on the trail and a Scotsman celebrating New Year's Eve.  
*Uncle Fred in the Springtime* (1939)



## Books for Sale

BY JOHN HANNAH

I would like to find a happy home for my accumulation (not collection—collection is too grand a term for it) of Wodehouse books. I have accumulated them over almost 50 years. Not a one is in mint condition, and some are almost ratty. But they are all readable.

Included are all of Plum's titles except some of his very earliest, when his skills hadn't yet reached their peak anyway. There are 47 hardback titles, including 12 first (or first American) editions. The balance of the books (70) are American and British paperbacks. Also included are the McIlvaine bibliography, the Centennial book, the 12 booklets in the Plum Stone series, and various omnibuses.

I'm asking \$2,000. Or if there is a library or some such who could accept them as a tax-deductible contribution, I would go that way. In either case, I would pay for shipping. Call me!

# Treasurer's Report for 2005

BY AMY PLOFKER, OUTGOING TREASURER

Balance as of December 31, 2004	\$7,618.99
Income	
Dues and fees <sup>1</sup>	\$15,770.15
Drones Club ties (orders: ongoing process)	<u>\$821.00</u>
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$16,591.15</b>
Expenses	
<i>Plum Lines</i> production and mailing	\$11,686.26
Correspondence, supplies, other	\$416.97
Achieving 501(c)7 tax-exempt status	\$625.00
Drones Club ties (bulk ordering & shipping)	<u>\$2,310.73</u>
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$15,038.96</b>
TWS Convention Fund <sup>2</sup>	
Return of funds advanced in 2004 for 2005 convention <sup>3</sup>	\$3,500.00
2005 convention raffle proceeds	\$812.00
2005 convention general income	\$51,065.00
2005 convention general expenses	<u>(\$49,006.79)</u>
<b>Total TWS Convention Fund</b>	<b>\$6,370.21</b>
<b>Balance as of December 31, 2005</b>	<b>\$15,541.39</b>



1. Dues income was higher than usual in 2005 because many members prepaid for future years.
2. Accounting for convention-related finances will henceforth be maintained separately from other TWS accounting. In 2005, for the first time, all convention funds went through national TWS. This system will be used for future conventions per the new TWS Convention Steering Committee charter (see "A New Approach to Conventions," *Plum Lines*, Winter 2005). Note that future convention general income is not expected to be as high since it will likely not involve housing costs, an inclusion unique to 2005 (when the convention was held on the UCLA campus).
3. The advance consisted of funds accumulated from previous conventions, primarily Philadelphia in 2001.

## More Delightful Poetry

Here are more entries from Capital! Capital!'s 2005 poetry competition (see *Plum Lines*, Winter 2005). Both of these limericks are by chapter leader **Jeff Peterson**, who is, according to Ken Clevenger, "a rare fount of limericks, all passed by the Public Censor. Jeff was given the A. B. Filmer Prize as the least likely fellow to be taken on as a Private Secretary for a politician." See also page 13 for more poetry!

Music Hall girls are curvaceous.  
Talent, however, nugatious.  
But Drones in top hats  
and wearing white spats  
have interests only salacious.

Miss Bassett's the ethereal kind,  
longing a soul-mate to find.  
But the lads at the Drones,  
without chaperones,  
have intentions corporeal in mind.

# Very Good, Joe Keenan

BY PETER CANNON

Joe Keenan fans, take heart. I have good news for those of you who may have worried that after writing two superb Wodehouse-inspired novels, *Blue Heaven* (1988) and *Putting On the Ritz* (1991), the author sold out to Hollywood, where he made a name for himself as a writer and producer on the TV show *Frasier*. In January, *My Lucky Star*, his third novel to feature the comic misadventures of former lovers Philip Cavanaugh and Gilbert Selwyn and their brainy pal, Claire Simmons, was published by Little, Brown. Set in Hollywood, it is his best to date. (A pity it wasn't available in time for the 2005 TWS convention.)

As I observed in an earlier article, "Thank You, Joe Keenan" (*Plum Lines*, Winter 1993), Keenan's language and plotting put him in the Wodehouse class. Taking my cue from Keenan in his highly amusing

introduction to a recent British edition of *The Code of the Woosters*, I will refrain from quoting the work in question. Those of you with access to the Winter 1993 issue of *Plum Lines* can consult it for samples of the author's witty prose. Better yet, all of you can simply go out and buy *My Lucky Star*, because, while some may accuse me of sacrilege for saying so, Keenan delivers a plot more ingenious and complex than that of, say, *The Code of the Woosters*.

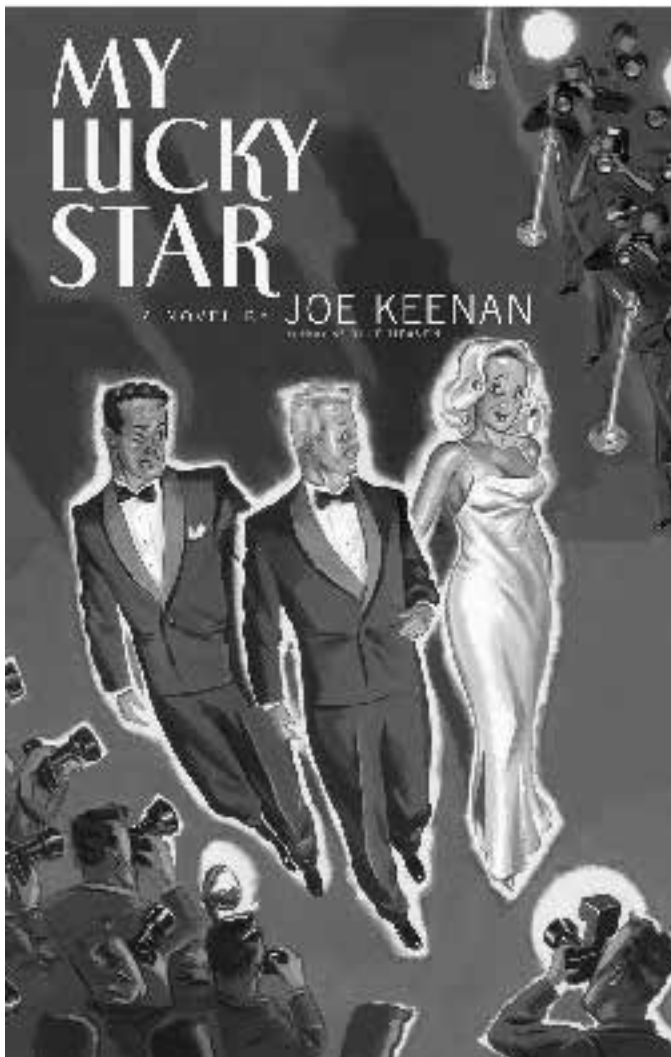
The tale starts out in a vein familiar to admirers of the Master. Philip, Gilbert, and Claire wind up in Hollywood, where Philip, under an alias, is hired to help Lily Malenfant, a vain, aging has-been movie actress, write her memoirs. In fact, Philip is in the employ of Lily's estranged sister, Diana, a more successful actress, and Diana's son, male-action star Stephen Donato. Diana and Stephen want to keep tabs on Lily, who they fear will dish the dirt on them. In contrast to Galahad Threepwood's memoirs, whose scandalous contents are only hinted at, the reader is treated to some details of Lily's book, and here we venture into territory untrod by Wodehouse.

Stephen is a closeted homosexual, and the last part of the novel focuses on his efforts to suppress an incriminating videotape secretly filmed at a health spa that discreetly caters to gay men. Blackmail, male prostitution, and impersonating a police officer are involved. Those of you concerned about a replay of Jonathan Ames's *Wake Up, Sir!* should know that the tone remains light, despite the sordid goings-on and one explicit, albeit hilarious, sex scene.

At the climax, Philip and Gilbert are at the mercy of a mean-spirited district attorney who is on the verge of charging them with a host of crimes. Leave it to Claire to step in with a solution to their problems that shows up Jeeves's knowledge of Roderick Spode's ownership of Eulalie Soeurs for the deus ex machina it is. Keenan prepares for the denouement as carefully as he would a classic fair-play detective story. In Wodehouse's day, a pig could eat a manuscript and it would be plausible that this was the sole copy. In our digital age, this no longer holds. Neatly tying up the loose ends, Keenan goes to great lengths to account for the several copies that have been made of the incriminating video.

By the happy ending, two characters who at first appear unsympathetic—the foolish Lily and her disreputable brother, Monty Malenfant, who is something of a Gally figure—have endeared themselves to the reader. How often do supporting characters in Wodehouse show such development?

Like Wodehouse, Keenan is vague about chronology. His heroes have scarcely aged since their



The cover for Joe Keenan's latest effort, *My Lucky Star*



last outing 15 years ago, and the few topical allusions offer no clues to a specific time for the story's events. Keenan's fictional world may have a little more to do with the unpleasantness of the real world than Wodehouse's, but not much. For verisimilitude, some actual Hollywood stars make cameo appearances.

Of course, Keenan does not emulate Wodehouse in every respect. Narrator Philip, despite a gift for simile and metaphor, is no Bertie Wooster. Philip, Gilbert, and Claire are social equals. Claire resembles Jeeves only in her role as savior. You will find neither allusions to classical literature nor humorous contrast between high and low speech in *My Lucky Star*, as you might expect with contemporary Americans who may be bright but not particularly learned.

In sum, Keenan poses no threat to Wodehouse. But he is doing a brilliant job of carrying on in the same literary tradition, if at a much slower pace. *My Lucky Star* took him two years to plot and seven years to write, what with a full-time career in television. May *My Lucky Star* bring Keenan enough success to allow him to give up TV and devote himself entirely to fiction.

[For more on Joe Keenan, see Peter's profile in the November 21, 2005, issue of *Publishers Weekly*.]

## Rivals of P. G. Wodehouse: Thorne Smith

BY DAN COHEN

Quickly now—who is Thorne Smith? If you were born after the Roosevelt administration, it is probable that the name rings no bells. For older readers there may be some dim memory.

Okay, let's try *Topper*. That does ring bells. It's the title of a popular 1937 film featuring Cary Grant, and it's about a couple of drunken ghosts who try to liven up the life of Cosmo Topper, a mild-mannered and rather stuffy banker trapped in "the summer of suburban Sundays." There were several other Topper films, but this is by far the best known.

There was also a popular 1950s television series based on *Topper*. The films and TV series, probably the first fantasy sitcom, were based on Thorne Smith's first published novel, *Topper*, written in 1926. Dedicated film buffs may know a delightful 1942 René Clair confection called *I Married a Witch*. It featured Fredric

March, Veronica Lake at her kittenish best, and Robert Benchley at his slightly inebriated best. It was based on Smith's last (and unfinished) 1934 novel *The Passionate Witch*, and it also inspired the TV series (as well as last year's big-screen version) *Bewitched*.

During his brief life, Thorne Smith wrote nine novels and was enormously popular. His books sold millions of copies worldwide, and they remained popular for at least a quarter-century after his death. Some have even tried to compare him to Wodehouse. In a 2000 reissue of Smith's *The Night Life of the Gods*, an overenthusiastic blurb writer gushed, "Thorne Smith's rapid-fire dialogue, brilliant sense of the absurd and literary aplomb put him in the same category as the beloved P. G. Wodehouse."

Well, not quite. I first encountered the novels of Thorne Smith in the early 1950s and became a big fan. I wasn't reading him for his literary aplomb. It was mostly for the sex. In the 1950s a Thorne Smith novel was about the most risqué thing you could get over the counter. He opened up a world of absolutely guilt-free sex, which was a lot more fun than, say, D. H. Lawrence's heavy breathing. There was also drinking—alcohol beyond a teenager's wildest dreams—with a nice touch of fantasy. Ghosts, Greek gods coming to life—that sort of thing. And a genuine disdain for all sober and responsible grown-ups.

Smith had his passionate admirers; one of them was Philadelphia critic Harry Emerson Wilde, who said, "When I come to be dictator I'm going to have all books burned but Thorne Smith's and Wodehouse's. Then we'll rebuild civilization anew with them as a basis and we'll have utopia." If Wodehouse ever saw that quote, I wonder what he thought of it, and of Smith's world of drunken orgies?

James Thorne Smith Jr. was born at the U.S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland, on May 27, 1892. His father was Commodore James Thorne Smith. His mother, Florence Maxwell Smith, died when her son Jimmy was only four years old. The commodore was off to the Spanish-American War, so Jimmy and his older brother Skyring were cared for by various relatives. By all accounts Thorne Smith was a solitary and sickly child. He attended a couple of boarding schools, which he did not like very much, but he somehow managed to get through one of them. He then enrolled in Dartmouth, where he enjoyed the social (but not the academic) life. He dropped out in 1912 and got a job at a New York advertising agency as a copywriter. He was good at the job, but he hated the corporate world.

America's entry into World War I saved him. Smith quit the advertising agency and joined the navy.

Actually, he spent most of his time writing for navy publications. He created a comic character named Biltmore Oswald—the “Hapless Recruit.” The character was very popular and gave Thorne Smith his first taste of literary fame.

Eventually wars end, and in 1919 Smith was discharged and forced to go back to advertising to pay the bills. But his real interest was in living the literary life in Greenwich Village. According to one account, he also spent time at a hotel in New Haven where he met Dorothy Rothschild (later Parker), and the two became the resident wits. Smith’s real interest was in a young Greenwich Village dweller named Cecelia Sullivan, and the pair eloped in 1919, much to the horror of her parents, who did not think Thorne had any future.

He paid the bills writing advertising copy until, in 1920, his father died and left him a considerable amount of money. Thorne and Cecelia managed to spend it all in short order. No matter how much money Smith had, he always seemed to wind up in debt. Two daughters were born, one in 1922, the second in 1924. He was devoted to his children and went back to advertising to support his family. He also tried to write a serious novel, called *Dream’s End*. He finished it in 1925, but no one would publish it. This depressed him, and his heavy drinking became even heavier.

However, in 1926 Smith expanded a short story into the novel *Topper*, and everything changed. The public loved his mixture of humor, the supernatural, free sex, and absolutely monumental drinking. A series of successful novels followed, and he even did some writing for Hollywood. Then, on the first day of summer 1934, Thorne Smith took an afternoon nap and never woke up. His heart had stopped. He was 42 years old. His heart had probably been weakened by his many earlier illnesses, but his heavy drinking certainly did not help.

Thorne Smith’s popularity continued well into the 1950s—and then he seemed to drop off the edge of the earth. Writing in the *New York Times* in 1997, Stephen Whitlock imagined a wonderful bar in heaven where only the best cocktails were served and dead authors went to brag about their earthly legacies. “P. G. Wodehouse orders a stiff Scotch and gazes down upon a world where his name is well known and his works well respected. Somebody buys James Thurber a drink because, after all, he has had his face on a postage stamp.

“But,” Whitlock continues, “there’s one writer there whose name is almost forgotten here on earth . . . Thorne Smith.”

What happened? Rereading some of Smith’s novels

after many years, some of the reasons are obvious. Times change. The sex scenes, which once seemed so ribald and titillating, are now commonplace and naïve. The monumental drinking isn’t so funny—it looks downright suicidal. And you can’t sustain a whole novel on underwear jokes and the occasional appearance of a nude woman.

And yet Thorne Smith does not deserve oblivion. He really could write well. His humor, though often dated, is still funny:

And all was not well at home with Topper. He had cursed a leg of lamb. He had actually damned the thing. Mrs. Topper could not forget that. Had he cursed her she might have dimly understood, but to hurl imprecations at a tender leg of lamb, a thoughtfully selected leg of lamb—oh no, that could not be forgotten. Men might rebel against their God, but a leg of lamb, a household deity, a savory roast . . . sacrilege, its very seat and circle!

Smith’s two most popular books, *Topper* and *Night Life of the Gods*, were republished in paperback editions by Modern Library in 1999 and 2000 and are still in print. Used editions of many of his other books are available at modest prices. *Haunts & by-Paths* is an excellent Thorne Smith website and merits a visit—go to <http://members.tripod.com/~jchoma/THORNE.html>.



Thorne Smith, 1892–1934

[Ambrose] was large and muscular, with keen eyes, a jutting chin, a high colour and hands like hams, and was apt, when on holiday, to dash off and go climbing the Pyrenees—and what is more, to sing while he did it.

*The Luck of the Bodkins* (1935)

# The East Coast Binge Returns!

April 28–30, 2006, in Washington, D.C.

**Brief History:** Since 1996, East Coast Wodehousians have been lucky enough not to wait two years between conventions to make merry in the best of Plummish company. This admirable tradition, nicknamed the Off-Year Binge or the East Coast Binge, was begun when some members of Chapter One, Capital! Capital!, and the NEWTS decided they couldn't wait another year and had a rousing get-together in Rhinebeck, New York (1996). The following year, another Binge was held in Cape May, New Jersey, attracting Wodehousians from around the country in addition to the East Coast chapters. In 1998, a group of NEWTS and Chapter One-sters made a pilgrimage to Remsenburg, Long Island, with additional activities in nearby Southold. Then came a hiatus: In 2000, the Millennium Tour in England took precedence; and plans for a 2002 Binge in Wooster, Ohio, never quite came to be. Any withdrawal pangs were soon alleviated in 2004, however, as U.S.–wide and British attendees attested that New York City made a fine place to Binge.

Following in this noble tradition, Capital! Capital! is pleased to host the first Binge in its home base of Washington, D.C. The central event is a performance of Wodehouse's *The Play's the Thing*, as well as meeting for drinks and a nifty dinner. We're looking forward to welcoming lots of visitors.

## Schedule

- Arrive Friday, April 28, or Saturday morning, April 29.
- Friday night, 8ish: Meet for drinks in the Hamilton Crowne Plaza Hotel bar.
- Saturday morning and lunch on your own. Our information packet will offer suggestions for browsing used-book stores, art galleries, and museums as well as tips about other attractions.
- Saturday 2:30: *The Play's the Thing*.
- Saturday evening: Group dinner
- Sunday brunch: No official plans, but brunch is available at the Hamilton Crowne Plaza. We'll send you information on other brunch possibilities, too. Hotel checkout time is 12 noon.

**The Play:** On Saturday, April 29, we will attend the 2:30 P.M. matinee of *The Play's the Thing*, presented by the Washington Stage Guild, an acclaimed local theater group now in its 20th season. Described as a "hilarious farce about the very nature of theater,"

this is Wodehouse's 1926 adaptation of a work by Ferenc Molnar, *The Play in the Castle*. The theater is small and in an "off-off-Broadway" neighborhood. Binge attendees are responsible for purchasing their own tickets, which are \$30 each; however, if you can get together a group of 10 or more, you'll get a 50% discount. (Contact Amy Plofker [see page 24] ASAP if you want to join in her group ticket order.) All tickets must be ordered by mail; no refunds or exchanges, and credit cards are not accepted. To print the order form, go to the Guild's website: [www.stageguild.org/orderform.html](http://www.stageguild.org/orderform.html). If you are a true procrastinator, you can check [www.TICKETplace.org](http://www.TICKETplace.org) (D.C.'s half-price ticket outlet) on the day of performance to see if any tickets have become available.

- Theater address: Washington Stage Guild, 1901 14th St. NW (at T St.), Washington, D.C. Telephone: 240-582-0050; website: [www.stageguild.org](http://www.stageguild.org)
- Mailing address for tickets: Washington Stage Guild, 4018 Argyle Terrace NW, Washington, D.C. 20011

**The Dinner:** After the play, we will meet for dinner. We're still working on the location and menu, but we hope to be able to keep the cost to around \$40 per person. When we find the right venue, we'll ask you to send us your check well in advance of your trip so we can secure our restaurant choice; please note that this payment will be nonrefundable.

**Lodging:** We're asking all attendees to make their own hotel reservations (the legal/financial hazards of block reservation contracts being what they are), but we can confidently make recommendations. We've done research, made on-site visits, and read reviews on travel websites. For its location, price, and general appeal, our preferred hotel is the Hamilton Crowne Plaza. It's a restored 1920s hotel, has both a bar and restaurant, and is one block from the Metro (McPherson Square station) as well as within walking distance to the White House. This primarily nonsmoking hotel offers a few smoking guest rooms as well. It's a \$15 cab ride from Ronald Reagan National Airport, or a simple Metro ride from the Airport or Union Station. Take advantage of the guaranteed best Internet rate on its parent company's website: [www.ichotelsgroup.com/h/d/cp/1/en/rates](http://www.ichotelsgroup.com/h/d/cp/1/en/rates). As you go through the reservation process, be sure to click the Rate Preference dropdown box to see if you qualify for a special discount (AARP Passport, AAA, etc.). As of mid-January, rooms were available for the weekend of April 28–30 at \$135 and \$143.

The Hamilton Crowne Plaza Hotel  
14th and K Street NW  
Washington DC 20005  
Telephone: 800-980-6429 or 202-682-0111  
Website: [www.crowneplaza.com](http://www.crowneplaza.com) or  
[www.ichotelsgroup.com/h/d/cp/1/en/hd/wasks](http://www.ichotelsgroup.com/h/d/cp/1/en/hd/wasks)

Another good hotel—our backup choice—is the Marriott Residence Inn. Room rate is \$149, with discounts available for seniors and others. We suggest you act promptly to get the most favorable room rates; expensive hotel rooms are the norm in Washington.

Marriott Residence Inn  
1199 Vermont Ave NW  
Washington DC 20005  
Tel: (888)236-2427 or (202)898-1100  
Website: <http://marriott.com/property/propertypage/WASDC>

**Contact:** When you have reserved your hotel room, please email Jeff Peterson with a copy to Joan Roberts so that we can keep track of who's coming, where you're staying, and when you plan to arrive. We'll get in touch about dinner plans and send you helpful printed material. You can also contact Jeff.

So, get those hotel reservations made at the best rates you can find, secure your play tickets, and join us for the 2006 East Coast Binge! We're looking forward to seeing many Wodehousians here in April.

—Joan Roberts, Binge Co-organizer  
—Jeff Peterson, CapCap's Fearless  
Leader and Binge Co-organizer

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*As we all know, P. G. Wodehouse was born on October 15, 1881, at 1 Vale Place, on the Epsom Road in Guildford, Surrey, when his mother was on home leave from Hong Kong. Today his birth house, which has a commemorative blue plaque above the front door, has been renumbered 59 Epsom Road. In early January I made the pilgrimage to Guildford, which is less than a one-hour train journey from London (leaving from Waterloo Station). Epsom Road is a right fork off the High Street if you travel northeast from the center of town, and number 59 will be on your left-hand side. Just before you reach the house, pay attention to a small alleyway also on your left. At some point within the past year (no one I spoke with seems to know quite when), the city gave the alley a name and a lovely road sign: Wodehouse Place.*

—John Graham

## Pay No Attention to the Natives

BY RAY STEEN

Those who intended to get around Los Angeles on their own for last summer's convention had to consider the expert advice: "Public transportation in Los Angeles is pretty bad." It was counseled that one should rent a car. Could be. On the other hand, I will describe my method. You judge for yourself.

I placed my faith in the Lonely Planet Los Angeles guidebook. In getting around in Bangkok and Manila, Jakarta and Rangoon, LP has never let me down. The soul of any guidebook is its maps. The LPLA has 19 excellent ones, bunched in the back, including "Map 19, Metro Rail System," in which the layouts of the Red, Blue, Green, and Yellow lines are presented. Elsewhere in the book, in "Getting Around," the bus system (MTA) is described—its fares, its toll-free phone number, and its website. So, having arrived in the city, I picked up the black hot-line phone.

"Where are you?" asked the Voice.

"Union Station," I answered.

"Where do you want to go?"

"UCLA."

"Hang on."

Presently she was back. "Take the Red Line to Vermont/Sunset and transfer to the No. 2 bus. That will take you to UCLA."

It did. For a buck and a half (old-age pension discount figured in), I was there in about 40 minutes. How can you beat that? It is just a shame that the No. 2 decanted me on the wrong side of the campus, which is only slightly smaller than the state of Rhode Island. The long, long scenic hike along the Bruin Walk, towing my big suitcase on its sturdy little rubber wheels behind me, took its toll. But a Wodehousian never complains.

It is fair to say that Lonely Planet is infallible for navigating in third-world cities.



# Collecting Wodehouse: To David from Plum

BY JOHN GRAHAM

One of the hallmarks—and highlights—of any serious Wodehouse collection is having at least one book inscribed by the Master himself. By that standard, Wodehouse's first biographer and bibliographer, David Jasen, must be judged to have accumulated the most enviable collection this side of Plum heaven, since he owned more than 100 inscribed copies. Not only are these books autographed by Wodehouse, but most are inscribed to Jasen, usually reading: "To David / from Plum / P. G. Wodehouse." The good news for the rest of us is that these books are now being offered for sale by New York book dealer Clouds Hill Books. Individual books range in price from \$200 up to \$15,000. To get a copy of the full catalogue that was issued this past December, you can telephone them at 212-414-4432 or email them at [cloudshill@cloudshillbooks.com](mailto:cloudshill@cloudshillbooks.com).

The collection is an embarrassment of riches and a remarkable record of a long friendship between Wodehouse and his Long Island biographer. It begins, appropriately, with a copy of Plum's first book, *The Pothunters*, inscribed to Jasen. All of the early school books are here in one form or another. Of particular note is *Mike*, which is a signed and dated presentation copy originally given by Wodehouse to L. H. Bradshaw, the young journalist and writer whom Plum befriended in 1909 on a visit to America. At \$1,500, this copy would be a bargain, save that it is heavily water-stained and described as "a good only copy," which is faint praise indeed in book-collecting jargon. In much better condition (but at 10 times the asking price) is Wodehouse's own leather-bound copy of *The Swoop!*, inscribed on the half-title page: "To / David / all the best / from Plum / P. G. Wodehouse." One of my favorite inscriptions appears on the U.S. first edition of *French Leave*: "To / David Jasen / all good wishes and / many thanks / for Tales of St. / Austin's. / P. G. Wodehouse / Dec. 2, 1959." To think that there was a time when Plum himself did not own a copy of his own third book!

The catalogue contains 46 full-color reproductions of dust jackets or book covers. Thankfully, Clouds Hill included pictures of two extremely rare dust jackets: a 1917 U.K. first-edition *Uneasy Money* and a 1919 U.S. first-edition *Their Mutual Child*. Even copies of these two books without their dust jackets are rarely seen; to find both books with near-fine dust jackets (and inscribed, in the case of *Their Mutual Child*) is extraordinary. Now for the bad news: In place of an asking price, both

items are simply listed as SOLD. I am told that the lucky (and no doubt well-heeled) buyer appeared on the scene long before the catalogue was ever printed.

To my mind, almost all of the books in this catalogue are fairly and reasonably priced, especially considering their provenance and unique inscriptions. Only one book of the lot strikes me as definitely overpriced: a 1961 first U.S. edition of *The Ice in the Bedroom*—inscribed on the front free endpaper: "Best wishes / P. G. Wodehouse"—which is offered for \$750. The reason I think this book is priced too high is that Wodehouse is known to have signed a large number of copies of this book with the identical inscription. Back in the 1960s, Chicago bookseller Kroch's and Brentano's (self-described as The World's Largest Bookstore) ran a mail-order book club offering its members a new book each month autographed by its author. In October 1961 their main selection was *The Ice in the Bedroom*, for which Plum signed 1,000 copies, according to Barry Phelps (on page 195 of *P. G. Wodehouse: Man and Myth*). Phelps fails to provide a source for this number, but I think it is a plausible estimate given the frequency with which copies appear for resale in book catalogues or on the internet. You should expect to pay about \$300–\$450 for a very good copy in dust jacket.

By the way, on a separate occasion, Plum also signed a much smaller number of copies of the U.K. edition, *Ice in the Bedroom* (which, as Charles Gould has noted, is a far better and more provocative title, thanks to the simple omission of the initial definite article). There is no copy of this inscribed book in the David Jasen collection, but there is one on my own bookshelf. The ink inscription reads: "Senile good wishes / from octogenarian / P. G. Wodehouse."

## *Yet More Delightful Poetry from Capital! Capital! (Haiku Category)*

*Telegram*

MATRIMONY LOOMS.

FATE'S DASHED FOOTBALL DASH IT. WHY?

PREUX BALLY DICKENS.

– Freda Kirkham

With Jeeves on the shelf

Quotes enliven family life,

Beds shake with laughter.

– Dorry Clevenger

# Psmith of Psherwood Pforest

BY C. P. WEST

*The third and final entry in the Great Wodehouse Movie Pitch Challenge, a big hit at the Hollywood convention last August, was submitted by one C. P. West of New York, a name we strongly suspect of being a pseudonym. Is it only coincidence that Mr. West bears a strong resemblance to NEWT Max Pokrivchak?*

## Psynopsis

Psmith (the P is silent, as in psalm, psuedoclassicism, and psychedelicatesen), the suave, thin, handsome hero of this action-adventure-swashbuckling romance, does something extraordinarily unique in modern American culture (and certainly in Hollywood): He steals from the *rich* and gives to the *poor*, rather than the other way around.

Psmith lives in Psherwood Pforest with a band of Merry Pschoolboys who spend their days carving cricket bats out of tree trunks and knocking each other off logs into streams. When they hear a stagecoach coming down the road from the castle, they hide in the trees and drop a net over the unsuspecting carriage. Psmith introduces himself, polishes his monocle, and points out the shortcomings of the feudal system as seen from the serf's point of view. He asks for donations to the local widows and orphans fund, and once the stage has been lightened of any cash, gold, and jewelry, he sends it on its way. When the soldiers come as they invariably do, Psmith and company vanish into the woods. Later they appear at various hamlets, distributing canned goods, clean socks, and umbrellas to the deserving masses.

Life passes in this pleasant fashion until Psmith's love interest, the fair Maid Halliday, is kidnapped by the evil Baxter, Psheriff of Pnottingham, and taken to Castle Blandings, where she is made to spend her days locked in the library cataloging its contents despite the topping weather outside the castle's thick stone walls.

Psmith, determined to free her, disguises himself as the Scottish bard McTodd to gain admittance to the castle. On the day of the annual village treat, held in the castle's courtyard, he summons his Merry Pschoolboys, led by his most trusted friend, Friar Mike. Psmith wagers Baxter that the Merry Pschoolboys can defeat Baxter's army of medieval thugs in a series of tests of strength, skill, and endurance, including a three-legged race, an egg-and-spoon race, and a pie-eating contest, with the prize being the hand of the fair Maid Halliday. Despite repeated attempts to nobble the events by the evil Baxter, Psmith and his Boys are neck-and-neck with Baxter's army going into the final contest.

In a thrilling conclusion reminiscent of such films as *Gladiator*, *Ben Hur*, and *My Dinner with André*, Maid Halliday is led, handcuffed, down to the cricket pitch, and a flowerpot is placed upon her head. An airgun is procured from the castle. Baxter and Psmith (still in disguise as McTodd) will each have one shot to try to knock the flowerpot from Maid Halliday's head, the victor winning her hand for eternity.

Baxter takes aim. As he is about to pull the trigger, Psmith wiggles his ear, a signal to Ern, the youngest and closest Merry Pschoolboy. Ern produces a peashooter and pots Baxter in the seat of the pants just as he fires, and the shot goes wide. Baxter is furious but reluctantly gives the airgun to Psmith as Maid Halliday breathes a sigh of relief.

Psmith, leaning the gun on his leg, reaches into his pocket and produces a monocle, which he ceremoniously polishes before putting it in his right eye. A gasp goes up from the crowd. "It's Psmith of Psherwood Pforest!"

"Psmith!" cries Baxter. "Get him!"

Psmith raises his gun and fires, nicking the rope holding up the castle gate. Maid Halliday takes her flowerpot and beans Baxter. Psmith grabs Halliday, and he and the Merry Schoolboys fight their way to the gate, rolling under it just before it slams down. Psmith, Halliday, and the Pschoolboys jump on the nearest horses and ride into the forest, as Baxter and his army pound the gate in frustration.

That evening, under the light of a silvery moon, Friar Mike clears his throat and declares, "We are gathered here this evening to join these two loving hearts in holy matrimony . . ." The camera pans back to reveal Psmith, monocle in place, and Maid Halliday, in silhouette. They kiss as the Pschoolboys raise their cricket bats in tribute. "Stagecoach coming!" Ern yells from his lookout perch. All of the Pschoolboys scamper to their positions in the trees. "Ah, Life," sighs Psmith contentedly as he pecks his bride on the cheek, stows his monocle, and climbs to lead his troops.

## Pcasting

Psmith of Psherwood Pforest: Matthew Broderick

The Merry Pschoolboys: The Flying Wallendas

Maid Halliday: Laura Linney

Friar Mike: John Goodman

Baxter, Psheriff of Knottingham: Antonio Banderas

Ern: Frankie Muniz (*Malcolm in the Middle*)

# In Search of Jeeves

BY KEN CLEVENGER

All homage to the Master, of course! But it is a well-known fact that when it came to phrases, plots, and characters, Mr. Wodehouse was no devotee of Polonius's advice to Laertes. Plum was a borrower. Just imagine how less rich the canon would be without the assists from the poet Burns, Shakespeare, the King James Bible, and the Anglican hymn book, or even *Types of Ethical Theory*.

I hasten to emphasize the improvement Wodehouse invariably brought to all he borrowed. And I stoutly defend the practice, in writing fiction, of using fond, albeit dim, memories whose exact roots are long forgotten. But as a borrower Plum exposes himself to having the sources of his memory fragments discovered.

An example of this concerns his great creation, Jeeves. Wodehouse himself says:

I find it curious, now that I have written so much about him, to recall how softly and undramatically Jeeves first entered my little world. . . . It was only some time later . . . that the man's qualities dawned upon me.

Doubtless, as Wodehouse scholars such as Barry Phelps have noted, Jeeves had many antecedents in literature and life. Indeed, Barry Day and Tony Ring quote Wodehouse in referring to the source of Jeeves as the antithesis of an English valet in an American novel he had read who was "all wrong"—"I think it was then that the idea of Jeeves came into my mind." Other sources for Jeeves have been cited—Harry Leon Wilson's *Ruggles*, J. M. Barrie's *Asquith*, *Pickwick's* Sam Waller, etc.—so I think adding one more won't go amiss.

Plum attended Dulwich College between 1894 and 1900 and was headed toward Oxford. Thus he was, from the age of 12 to 18, when memories are implanted and take deepest root, living in a world of competitive sports and games, schoolmasters, aunts and uncles, and bosom chums. The evidence is that at Dulwich he was scholastically able but more devoted to sports (although he learned to translate Greek and Latin authors well enough to remember them fondly later in life). Plum read voraciously everything that came to hand, whether it was short stories or a ripping new novel, one of those late-19th-century, moralizing, character-building tales. This novel might have been a gift; a tome borrowed from William Townend, his roommate; a library book;



or even a rare purchase with the pocket money given by an indulgent uncle after a well-behaved school holiday visit.

And so I posit this scenario: Plum, rushing through his Cicero or Aristophanes to settle down with a new novel of seafaring adventure by an American author with the honorable English name of Winston Churchill.

This Churchill was born in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1871 and graduated from the Naval Academy at Annapolis, Maryland, in 1894. He did not pursue a naval career, but he published his first novel, *The Celebrity*, in 1898. This was followed by *Richard Carvel* in 1899, *The Crisis* in 1901, *The Crossing* in 1904, and his last novel, *Coniston*, in 1906. He died in 1947.

*Richard Carvel*, I think, provides an interesting Wodehousian connection. It is not a bad read for a boy who likes stories of adventure, pirates, beautiful if haughty young women of class, "best buddy" girls who stick by a guy no matter what, dependable friends, and implausible imbroglios which all turn out well in the end. *Richard Carvel* was first published in 1899 by the Macmillan Company in New York and London. The hero, Richard Carvel—whose adventures take place at the time of the American Revolution—is the scion of a rich colonial American family with a devoted grandfather and curiously absent parents. There are also an evil aunt, feasts and dances, and love interests and rivals.

Carvel's adventures lead him to London, where he interviews applicants for a position as his manservant:

And out of them I hired one who had been valet to the young Lord Rereby, and whose recommendation was excellent. His name was Banks, his face was open and ingenuous, his stature a little above the ordinary, and his manner respectful.

Banks does not play a sustaining role in *Richard Carvel*, but what he does do, he invariably does inscrutably well for his young master. In this novel circumstances so contrive themselves (a “concatenation” I think is the word I am looking for) that Carvel finds himself in a “sponging house”—a private debtor’s facility where a bailiff would keep a gentleman until his debt had been paid. Broke, Carvel sends a letter to a source he hopes will supply the ready. But help arrives from an unexpected quarter, when Banks comes to him.

He was exceedingly neat in a livery of his old master . . . he thrust his hand inside his coat and drew forth a pile of carefully folded bank notes.

“I be a single man, sir, and has small need of this. And—and I knows your honour will pay me when your letter comes from America.”

And he handed me five Bank of England notes of ten pounds apiece. I took them mechanically, without knowing what I did. The generosity of the act benumbed my senses, and for the instant I was inclined to accept the offer upon the impulse of it.

“How do you know you would get your money again, Banks?” I asked curiously.

“No fear, sir,” he replied promptly, actually brightening at the prospect. “I knows gentlemen, sir, them that are such, sir. And I will go to America with you, and you say the word, sir.”

I was more touched than I cared to show over his offer, which I scarce knew how to refuse. In truth it was a difficult task, for he pressed me again and again, and when he saw me firm, turned away to wipe his eyes upon his sleeve. Then he begged me to let him remain and serve me in the sponging house, saying that he would pay his own way. The very thought of a servant in the bailiff’s garret made me laugh, and so I put him off, first getting his address, and promising him employment on the day of my release.

This vignette, I concede, is Jeevesian only in limited aspects. The language is stilted in its late-18th-century construction, and Jeeves, to my recollection, never supplied Bertie out of his own funds. On the other hand, Banks’s appearance is Jeevesian—correct to the nines. His motive is unclear to Carvel, just as Bertie frequently fails to see behind Jeeves’s schemes. Banks, too, knows the fundamental truth that a gentleman pays

his debts of honor, and above all he evinces loyalty: He will serve even in the sponging house, and he will go to America with him. That Banks shows some emotion is hardly Jeeves-like, but I suggest he is a prototype, yet to be issued in the Mark-2, improved Wodehousian model.

Can Banks be seen as a direct forerunner of Jeeves? Any loyal, correct English servant would perhaps have done as much as Banks and doubtless legions of such servants have been brighter than their employers. I therefore advance my final arguments.

Richard Carvel has a rival, the Duke of Chartersea, contending for the love of a rich and beautiful girl. The duke mistakenly thinks the hero is responsible for some foul play at Almack’s (a gambling club). At one point our young hero has a row with the r. & b. girl and goes walking blindly about London, winding up in a rough section of Drury Lane. He is attacked, and suddenly one of his assailants is flung down by somebody who cries out, “The watch! the watch!” (the 18th-century equivalent of “Cheese it, the cops!”), and the other toughs run off.

They vanished like rats into their holes at the shout, leaving me standing alone with him. The affair had come and gone so quickly that I scarce caught my breath.

“Pardon, sir,” he said, knuckling, “but I followed you.”

It was Banks. For the second time he had given me an affecting example of his faithfulness. I forgot he was my servant, and I caught his hand and pressed it.

“You have saved my life at the risk of your own,” I said; “I shall not forget it.”

As they leave, Carvel reflects on what has happened, promises Banks an increase in pay, and asks why the servant had followed him. Our model for Jeeves explains:

He had seen gentlemen in the same state, or something like it, before: his Lordship, his late master, after he had fought with Mr. Onslow, of the Guards, and Sir Edward Minturn, when he had lost an inheritance and a reversion at Brooks’s, and was forced to give over his engagement to marry the Honourable Miss Swift.

“Lord, sir,” he said, “but that was a sad case, as set all London agog. And Sir Edward shot hisself at Portsmouth not a se’nnight after.”



If this is not a case of Banks knowing the psychology of the individual, I don't know what is.

Carvel continues to ruminate until Banks asks if he can say something. He then comes out with a reference every Wodehousian will recognize:

“Your honour must know then that I belongs to the footman's club in Berkeley Square, where I meets all the servants o' quality—”

“Yes,” I said, wondering what footman's tale he had to tell.

“And Whipple, he's a hintimate o' mine, sir.” He stopped again.

“And who may Whipple be?”

“With submission, sir. Whipple's his Grace o' Chartersea's man—and you'll forgive me, sir—Whipple owns his Grace is prodigious ugly, an' killed young Mr. Atwater unfair, some think. Whipple says he would give notice had he not promised the old duke—”

“Drat Whipple!” I cried.

Could anything be clearer? If Banks's “footman's club in Berkeley Square” isn't Jeeves's Junior Ganymede club on Curzon Street, what is? I suggest that this is a very real possibility: Plum reads a novel in his schooldays, a memory lingers of a character, a role, a plot twist, a plausible form of *deus ex machina*, and later Jeeves materializes—shimmers up, so to speak.

The tale continues:

“I thank you again, Banks. I shall bear in mind your devotion,” I replied. “But I had nothing to do with sending the duke to Covent Garden.”

“Ay, sir, so I tells Whipple.”

“Pray, how did you know?” I demanded curiously.

“Lord, sir! All the servants at Almack's is friends o' mine,” says he. “But Whipple declares his Grace will be sworn you did it, sir, tho' the Lord Mayor hissself made deposition 'twas not.”

“Then mark me, Banks, you are not to talk of this.”

“Oh, Lord, no, your honour,” he said, as he fell back. But I was not so sure of his discretion as of his loyalty.

Banks and other faithful—and ingenious—manservants have appeared in literature for 2,000 years. But it seems only just to add him to the list of possible sources for

the original Jeeves.

I emphasize again that no borrowing can diminish Wodehouse's creation of Jeeves. Plum's felicity with language and his superlative images are why we love his writing. Plots repeat and characters reappear, but we do not tire of them. Why shouldn't there be “wheels within wheels” about Wodehouse and the sources of his works? The mindspring from which this wide river of prose flowed was so lively and refreshing in full flood that it is forever a source of sweetness and light, like Uncle Fred approaching a beautiful girl he intends to kiss on both cheeks. It is pure delight, and if, as I suggest, we can surmise another possible source for the immortal Jeeves, we are merely more grateful for the vastly improving hand of the Master.

## Your Obedient Servant

*Ray Steen came across the following PGW letter to The Times of London, 30 November 1937, in a book called Your Obedient Servant, published by Methuen. This letter has also appeared in The First Cuckoo, a collection of letters to The Times published by Allen & Unwin, and it has been published twice before in Plum Lines. For the benefit of our newer readers, we are pleased to print it again.*

Sir,

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

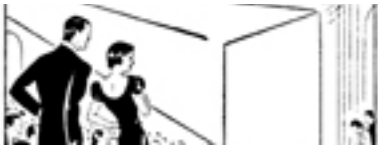
A fishlike face has always been hereditary in the Wooster family. Froissart, speaking of the Sieur de Wooster who did so well in the Crusades—his record of 11 Paynim with 12 whacks of the battleaxe still stands, I believe—mentions that, if he had not had the forethought to conceal himself behind a beard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

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

Your obedient servant,  
P. G. Wodehouse

# Answers to “The Maestro’s Beastly Similes”

1. **Roberta Wickham** tricks Ambrose into taking charge of two unpleasant boys for the afternoon.
2. **Chimp Twist** escapes from Lord Uffenham and hides in Eustace Trumper’s wardrobe.
3. **Penny Donaldson** blasts Jerry Vail for having stood her up to have dinner with another woman.
4. **Roderick Spode** apologizes to Bertie Wooster, thinking Bertie can blackmail him about Eulalie.
5. **Howard Saxby** as seen by Cosmo Wisdom on coming to see him about publishing *Cocktail Time*.
6. **Gussie Fink-Nottle** upbraids Bertie for refusing to prod Stiffy Byng’s legs to see if she has the small, brown, leather-covered notebook in her stocking.
7. **Lord Marshmoreton**, as described to George Bevan by a house agent.
8. **Dolly Molloy** threatens to expose Jeff Miller for impersonating J. Sheringham Adair, aka Chimp Twist.
9. **Uncle Fred**, impersonating Sir Roderick Glossop, is on his way to Blandings Castle when he meets the Duke of Dunstable.
10. **George Cyril Wellbeloved**, after getting tight at Blandings Castle, arrives with a note from Gloria Salt for Sir Gregory Parsloe-Parsloe.
11. **Jeeves** becomes discreet because he has confidential information about Uncle Percy’s plans for a merger between his Pink Funnel Line and an American shipping firm.
12. **Sir Raymond Bastable** says he’ll give Cosmo Wisdom the £200 he asked for.
13. **Nobby Hopwood** muses about her love for Boko Fittleworth.
14. **Sir Watkyn Bassett** in reply to Stiffy’s suggestion that he and Bertie had been having a nice talk. (Stiffy has forced Bertie into pretending he wants to marry her.)
15. **Bertie Wooster’s** description of Aunt Agatha.
16. **Aubrey Trefusis** tells Charlotte Mulliner of his love for animals.
17. **Sir Alexander Bassinger** is the head of Aubrey’s family.
18. **Bertie Wooster** on hearing Jeeves say he must lend his Sindbad the Sailor costume to Uncle Percy.
19. **J. Washburn Stoker**, although furious with Jeeves for releasing Bertie from the yacht, is soon tamed by Jeeves.
20. You’re on your own—let me know if you get it.
21. **Stiffy Byng**, in spite of her normal composure, gets flustered when she fears that the saintly Stinker Pinker might learn she is blackmailing Bertie through her possession of Gussie’s notebook.
22. **Jeeves** betrays no emotion on learning that Bertie has outwitted him by bringing his white mess jacket with the brass buttons to Brinkley Court.
23. **Bill Oakshott** has amazed Uncle Fred by the speed with which he dived under the seat as the train neared Ashenden Oakshott.
24. **Sir Aylmer Bostock** greets Pongo Twistleton in what he thinks is the voice of a cooing dove—but before he sees that Pongo has smashed his African whatnot.
25. **Pongo Twistleton and Sally Painter** have been sentenced to 30 days without the option for assaults on Constable Potter.
26. **Cosmo Wisdom** is nervous about asking his uncle, Sir Raymond Bastable, for £200.
27. The **Duke of Dunstable** as his nephew, Horace Davenport, describes him to Uncle Fred.
28. **Chimp Twist** disagrees with Soapy Molloy and Dolly about his cut for finding the diamonds.
29. **Lady Constance Keeble** has found Beach kissing Mrs. Bunbury, aka Maudie Stubbs, his niece.
30. **Claude Pott** sees a chance of getting money out of Oofy Prosser by running the Clothes Stakes.
31. **Aunt Agatha** would never have let Bertie hear the end of it if he had failed to deliver a brooch to her stepdaughter, Florence Craye.
32. **Jeff Miller** learns that Anne Benedick has already looked for the diamonds in the stuffed antelope head in the study of the fearsome Mrs. Cork.
33. **Agnes Flack**, described by the Oldest Member as she crosses the links.
34. **Uncle Tom** after he learns that he owes £58 1s 3d in income tax.



# 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.



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



Phone:  
Email:

Anglers' Rest met in downtown Seattle on January 28. Folks from all over the Puget Sound region got out their inflatable boats and managed to paddle their way in. (Seattle had one of its wettest Januaries ever, including 29 straight days of rain!) We gathered at the Elephant & Castle restaurant, which not only served "British food" but was discovered to have a Wodehousian theme in the false books covering a door in our section—an entire shelf of "Plum Tales!" We toasted PGW and friends not in attendance, and we gave away prizes for readings. Stu Shiffman, our speaker, graced us with a lovely reading of his paper on *Laughing Gas*. We learned about child stars, literary themes re switching bodies, and many other interesting subjects. The reading was well received, and we look forward to more work from Stu (and other members) in the future.

Anglers' Rest was joined by members of "Somewhere in Time," a local group that enjoys wearing period costumes. We also welcomed a few new folks who found us via the Internet. Barbara Combs did a marvelous job on the mailing as well as organizing the event, and we hope to see everyone back in April, when we will all perform a reading (to be selected soon). We will be back at the Elephant & Castle, this time mingling in the spacious billiards room.

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



Phone:  
Email:

A meeting was held at Ed and Missy's home among the redwoods of Felton on December 11, 2005. Beginning at noon with a potluck lunch, the afternoon was devoted to memories, pictures, and videos from the August L.A. convention, including the prefilmed portion of the "Hollywood Comes to Blandings" skit. One of the rewards of hosting a convention, once all the hard work is done, is indulging in postconvention nostalgia and basking in the rosy glow of success.

**The Broadway Special**  
(New York City and vicinity)  
Contact: Amy Plofker

Email:



*The Broadway Special gathers round.*

On the brisk evening of Friday, December 2, 2005, members of The Broadway Special met in the Card Room of The Players Club in Manhattan's Gramercy Park South (the room that houses a card table donated to the club by Mark Twain) for a spirited discussion of *A Damsel in Distress*. Conversation touched upon such topics as Plum's attitude regarding the English aristocracy, his work as commerce versus social commentary, the extent to which men more than women become moonstruck over the opposite sex, and the curse of the name Ichabod. Of course, this catalogue scarcely describes the witty and broad-ranging repartee

that characterized a thoroughly delightful convocation. Desirous of confronting one of the Master's fruitiest classics, The Broadway Special next met at The Players on January 27, 2006, for a discussion over cocktails of *Right Ho, Jeeves*. In an important plot twist, Philip Shreffler and Amy Plofker switched roles as president and vice president after two and a half years, and Young Amy will now guide us into our future. It is impossible to summarize the wildly animated and erudite explosion of conversation that consumed more than two solid hours, except to say that we paused only to refresh our drinks—and once to turn out all the lights in the Card Room in order to marvel at the novelty Luminous Newt. The Special will meet again in March to consider *Uncle Fred in the Springtime* and, of course, on May 6 for a matinee performance of *Oh, Lady! Lady!!*

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



Phone:  
Email:

The finest minds of the Buck-U-Uppo Bottling Company have decided to meet twice a year: spring and fall. The exact date of the next meeting, which will be in May, has yet to be hammered out.

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



Phone:  
Email:

The Capital! Capital! gang gathered at the Panevino Restaurant in downtown Washington, D.C., on February 19 for a buffet dinner followed by a dramatic reading of part of Ferenc Molnar's *The Play's the Thing*, adapted by Wodehouse. Many thanks to our own Col. Ken (The Beak) Clevenger for selecting 38 passages from the play and arranging them to be read aloud. For the event, chapter members were divided into seven characters, a narrator, and a sound-effects man on one side of the footlights, and into an unruly crowd of unreasonable critics and hecklers on the other. Any similarity between legitimate theater and Capital! Capital!'s goofy affair was strictly long-shot odds.

Capital! Capital! is also steaming along with its plans

to host the TWS East Coast Binge on Saturday, April 29, here in our nation's capital. We will probably have a wine-sipping event. Attending a matinee performance of *The Play's the Thing* and enjoying a memorable dinner together are on the Binge agenda. Attendees will still have time for visiting monuments and museums on their own. So think D.C. in springtime! (For further details, see page 11.)

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



Phone:  
Email:

After the rigours of the holidays and a national election, members of Capital F.O.R.M. are finally able to turn their attention to the truly important things—in particular, how best to inject a little Wodehouse into our tired old world. To this end, a meeting will take place in mid-February at the home of member Ann MacDonald, where discussion will centre around the theme of animals and pets . . . our own and those found in Wodehouse. This dovetails nicely with the fact that we are heading into the Year of the Dog. In keeping with our policy of fitting the food to the mood, Megan Carton's dog Aurora will be loaning her bone-shaped cookie cutter to ensure that even the refreshments convey a measure of canine versimilitude. Ah, yes, it's the little things. . . .

And while we're talking about things that dovetail nicely, we should also mention a highlight of our fall meeting, Chris Carton's reading of his short essay exploring a "What If" scenario that paired *The Catcher in the Rye's* Holden Caulfield with the world of Blandings. Using Holden's voice, he presented an almost alarmingly plausible scenario, picking up where *Catcher* left off and linking those disparate worlds via Freddie Threepwood. Holden's take on the "phoniness" of the English butlers he encounters is a classic—very entertaining stuff. Well done, Chris!

**Chapter One**  
(Greater Philadelphia area)  
Contact: Susan Cohen



Phone:  
Fax:  
Email:

At our November meeting we signed a sympathy card to send to Carolyn Pokrivchak, whose husband had recently died. Carolyn is one of our most fervent Wodehouse fans and we all look forward to seeing her at future meetings. We were delighted that the ever-entrepreneurial Barbara Van Hook had gotten the local Nordstrom's to send us, free of charge, silver key chains with *Nordstrom* engraved on them, each dangling a gorgeous high-heeled shoe in miniature. Just the sort of thing Minna would have worn. Barbara also gave us gorilla glue, gorilla glue stickers, and Gorilla Munch Cereal. Patrick Hinchy, a guest at the meeting, then spoke about a planned tour of sites relating to Wodehouse's German episode. (See page 4 for details.) The high point of the meeting was the excellent read-aloud of the 1970s *Paris Review* interview with Wodehouse, starring Will Jordan as the interviewer and Herb Moskowitz as Wodehouse.

At the January meeting we collected money to readopt our newts at the Philadelphia Zoo, as we do every year. We also cheered on Bob Gordon for his different disguises. The man is a positive master when it comes to the false nose and fake hair. Burns Day would soon be upon us, so Dan Cohen toasted the poet in Burns's own immortal words, "Freedom and Whiskey Gang Together." Since the theme of the meeting was "Favorite Villains in Wodehouse," Dan segued into his choice of villain: the Prohibitionist Senator Opal, a man who voted one way and drank another. The Chaps came up with a very interesting assortment of villains: Percy the Cat, orange of body, inky of soul; the evil Princesse von und zu, etc.; the cold, cruel father John Bannister from *The Coming of Bill*; all five aunts of *The Mating Season*; Jas Waterbury, the greasy bird himself; and the swan from "Jeeves and the Impending Doom." We will meet again on March 26.

### The Chicago Accident Syndicate

(Chicago and thereabouts)

Contact: Daniel & Tina Garrison

Phone:

Email:



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



Phone:

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 Clients of Adrian Mulliner gathered in the Helen Hayes Room at the Algonquin Hotel on January 14. We began with a discussion of pig-stealing—methodology, not morality—in which a number of techniques were discussed. Perhaps the most practical was that, since pigs will follow food anywhere, all that is really needed is a large supply of apples. We followed this discussion with an impassioned reading of Robert L. Fish's "The Return of Schlock Homes," adapted for our use by Marilyn MacGregor. Our next gathering will be next January; till then, we hibernate.

### The Drone Rangers

(Houston and vicinity)

Contact: Toni Rudersdorf

Phone:

Email:



We meet every month, alternating the meetings so that one month we dine out together and the next month we hold a book meeting. At the book meetings, which take place at Barnes & Noble on Westheimer at Voss, we have two reports. One is about the book of the evening, the other is about "something Wodehouse." On the winter book meeting schedule was *Ring for Jeeves*. We browse and sluice at dinner meetings and share views, some of which are about daisy chains and some of which are not. A dinner meeting was held Saturday, January 28, at the Raven Grill on Bissonnett. Carey Tynan brought a delicious chocolate Berkshire pig for the Drone Rangers' dessert. Very tasty!

It was a busy winter season. In addition to our regular meetings, we had several delightful outings, including a

swell New Years Eve party at Susan and David Garrett's. The champagne flowed. We attended the Gershwin musical *Pardon My English* early in January, and later in the month went to see William Powell and Myrna Loy in *The Thin Man* at the Museum of Fine Arts. We planned to gather at Toni and Bill's house on February 11 to celebrate our "Remember Plum" bash, going on to the Continental Club for an evening of singing and dancing afterward.

### The Flying Pigs

(Cincinnati area and elsewhere)  
Contact: Susan Brokaw



Phone:  
Email:

Our second meeting was held on Sunday afternoon, January 22, at the Mariemont Inn, located on Wooster Pike (OH 50) in Mariemont. We commandeered a cozy nook furnished with overstuffed chairs and sofas arranged around a fireplace with logs ablaze, and browsed and sluiced while we shared our first Wodehouse experiences with one another. John Dial brought along what is sure to become a mascot of sorts, a cast-iron doorstop shaped like (and nearly as heavy as) a pig. We also welcomed three new members; one couple has a daughter named Honoria. It was a delightful evening, and we look forward to meeting again in April, time and date yet to be determined.

### The Mottled Oyster Club / Jellied Eels

(San Antonio and South Texas)  
Contact: James P. Robinson III



Phone:  
Email:

The San Antonio chapter of TWS continues to meet monthly on the second Thursday of each month (except when we don't). We have a split personality: March, May, July, September, and November find the Jellied Eels assembling at a local eatery-slash-watering hole, which we work mightily to tie in with PGW or his works in sometimes very obscure ways, while in April and every other month thereafter we gather as the Mottled Oyster at Barnes and Noble. Last November we had a Guy Fawkes Day celebration, complete with roast pilgrim, and in December the Oyster competed in an impromptu name-that-short-story contest for

prizes of the Infant Samuel at Prayer. We have lots of lighthearted fun together and would love to add to our roster.

### The New England Wodehouse Thingummy Society

(NEWTS – Boston and elsewhere in New England)

Contact: Anne Cotton, president

Phone:  
Email:

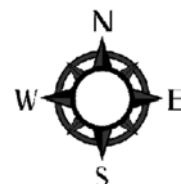


We NEWTS held our annual Christmas bash, as is now traditional, at Charles and Dorothy Swanson's clubhouse. We indulged in the usual feasting, drinking, and making merry, exchanging some marvelous gifts. But we did not actually read aloud either of the two Wodehouse stories we had hoped to get to because, instead, we did our initial reading of the script of our next NEWTS skit in preparation for Providence 2007. At our next meeting we will get down to casting specific roles for the revised and polished script, and the serious rehearsals will begin. It's going to be a somewhat simpler staging than some of our past epics, but anyone who watches with a straight face is no true Plummie. That next Nottle will be held on Saturday, March 18, *chez* John and Lisa Fahey. If you are not yet a NEWT but would like to attend, please email Anne Cotton at the above email address.

### The Northwodes

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

Phone:  
Email:

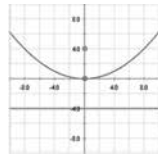


In a delightful interplay of food and fiction, the Northwodes collaborated with the Friends of the University of Minnesota Libraries in sponsoring a Wodehouse dinner on January 26. The theme came from Bertie's fantasy meal in *The Code of the Woosters*. The menu was delicious and elegant, although not actually including *timbale de ris de veau Toulousaine*. Afterward, police helmet and all, the Northwodes read aloud an excerpt from the book, adapted by Kris Fowler. The readers did their stuff with brio: Dick Sveum (the tuxedoed announcer and butler), Chris Larkin (Bertie), Dave Fritz (Jeeves), Angie Meyer (Stiffy Byng), Mike Eckmann (Sir Watkyn Bassett), Bonnie Sample (Aunt Dahlia), and Terry d'Souza (Spode). The

performance was a big hit, inspiring the uninitiated to read Wodehouse and those already familiar with the master's works to read more. Displays from the university's library focused on Wodehouse's musical-comedy achievements as well as other aspects of his work. We handed out plenty of bookmarks featuring TWS's website and The Basic Wodehouse Library List. We hope the bookmarks spread the word about Wodehouse and bring the Northwodes new members. It was all great fun, a worthy return on investment, as we'd spent a busy few months augmenting our book discussions with rehearsals. We can rest from our labors till our next meeting scheduled for Sunday, March 26.

**The Pale Parabolites**

(Toronto and vicinity)  
 Contact: Peter M. Nixon  
 Email:



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



Email:

**The Perfecto-Zizzbaum Motion Picture Corporation**

(Los Angeles and vicinity)  
 Contact: Melissa D. Aaron  
 Phone:  
 Email:



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. We also occasionally attend events of interest, such as the Avalon Ball on Catalina Island, an Art Deco dance in the fabulous Casino, and the Lanterman House Tea, a ragtime era event. We go to 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



Phone:

Email:

**The Size 14 Hat Club**

(Halifax, Nova Scotia)  
 Contact: Jill Robinson  
 Email:



**The Soup & Fish Club**

(Northern Virginia area)  
 Contact: Deborah Dillard



Phone:

Email:

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 convince them to let her give presentations on the master's works to their students, and often tackles other projects to spread the word about Wodehouse. Since the summer reading season looms, Deborah, or Mary if you prefer, will go into her practiced Plum Pitch in an attempt to get a handful of Wodehouse's book on the Beach Reads list of the local library system's quarterly publication.

**Ties Still Available**

President Pighooey tells us that there are still a few classy Drones Club ties available for purchase. This delightful neckwear is handmade of pure silk, with black, gold, and plum-colored stripes. Prices in *U.S. dollars*, including postage and packing, are as follows. 4-in-hand: \$42 in the United States and Canada, \$47 outside North America. 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.

## Dues Reminder to All Members

At the Los Angeles convention last year, the Board reluctantly voted to raise the dues because of the increased costs of . . . well, just about everything since 1997, the last time dues were increased. Therefore, as TWS president Jean Tillson announced in the Autumn 2005 issue of *Plum Lines*, dues for membership in the Society are being increased to \$25 (U.S.) per year. For new members, this rate took effect as of January 1; for existing members, the increase will be reflected in spring renewal statements.

## Raffle Status!

For those who have entered the *Wodehouse Playhouse* DVD Raffle advertised in the last two issues of *Plum Lines*, please note that the lucky winners will be announced in the next issue. That's right, we said "winners"—there will be more than one!

## Volunteer Officers & Plum Lines Staff

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Jean Tillson

Membership Secretary (new-member inquiries,  
contact information changes):  
Amy Plofker

<http://www.wodehouse.org/cgi-bin/twsinquiry/>

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