

The quarterly journal of The Wodehouse Society

Volume 28 Number 2 Summer 2007

Large, Amiable Englishman Who Amused the World

BY DAVID MCDONOUGH

Recently I read that doing crossword puzzles helps to ward off dementia. It's probably too late for me (I started writing this on my calculator), but I've been giving it a shot. Armed with several good erasers, a thesaurus, and my wife no more than a phone call away, I've been doing okay.

I've discovered that some of Wodehouse's observations on the genre are still in vogue. Although the Egyptian sun god (Ra) rarely rears its sunny head, the flightless Australian bird (emu) is still a staple of the old downs and acrosses. In fact, if you know a few internet terms and the names of one hockey player (Orr) and one baseball player (Ott), you are in pretty good shape to get started. I still haven't come across George Mulliner's favorite clue, though: "a hyphenated word of nine letters, ending in k and signifying an implement employed in the pursuit of agriculture."

I was sitting down with my local paper's Sunday puzzle the other day. Sunday, I think it was. One of the first clues was "Poet of The Enormous Room" (e. e. cummings) and another was, "He created Philo Vance" (S. S. Van Dine). I began to have hope. "It has to be coming up," I thought, and sure enough, after "Shropshire Lad poet" (A. E. Housman) and before "British essayist" (V. S. Pritchett), there it was: "Bertie Wooster's creator."

So that, you would think, was that, and satisfying enough for one man's Sunday. But then I got interested. What words were intertwined with P. G. Wodehouse (or, as he was known to the puzzle's author, "74 across")? I concentrated solely on the right-hand corner of the page and found that, with a little effort, I could relate all the words that connected to "74 across" to the Wodehouse canon.

The first was easy. The clue for 62 down

was "sires," and the answer was "begets." In *Right Ho, Jeeves* (aka *Brinkley Manor*, 1934), Gussie Fink-Nottle interrogates G. G. Simmons, the prizewinner for Scripture knowledge at the Market Snodsbury Grammar School presentations. Gussie, fortified by a liberal dose of liquor-laced orange juice, is suspicious of Master Simmons's bona fides.

"... and how are we to know that this has all been open and above board? Let me test you, G. G. Simmons. Who was What's-His-Name—the chap who begat Thingummy? Can you answer me that, Simmons?"

"Sir, no, sir."

Gussie turned to the bearded bloke.

"Fishy," he said. "Very fishy. This boy appears to be totally lacking in Scripture knowledge."

Number 63 down asked for "suburban greenery," and the answer was "lawns." No problem. Many Wodehouse stories are set in Valley Fields, that suburban Mecca of London, where "more lawns are cultivated, more green fly squirted with whale oil solution and more garden rollers borrowed than anywhere else south of the Thames." (*Company for Henry*, 1967)

Number 50 down's clue was "Umiak rowers," which proved to be "Eskimos." Wodehouse was familiar with the reading habits of these citizens of the North: "In New York you may find every class of paper which the imagination can conceive. . . . If an Esquimau [sic] came to New York, the first thing he would find on the bookstalls in all probability would be the Blubber magazine, or some similar production written by Esquimaux for Esquimaux." (*Psmith Journalist*)



World Amuser (with Jed)

Children in the Works of P. G. Wodehouse

BY ANN STONE

Ann presented this splendid paper at a Capital! Capital! gathering on October 22, 2006; it was, according to chapter president Jeff Peterson, “joyously received by listeners.” Ann herself notes: “I want to acknowledge the enormous debt which I owe to Robert McCrum. Without his elegant biography of Wodehouse, I can assure you that this little parlor piece would never have gotten off the ground.”

The received wisdom among Plummies seems to be that children in the works of Wodehouse are for the most part loathsome blots on the fairway of life—a notch above taxes, perhaps, and less morally reprehensible than aunts, but still something along the lines of a sunburned neck or the weightier German philosophers. From my own readings I’d say that’s pretty much the case, although many of his literary progeny have highly redeeming qualities, and all play critical, and at times quite dramatic, roles in advancing those exquisite creations which we know as Wodehouse plots.

To fully appreciate the way children are presented in the works, I suppose one should go back to the early life of Plum himself. On this point, however, I must issue a firm *nolo prosequi*. Robert McCrum’s graceful portrait gives the reader excellent food for thought on this point, and I cannot do better than refer you to him.

Let us start with what we know of the adult Plum’s relationships with children. First honors must, of course, go to his stepdaughter Leonora, who was nine years old when he married Ethel in 1914. Three years later Plum dedicated *Piccadilly Jim* to Leonora and called her “the most wonderful child on earth.” At the risk of dipping my toe into “the psychology of the individual,” I can’t help but thank the stars that there existed such a warm and loving relationship between this child with no father and this man with virtually no mother. We are told that in later years, the pathetic spectacle of Bertie visiting a girls’ school was inspired by Plum’s own visits to Leonora. This perhaps gives us new insight into the young terrors described in the oeuvre and enlists at least a portion of our sympathy for the helpless students as well as for the hapless Bertie. And if Frank Muir and Robert McCrum are to be believed—and I believe them fervently—the ending to “Lord Emsworth and the Girl Friend” has five-year-old Gladys slipping her little hand into that of Lord Emsworth, in what McCrum describes as “one of the rare, and lyrical, expressions of

Number 56 down asked for a word meaning “covered with ivy”; the answer, “vined.” Ah, yes. Ivy-covered cottages abound in the small towns of Shropshire. One movie theater, The Electric Palace in Market Blandings, is described as “an ancient ivy-covered building.”

Number 51 down’s clue was “tooth.” In this case, the answer was “canine.” Dumb chums alert! Wodehouse characters have met many four-legged fiends who can only be described as tough eggs: “[The Alsatian] fixed Freddie with a cold, yellow eye and curled its upper lip slightly, the better to display a long, white tooth. It also twitched its nose and gave a sotto-voce imitation of distant thunder.” (“Goodbye to All Cats,” *Young Men in Spats*, 1931)

Number 64 down wanted “a thin serving.” As every Dickens fan knows, the answer is “gruel.” Ebenezer Scrooge loved his gruel, that thin, cheap source of dubious nutrition. Mr. Cook, in *Aunts Aren’t Gentlemen* (1974) is so stingy that Orlo Porter would have had more luck “. . . if I was trying to get money out of a combination of Scrooge and Gaspard the Miser.”

Number 65 down asked for a “nave feature.” That’s an “aisle.” So many churches in Wodehouse to choose from, so little time—unless the Rev. Heppenstall is preaching. In *Cocktail Time* (1958), the Bishop of Stortford delivers a sermon denouncing the title novel (“He that toucheth pitch shall be defiled”), and he had “the fashionable congregation rolling in the aisles and tearing up the pews.”

Number 66 down was “molding,” and the answer was “ogee.” Plum once wrote a song called “Oh Gee, Oh Joy!” (No, it’s not a reach, and what if it is?)

Number 75 down wanted the “1944 Nobel Chemist.” A tough one. Otto Hahn (1879–1968) was, obviously, a renowned chemist. He studied at University College London in 1904, where he was a close friend of that eminent young man about town, P. G. Wodehouse. Okay, that’s a lie. But Hahn did discover a new element in 1905, radiothorium, which I maintain, with no proof whatsoever, but purely for the heck of it, is the basis for Willie Partridge’s explosive, partridgite, in *Piccadilly Jim* (1918). He also discovered uranium Z and nuclear fission and warned against atomic weaponry publicly in 1955, 1957, and 1958. Doubtless, this was the basis for the protest in which Bingo gets involved in “Bingo Bans the Bomb” (1965). Let’s put it this way—can you prove I’m wrong?

There is only one logical conclusion to all this. It’s Wodehouse’s world. We are all just trying to solve it.

“Pitch-fork, sweetheart,” said George,
“. . . [and] agriculture isn’t the only
thing it is used in pursuit of.”
“The Truth About George” (1929)

unfettered emotion in Wodehouse's works." If one thinks, as I do, that almost all of Wodehouse somehow, some way, springs from the author's genuine experience, where else could we look but to Leonora for this touching scene?

Going back even earlier, in 1902 Plum had dedicated his first book, *The Pothunters*, to three lively Bowes-Lyon girls, ages 10–13, at whose house he occasionally took tea and with whom he enjoyed an avuncular relationship. One can readily appreciate the appeal of such undemanding and innocent company to a young man of Plum's character and tastes.

The fun-loving Bowes-Lyon girls had a cousin, Elizabeth, who later became queen and, along with her daughter, the future Elizabeth II, was an avid fan of the Master. One hopes that during the terrors and privations of World War II, these two occasionally found a brief respite, and perhaps even inspiration, in the sunny tales of Emsworth, Jeeves, and Mr. Mulliner.

At that same time, across the Channel, Wodehouse was in the midst of the great crisis of his life in the most improbable of circumstances. Yet he would again become an avuncular figure when, after his release from internment by the Nazis, he lived at the country estate of a German widow. He became "Uncle Plummie" to his hostess's 10-year-old daughter, and in their walks and games, the two of them seemed to create a tiny Blandings of their own.

You will note that all of these young persons were of the female persuasion, and this may signal something of the comparative favoritism with which Wodehouse treats our charming sex, at least during childhood's happy hour. However, there is at least one encounter on record with a young gentleman, who later became a well-known author himself. Robert Graves in his autobiographical *Goodbye to All That* describes the experience. After noting that he and his siblings were kept painfully short of pocket money by their high-minded Victorian parents, Graves writes:

The first distinguished writer I remember meeting after Swinburne was P. G. Wodehouse, a friend of my brother Perceval, whom he later gently caricatured as "Ukridge." Wodehouse was then in his early twenties, on the staff of "The Globe," and writing school stories for "The Captain" magazine. He gave me a penny, advising me to get marshmallows with it. Though too shy to express my gratitude at the time, I have never since permitted myself to be critical about his work.



Loathsome blot and a great lot of fun

Let us examine the lovely nature of our Plum, who went about offering treasured coin and excellent advice to the younger brothers of his friends. Plum knew what mattered to a five-year-old and delivered the goods. Here, I think, we see the glimmerings of so many future stories in which fashionable young men find their perfectly tailored trousers at high risk from the sticky fingers of sweet-eating youngsters. Graves may have given us Claudius, but Plum gave us Bertram Wooster. I'd hate to do without either, but in a pinch I'd take Bertie any day.

Childhood in Wodehouse seems to me a sort of parallel universe in which the doings of the boys or girls is of immense importance as they commit themselves fully to their pursuits, but which is really rather distinct from the world of the adults. Those worlds collide, of course—sometimes violently. We have air-guns, explosions, fire, attempted poison, and the odd pushing into the lake. But the worlds are, as was probably the case in Edwardian times, run on different lines. Children populate Wodehouse rather freely, but they are there in service to an adult world of teas and racing and golf and engagements and pig raising that is really quite apart from their own interests and experience.

The great service they perform, of course, is to advance the plot. Their contributions may be fairly incidental, albeit spectacular, as when Edwin the Boy Scout blows up Bertie's fireplace in *Joy in the Morning*. They may be of considerable importance, as when Bertie's cousin Thomas strands a Cabinet minister in the middle of the lake in "Jeeves and the Impending Doom." And they may be center stage, as when Peggy Mainwaring and her giggling companions bring Bertie to his senses in "Bertie Changes His Mind." Sometimes, it is true, the younger set lend a touch of local color to the proceedings, as in the Beautiful Babies competition on the French Riviera or the prize distribution at Market Snodsbury Grammar School. But even there, their reason for existence is plot rather than atmosphere. If a pretty girl's younger brother is mentioned, apparently in passing, on page 3, we can be sure that by the final clinch he will have been a vital force in either fixing up the right couples or sorting out the wrong ones.

Although I have emphasized, I hope correctly, the plot motif over all others, the question naturally arises whether Wodehouse ever presents his younger characters in the light of "father to the man" or "mother to the woman." I think the reader can make some good assumptions on that point, and we are occasionally assisted in such speculations by the author. Thus, when Bingo Little stoutly proclaims that any son of his would naturally want

to put his wee savings account at his father's disposal for a sporting venture, we glimpse a truly interesting future for little Algernon Aubrey. And when Bertie joins forces with Bobby Wickham's little red-haired cousin in "Jeeves and the Kid Clementina," one trembles for the young men of the coming generation, all quite innocent of the ball of fire who will be waiting for them on the debutante circuit in just a few short years. We might add to these the interesting character sketches from "The Love that Purifies." Young Master Moon, of course, has the repulsive golden curls and goggle eyes that surely presage a manhood characterized by the writing of tone poems. Then comes Aunt Dahlia's "ordinary selling-plater" of a son, Bonzo, who represents the bulldog spirit of England, giving of his best and warming his loving mother's heart. Finally, inevitably, we meet young Thomas, the ghastly product of a merciless aunt. Agatha's son—he who callously marooned a Cabinet minister in the middle of a lake with fierce swans craning for a chunk of his leg—is described as "a thug" and "a scourge of humanity." It sounds like Aunt Agatha on steroids, and if he makes it to adulthood, watch out.

Now, if I may, a special word about "infants." I don't know about you, but the first thing I think of when one says "infants" and "Wodehouse" in the same sentence is Aunt Dahlia hurling a statuette of the Infant Samuel at Prayer into the fireplace, in an excess of honest emotion. Might one see a metaphor lurking here? Plum has rather a thing about infants. He doesn't see much point to them—at least his characters don't—unless they are, like young Algernon Little, in a position to finance a few quid on Hot Potato in the seventh at Hyde Park. Quoted from McCrum, here is Freddie Widgeon's reaction to infants in *Young Men in Spats*:

It would be paltering with the truth to say that he likes babies. They give him, he says, a sort of grey feeling. He resents their cold stare and the supercilious and up-stage way in which they dribble out of the corner of their mouths on seeing him. Eyeing them, he is conscious of doubts as to whether Man can really be Nature's last word.

This is just one man's point of view, of course, but Plum milks it over and over throughout his long and glorious career. We have platoons of plug-ugly kids in Beautiful Baby contests. We have coppers exclaiming over how hideous their infant progeny are. We have . . . well, you get the drift.

I'd like to close with a brief tribute to a few of the many stories that feature children in a particularly prominent way. Among my top picks are:

- "Fixing It for Freddie," in which Bertie, in a bungled

attempt to help a pal with the girl he loves, kidnaps a small child from the seashore. Wodehouse constructs the story almost like a small play, with scene settings, directions to characters, and a marvelous punch line which the star eventually manages to blurt out . . . that, of course, being "Kiss Fweddle!"

- "The Love that Purifies," which pits Aunt Dahlia's half-decent son Bonzo against Thomas, a fiend in human shape and the loathly offspring of Aunt Agatha, in a competition for a good conduct prize.
- "Jeeves and the Kid Clementina," which has Bertie "leaping from branch to branch in a garden belonging to Aunt Agatha's closest friend."
- "Noblesse Oblige," which has Freddie Widgeon judging a Gallic Peasant Mothers Baby Competition.
- "Crime Wave at Blandings," which has Lord Emsworth's young grandson George potting the ghastly Baxter with an air-gun, only to have Lord Emsworth himself, the formidable Lady Constance, and even the dignified butler Beach taking potshots at the unsuspecting.
- The rather unexpected "Jane Gets off the Fairway," in which there is an actual marital breakup—but one that is repaired by a mother's horror at seeing her son holding a mashie the wrong way. Almost too late Jane recognizes the solid worth of her humdrum husband compared to the smooth but shallow Rodney Spelvin.
- And my personal favorite, although it's not as fully imbued with children as many others, "Jeeves and the Impending Doom," which features the redoubtable Aunt Agatha, the terrifying Thomas, the priggish Cabinet minister, the angry swan, the ever-accommodating Bertie, and the inestimable Jeeves.

In sum, children abound in Wodehouse. They are "excrescences," they are loathsome, they are masses of sticky sweets, they are susceptible to nobbling in sporting ventures, they pot governesses in the backside, they giggle at young men addressing them in school assembly—and they are in all their manifestations a great lot of fun.

Small girls as a rule . . . are inclined, when confronted with me, to giggle a good deal. They snigger and they stare. I look up and find their eyes glued on me in an incredulous manner, as if they were reluctant to believe that I was really true.

"Jeeves and the Kid Clementina" (1930)

Incarcerated in Wodehouse

BY KEN CLEVENGER

I suppose a confession is in order. I once sat, as we law-birds say, as a beak. Specifically, if you must know, I beaked as a military court-martial judge. And blinded as I was by what Wodehouse calls, in *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit*, “the awful majesty of Justice,” I visualized a beakdom as a pure and noble undertaking. But with the leisure of retirement to delve more deeply into the Wodehouse canon, I now realize the error of my ways.

Beaks play a key role in the Wodehouse oeuvre, and it is usually not a kindly role. Beaking, more or less, involves the firm suppression of anything in the nature of rannygazoo and occasionally of mere youthful high spirits. Wodehouse’s Wooster and his pals, sprightly lads and ladies though they may be, are occasionally subjected to the rigors of the law. Indeed, many of Plum’s characters have run afoul of the law at the cost of some guineas or even time in the coop.

For example, allegations of, and apprehensions for, stealing policemen’s helmets are nearly a commonplace. Bertie Wooster and Oliver Randolph Sipperley spring to mind in re this particular crime. But crime in Wodehouse encompasses the whole range of human frailty, from conspiring to assault a policeman to the actual execution of said assault with a dangerous weapon—to wit, a cosh or rubber bludgeon. We also read of dog-napping, “effecting burglarious entry,” and outright theft, all perpetrated by gentlemen, gentlemen’s personal gentlemen, and even by otherwise good and deserving aunts.

Viewing the canon as a “rap sheet,” even as unlikely a criminal cove as Gussie Fink-Nottle finds himself in stir for hunting newts in the fountains in Trafalgar Square one happy night. And Bertie, acting with his usual swift intelligence and “exercising certain latitude as regards the details,” was arrested at least three times that we know of and nabbed once for impeding an officer of the law in the execution of his duties. This crime, unless you know it sprang from the pure motives of a *parfait gentil preux chevalier* attitude, would sound a trifle serious to the law-abiding public. Many lesser crimes, other than female-induced theft, assault and battery, blackmail, and extortion, also feature in the Master’s works.

In “Without the Option,” Vera Slipperley, clearly a hardened criminal, fails to abate a smoky chimney, exceeds the speed limit in her automobile, and allows her dog to



appear in public without a collar. She thereby incurs the inevitable summoning by a flint-hearted constable to see justice imposed by a beak. This one-woman crime wave challenges even the profligacy of Stiffy Byng, whose dog, in *The Code of the Woosters*, bedevils Constable Oates so incessantly and whose own moral laxness would tempt a curate to crime.

But be they high crimes or only minor misdemeanors, we beaks must take a rather dim view of such riotous behavior (at least outside the confines of the Drones Club). It is as the accused Byng herself correctly observes concerning her beaky uncle, Sir Watkyn Bassett: “You can’t choke a man off magistrating, once it is in his blood.” So hereinbelow is a beak’s peek at a few cases from the Wodehouse criminal files accompanied by a few remarks from the bench.

My favorite tale of beakdom involves Bertie’s escapade that lands him in durance vile in *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit*. Doubtless from biased motives, the beak in this story is harshly described as “a twenty-minute egg with

Beaking, more or less, involves the firm suppression of anything in the nature of rannygazoo.

many of the lovable qualities of some high-up official of the Spanish Inquisition.” But, I say! We magistrates have feelings too. This Solon of Vinton Street engages Bertie in a dialogue about “stretches” and “fines”

that make him the envy of every magistrate. The witty repartee Wodehouse gives his characters far exceeds the give-and-take in any court in my experience; indeed, I never found real-life courtroom dialogue to be anywhere near the Wodehouse level; rather more distinctly C3, in fact. Of course, I must also confess contributing more than my fair share to the verbal dross.

A close run for second place in my catalogue of Wodehouse beaks would be the magistrate in the short story “Without the Option,” wherein we find Oliver Sipperley in chokey, or, as Bertie puts it, “jugged for biffing a cop.” The protagonist, being less practiced than Bertie in the exercise of such elementary precautions as giving a false name, appears before the beak as Leon Trotzky, clearly an alias. Summing up old Sippy’s sins superbly as “aggravated acts of ruffainly hooliganism” which “can not be overlooked or palliated,” the Boshier Street beak puts Mr. Sipperley in quod for 30 days. Quite right, too!

We are left to speculate on the identity of the Boshier Street beak in this story, but we know Pop Bassett sat on

that bench sometimes. That is the same Sir Watkyn Bassett of whom his niece, the female menace S. Byng, not without justice herself, says: “I don’t think the man understands the A B C of justice.”

I suppose that young hellion merely means the magistrate embodies a “stern remorseless Justice of the Peace,” as Esmond Haddock is described in *The Mating Season*. In this close-run-to-place favorite novel, the admirable beak steps up and does the morally correct thing in the face of intense public pressure, or at least in the face of the considerable pressure of five resident aunts. The story is complex. Suffice it to say that Jeeves, to facilitate true love all around, assaults Constable Dobbs with a truncheon. Later Jeeves provides a dubious, if not totally false, alibi when Dobbs, with a suspicious and bruised mind, brings his accusations before the JP, looking—the JP, I mean, not the constable—“like Judge Jeffreys about to do his stuff.” E. Haddock, JP, being of the live-and-let-live school of judicial philosophy, and astutely noting the weakness of the constable’s evidence, shows himself to be a very fair-minded interpreter of the law. His ability to overcome his first impulse and the public clamor to imprison either “Mr. Wooster,” who is actually the apparently inveterate miscreant Fink-Nottle, or Claude “Catsmeat” Pirbright, aka Meadowes, is a valuable lesson for all magistrates. Study the evidence carefully, use your authority judiciously, and keep the rozzers in check.

It is true, as Esmond Haddock says, that the first duty of a beak is to “put it across the criminal classes when they start getting above themselves.” Still, as Shakespeare, whose best bits rival the Master’s, once said, “the quality of mercy is not strained.” And a beak, speaking from my own experience, is indeed often urged to be clement and merciful, at least by the man in the dock, on that very principle. But not every Wodehouse beak is so wise, just, and clement as E. Haddock, JP. The usual beak in Wodehouse is much more like a picnic egg, “cold and hard.” In addition to Sir Watkyn Bassett and the Vinton Street police court beak, there is the New York City judge who presumably bungled up Wilmot, Lord Pershore, for assaulting a cop. This hypothetical beak ignored the clear evidence of self-defense as the cop, who was understandably mistaken for a postman, had assaulted his Lordship first. It gives more than a tinge of truth to what Bertie says about beaks: “When a fellow hasn’t the brains and initiative to sell jellied eels, they make him a magistrate.” And I have merely leaped randomly from beak to beak in the Master’s work to collect these examples.

But for their outstanding contributions to the plots, the fictional crime sprees and the Wodehouse beaks’ bench behavior might cause one to wonder about Plum’s fundamental attitude toward the judiciary. Indeed, when

one notes his legal conflicts with several sovereign tax authorities and the occasional deprecation, if not actual flaunting, of quarantine and other Customs regulations, a beak might even be inclined to elevate an eyebrow a tad and tut at the Master. Of course, we have Wodehouse’s own assertion that a trying personal experience in his youth (he was arraigned before a tribunal of aunts for turnip stealing) was “what has given me the respect for the law which I have always had.”

So we may rest assured that our true hero is the *ne plus ultra* creator of a make-believe world who introduces the occasional legal imbroglio to set the stage for the consequent splendid dialogue and denouement. As Richard Osborne noted in *Sunset at Blandings*, Wodehouse obviously had an “irreverent fondness for the law.”

Wodehouse On Stage

We’d love to hear of upcoming productions of Wodehouse-related plays. Please send them along as soon as you hear of them! Also, if you or someone chooses to write a review of a production, we’d very much like to consider it for publication in Plum Lines.

In San Francisco, the **42nd Street Moon Theatre** is staging a production of *Oh, Lady! Lady!!* from November 23 to December 16. Visit <http://tinyurl.com/35argv> for more information. Our own **Neil Midkiff** has offered to review the show.

And from Tucson, Arizona, comes word that the **Top Hat Theatre Club** will be enacting *Come On, Jeeves* May 6 through June 2. The THTC is located at 3110 E. Fort Lowell Road, and (groups, pay attention!) discounts are available. For more information, call the theatre at 520-326-6800.

Farewell to Ray Steen

We’ve received word that Ray Steen, the leader of the Portland chapter of The Wodehouse Society, passed away on April 11, 2007, after a brief illness. Ray was a fine fellow and frequent contributor to *Plum Lines*. He will be greatly missed, and glasses will be raised to his memory at Providence this fall.

The Canine Connection

Can it really be a year since *Capital! Capital!* sent us this quiz from the 2006 Binge? (For a report of the Binge, see the Summer 2006 Plum Lines). Editorial Apologies abound! We're in the doghouse . . . Anyway, *Capitalist Ann Stone* writes: "Needless to say, the resulting shower of brilliance, *éclat* and general knowledge of the *œuvre* was most impressive. Prize-giving being a perilous venture in the world of PGW, we decided on a totally random method of selecting winners. All entries were deposited in Anatole's toque, and those whom fortune favored had their names drawn by the lovely Freda Kirkham. Prizes all had a canine theme and ranged from chocolate Aberdeen terriers to a bottle of Mad Dog red wine. No French peasant mothers were observed to be glaring at us from the back of the room, so we think we can say that things went fairly well. One must give credit to our intrepid Binge coordinator, Joan Roberts, for thinking up the idea for a quiz and for suggesting a canine theme. The concept was to honor our animal-loving Plum (of course), and also to recognize the Chinese Year of the Dog. A most felicitous concatenation of circumstances." For answers, see page 18.

1. *The Code of the Woosters* introduces us to a "stout, moonfaced policeman on a bicycle" who has not yet realized that he is being "chivvied—in the strong, silent, earnest manner characteristic of this breed of animal—by a fine Aberdeen terrier." The ensuing collision sends the policeman into a ditch, with the terrier "looking down at him with that rather offensive expression of virtuous smugness which I have often noticed on the faces of Aberdeen terriers in their clashes with humanity." The owner of the offending—or offended—

- Florence Craye
- Madeline Bassett
- Honorita Glossop
- Stiffy Byng



2. Gussie Fink-Nottle, that peerless newt fancier, met Madeline Bassett when:
- she was out walking her dog and the dog had got a thorn in its foot.
 - her fox terrier was investigating a vat with Gussie's newts in it.
 - there was a mix-up over quarantine regulations in the customs sheds of New York.
 - Madeline's Peke had gotten into Aunt Dahlia's picnic basket.
3. In *The Return of Jeeves*, Jill Wyvern reminisces that,

as a young girl, she had attended Monica and Rory Carmoyle's wedding. Her job there was to:

- walk Aunt Agatha's Pomeranian.
- hide a Peke underneath Bertie's top hat.
- keep the dogs from jumping on the guests, as it was raining and they all had muddy paws.
- prevent the foxhounds from chewing on the bride's train.

4. From *The Butler Did It* comes the information that greyhounds are called greyhounds because:

- regardless of later coloring, their coats always have a silvery hue at birth.
- grey is the old English word for badger, and greyhounds were used in hunting the badger.



- they were first bred at the ancestral home of the Grey family.
- an ancient Mulliner, Sieur de Grai, brought them over with the Conqueror.

5. Again from *The Butler Did It*, we note that dirty work is afoot. George the bulldog is slipped a piece of doctored meat so that private detective Percy Pilbeam can:

- retrieve the earl's letters to a chorus girl.
- restore Aunt Agatha's pearls to the safe.
- switch an early English silver cow creamer for one that is Dutch.
- purloin the contract giving Augustus Keggs, retired butler, 100,000 of the ripest for inside information on the Bayliss Matrimonial Tontine.

6. "I know what that is. That is my sister's poodle. He has a sensitive skin, and he is like the young lady of Natchez who said: 'Where Ah itches Ah scratches.' Are you fond of dogs, sergeant?" In this gripping passage from *The Old Reliable*, Wilhelmina Shannon is attempting to divert the Hollywood police from:

- arresting Bertie for impersonating a bookie.
- issuing a summons for failure to abate a smoking chimney.

- c) investigating strange noises in the projection room, where the butler has been sent to crack the safe.
- d) unmasking a business tycoon dressed up as Mephistopheles.
7. In “Jeeves and the Impending Doom,” one of Bertie’s pals reveals that “At the last moment before she sailed to America, Rosie decided that I had better stay behind and look after the Peke. She left me a couple of hundred quid to see me through till her return. This sum, judiciously expended over the period of her absence, would have been enough to keep Peke and self in moderate affluence. But you know how it is.” The speaker is:
- Barmy Fotheringay-Phipps.
 - Bingo Little.
 - Offy Prosser.
 - Stilton Cheesewright.
8. “The Ordeal of Young Tuppy” gives us the heart-searing tale of a young gentleman who risks life and limb in a local rugby match to win the affections of Miss Dagleish, otherwise known as the dog-girl. Tuppy’s devotion is shaken, however, when the young lady bypasses his heroics to rush off in search of:
- an Irish Water Spaniel.
 - a Pekingese.
 - a Sealyham.
 - a Pug.
9. Taking the big, broad, flexible view, Stanley Featherstonehaugh Ukridge established a dog college for the purpose of:
- training Dalmatians for fire house duty.
 - educating dogs to perform on the music-hall stage.
 - polishing the manners of foxhounds.
 - teaching bloodhounds to ferret out loose change.
10. Ukridge puts a dog—“a large mongrel with wild eyes and flashing fangs”—in Teddy Weeks’s bedroom in what story?
- “Buttercup Day”
 - “Ukridge’s Accident Syndicate”
 - “A Bit of Luck for Mabel”
 - “Ukridge and the Old Stepper”
11. Smallwood Bessemer soars over a railing and plunges into the water below. “Rising quickly to the surface and clutching out for support, he found himself grasping something wet and furry. For an instant, he was at a loss to decide what this could be. It had some of the properties
- of a sponge and some of a damp hearthrug. Then it bit him in the fleshy part of the thumb and he identified it as Celia Todd’s Pekingese, Pirbright.” This passage comes from:
- a Drones Club story.
 - a golf story.
 - a Mulliner story.
 - none of the above.
12. In “The Awakening of Rollo Podmarsh,” young Lettice is inspired by the fate of her family’s dog Ponto to:
- try to poison her uncle’s evening arrowroot.
 - spike the lemonade at the village school treat.
 - place a luminous rabbit in the bishop’s bedroom.
 - raise the fire alarm at 2 A.M.
13. When a rough, hairy dog trees the bishop in “Mulliner’s Buck-U-Uppo,” our hero-curate Augustus:
- summons the constable.
 - joins the bishop in the tree.
 - utters a hollow laugh.
 - pots the animal with a well-aimed rock.
14. In “Came the Dawn,” the stout-and-mild in the corner has just spoken of “a favorite dog of his which, entered recently by some error in a local cat show, had taken first prize in the class for short-haired tortoiseshells.” The moral of the ensuing tale is:
- You get what you pay for.
 - Never trust a bookie.
 - You never can tell.
 - None but the brave deserve the fair.
15. In “Portrait of a Disciplinarian,” Frederick Mulliner explains to Jane that he had been wining and dining an actress at the Berkeley in order to:
- buy the actress’s Pekingese as a surprise for Jane.
 - apologize to the actress for running over her pug with his two-seater.
 - conduct research in connection with a forthcoming dog show.
 - exchange a stolen Aberdeen terrier for one belonging to his former nanny.
16. In “Open House,” Eustace Mulliner is given the care of the canary and the Peke belonging to the girl he loves. As fate would have it, the dog:
- slips his lead while being walked by Blenkinsop, the valet.
 - is taken off to Paris by Mulliner’s previous girlfriend.
 - becomes the star of a major motion picture.
 - goes into a near-fatal decline.

the favor of Nobby's guardian by trying out some highly questionable Joke Goods at lunch.

17. In a delightful combination of canine references, we read in "Clustering Round Young Bingo" that Bertie exhibits the "good old bulldog courage of the Woosters" as he surreptitiously creeps into the Little home, yet succumbs instantly to the harrowing experience of finding that a shaggy corner of the carpet is actually a Pekingese with a terrific bark. Some solution other than burglary must be found for Bingo's predicament. This predicament occurs because:

- a) Bingo has wagered his infant son's money on a loser in the fourth at Cheltenham Downs.
- b) Bingo's lady-novelist wife has authored an article titled "How I Keep the Love of My Husband-Baby."
- c) Bingo has lost his job at *Wee Tots*.
- d) Bingo has inadvertently committed bigamy with a waitress named Mabel.

18. As is well known in the dog-stealing industry, the secret to getting dogs to follow you is to:

- a) employ a high-frequency whistle.
- b) chirrup to them softly while holding out a bone.
- c) sprinkle the trousers with aniseed.
- d) imitate a cat and run very fast.

19. In a particularly striking canine image, Aunt Dahlia refers in "Jeeves and the Greasy Bird" to certain "frank and fearless young novelists" who are "devils on paper, but put them up against a girl who doesn't come out of their fountain pen and their feet get as cold as a dachshund's nose." The novelist in question is:

- a) Blair Eggleston.
- b) Roderick Spode.
- c) Lucius Pim.
- d) A. B. Filmer.

20. In *Joy in the Morning*, Boko Fittleworth has been told precisely where he gets off by the girl of his dreams (Zenobia "Nobby" Hopwood). Utterly shattered by the experience, and sorely in need of strengthening stimulants, he advises Bertie that "One should always carry a flask about in case of emergencies. Saint Bernard dogs do it in the Alps. Fifty million Saint Bernard dogs can't be wrong." The reason for Nobby's Vesuvian eruption?

- a) Boko has been discovered kissing Florence Craye in the garden.
- b) Boko did not have the nerve to steal the portrait of J. Chichester Clam from the dining room.
- c) Boko has lost the only copy of Nobby's latest novel.
- d) Boko has made a cloth-headed attempt to win

21. "If there was one person he had been wanting to meet, it was somebody with an inside knowledge of the Chateau Blissac, somebody who would give him the low-down on its *personnel*. More than anything else, he desired to know how well off for dogs the place was. On one occasion in his career his most careful plans had been wrecked by a wholly unforeseen Pekingese." These are the prudent sentiments of:

- a) Percy Pilbeam, private investigator.
- b) Soup Slattery, master safe-cracker.
- c) Stilton Cheesewright, sometime constable.
- d) Steggles, nobbler of contest favorites.

22. Patricia, the vigilant Pekingese in *Quick Service*, barks to the heavens when she spies Lord Holbeton attempting to steal Mrs. Chavender's portrait from the breakfast room, and bites him on the ankle. Patricia's delicate sensibilities have been outraged by:

- a) the loud and vivid pattern on Lord Holbeton's dressing gown.
- b) the poor quality of provender afforded by the hall's kitchens.
- c) the smug airs taken on by Lord Holbeton's cat.
- d) Lord Holbeton's nervous rendering of "Trees."

Gradually it would get so that anybody in a decent social position would be ashamed to be seen out with a non-Ukridge dog.
"Ukridge's Dog College" (1923)

Plums for the Picking

TWS Member and proud Iowa resident **Linda Young** writes: "My friend—bless his heart—told me about a website called www.librivox.org and I immediately fell in love. With the website, not with him. This website has audio books that are in the public domain that you can download for free! I downloaded *Love Among the Chickens*. Others available are *My Man Jeeves*, *Psmith in the City*, *Right Ho, Jeeves*, and *When Papa Swore in Hindustani*. Others might find this interesting as well, and the price is certainly right!"

Books and Articles about P. G. Wodehouse

BY TONY RING

Here is the third and final part of a talk given at the Hooray for Hollywood! convention in Los Angeles in August 2005. At the end is a full list of books and articles that Tony discussed in his talk.

Although it is not the primary purpose of this paper to describe anthologies of Wodehouse material, it is within its scope to mention two recent publications. *P G Wodehouse: In His Own Words*, compiled by Barry Day and Tony Ring, was published by Hutchinson and Overlook Press. Its objective was to tell Wodehouse's life story by quotation from his fiction, letters, lyrics, and other material, using linking text to guide the reader from one quotation to the next.

The second was also compiled by Barry Day. *The Complete Lyrics of P G Wodehouse* appeared in 2004 after a long confinement and represents by far the most comprehensive research ever undertaken into Wodehouse's musical comedy pedigree. Reproducing well over 300 lyrics, published and unpublished, the text places them in the context of the shows in which they appeared and clearly demonstrates the skill with which they were written.

It is important to mention two books which were deliberately created as collections of essays affectionately describing the feelings of the various writers to all aspects of Wodehouse's work.

Homage to Wodehouse, published in 1973, was edited by Thelma Cazalet-Keir, a family member and former government minister. It includes 11 essays by such luminaries as Sir John Betjeman, Malcolm Muggeridge, and Sir Compton Mackenzie.

Rather more spectacular in appearance is *P G Wodehouse: A Centenary Celebration, 1881–1981*, edited by James Heineman and Donald R. Bensen and published by Oxford University Press. Over a foot high, and nine inches wide, it has endpapers comprising some 20 illustrations of cartoon Wodehouse characters created by Peter van Straaten. It features 25 essays by Alec Waugh, Isaac Asimov, Benny Green, and others.

For many decades publishers have been turning to other eminent authors and personalities to write introductions for, generally, reprints or anthologies of Wodehouse stories. They represent a category of writing in their own right, as they have not generally been separately published. Those I have traced were listed in the March 2005 edition of *By The Way*, published by The P G Wodehouse Society (UK).

Turning now to essays and articles published in

their own right, we find they may be divided into two categories. The first consists of a small group which were published individually, in pairs, or as a threesome by James Heineman, the greatest-ever Wodehouse collector until his death in 1994, who published a substantial volume of Wodehouse material through his own publishing company, generally in limited print runs of 500. In this capacity, he reprinted a number of talks given by eminent Wodehouseans: *Dr Sir Pelham Wodehouse – Old Boy*, an address given by Richard Osborne at the opening of the P G Wodehouse Corner in the Library of Dulwich College in 1977; *P G Wodehouse 1881–1981*, addresses by Frances Donaldson and Richard Osborne at the Centenary Exhibition at the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York; *The Toad at Harrow*, an address by Charles E. Gould, Jr.; and *Three Talks and a Few Words at a Festive Occasion*, addresses given by Angus McIntyre, Richard Osborne, William Douglas-Home, and Malcolm Muggeridge when the Centenary Exhibition was transferred to London.

And now for a selection of the more important articles about Wodehouse published in the traditional newspaper and magazine market. The earliest attempt to write an appreciation was L. H. Bradshaw's "Impressions of P G Wodehouse," which appeared in *The Captain* in March 1910, when Wodehouse was still under 30 and his output had been more or less restricted to a schoolboy market.

"The Popularity of P G Wodehouse" by Augustus Muir appeared in the *Strand* in February 1927, and "P G Wodehouse at Home" by Leonora Wodehouse, his stepdaughter, appeared in January 1929. This was the first of three articles conveying her impressions of life with Plum and her mother, Ethel. The other two were "What His Daughter Thinks of P G Wodehouse" in the *American Magazine* in October 1931, and "P G Wodehouse: A Brilliant Chums Reader" by Toye Vise, a staff writer for *Chums* whose attempt to interview Plum in 1933 became, instead, largely an interview with Leonora.

Hilaire Belloc had caused a stir by referring to Wodehouse on radio as "the best writer of English now living," and he sought to explain his views in detail in *John O'London's Weekly* in August 1940. (According to Wodehouse, this praise had worried Hugh Walpole, who asked Wodehouse what he thought Belloc meant by it. Receiving no reply, Walpole added, "Ah, well, the man's getting very old.")

John Hayward was a noted critic and Cambridge scholar who had already published "P G Wodehouse and the Edwardians" in the *Spectator* in 1935, when he contributed an essay to *The Saturday Book, 1941–1942*

which is commendably long and informative. His papers at Cambridge University Library include the draft of one of Wodehouse's early dramatic sketches, "After the Show," and a flawed attempt to list the members of the Drones Club.

The next group of articles which need to be mentioned are connected to the infamous broadcasts made from Berlin in July 1941. George Orwell's "In Defence of P G Wodehouse," first appearing in *The Windmill* in 1945, has been reprinted since in a number of Orwell essay collections. The essay is written from a philosophical stance, its cavalier treatment of some less critical facts demonstrating its journalistic origins. Undoubtedly the thrust of what Orwell wrote offered comfort and balm to those unwilling to believe the bile emanating at the time from the popular press, which contained much more serious errors of fact. The texts of the broadcasts themselves appeared in *Encounter* in 1954 and were reprinted with Iain Sproat's commentary, "Wodehouse's War: The Two Texts of the Berlin Broadcasts" in the same journal in 1982.

Also relevant to this topic are articles by two eminent authors. Evelyn Waugh's "Act of Homage and Reparation" appeared in the *Sunday Times Magazine* on July 16, 1961, being described as the text of "last night's broadcast by Mr Waugh in the Home Service." Weeks later Malcolm Muggeridge, who had been the first MI5 officer to interview Wodehouse in Paris when the war ended, expressed his opinion in "The Wodehouse Affair" in *The New Statesman*.

Returning to articles biased more towards Wodehouse's writing, John Aldridge wrote "P G Wodehouse: The Lesson of a Young Master" in 1958, reprinted as the introduction to an American anthology *Selected Stories by P G Wodehouse*. It was followed in 1959 by the lengthy "The Antecedents of P G Wodehouse" by Lionel Stephenson in the *Arizona Quarterly*. And, while engaged in research for his two books, Geoffrey Jaggard found time to contribute "P G Wodehouse and the Immortals" to *The Listener* on May 30, 1963.

The next major event was Wodehouse's 90th birthday in October 1971. Most of the quality papers carried celebratory articles, and John Le Carré's "Well Played, Wodehouse" in *The Sunday Times* on October 10, 1971, is a good example.

Just as Jaggard wrote an article whilst engaged in his researches, so did Richard Osborne. Amongst his original articles were two for *Blackwoods*: "My Blandings Castle" and "P G Wodehouse's Family of Fiends" (not "friends" as McIlvaine suggests). *Blackwoods* also published Norman Murphy's "The Real Drones Club."

Shortly before Wodehouse's death in 1975, there was a spate of requests for interviews with him, many of

which were rejected. Gerald Clarke was fortunate, the result being his "Checking in with P G Wodehouse: Notes in Passing on a Life Still in Progress," which appeared in the men's magazine *Esquire*. He followed this up with an article in *The Paris Review* in 1975. Also favored was Robert Robinson ("Of Aunts and Drones: P G Wodehouse Talks to Robert Robinson" in *The Listener*, October 1974).

Another unlikely source for a detailed article on Wodehouse is the *South Atlantic Quarterly*. Its Autumn 1978 issue featured "Another 'Last Victorian': P G Wodehouse and His World," a 20-page piece by David Cannadine considering Wodehouse's approach and seeking to justify the thesis that Wodehouse could indeed be regarded as the last Victorian.

Research into Wodehouse's work led to further articles by Norman Murphy such as "Blandings Revisited: The Topography of P G Wodehouse" and "Bertie Wooster's London," each of which can be found in *Country Life* in 1984; and Richard Osborne, with "New Wodehouse Material: Letters and Notebooks of his Apprentice Years" in *Encounter* in 1985.

Since the centenary of Wodehouse's birth in October 1981, there has been no reduction in the volume of articles, original or repetitive, appreciative or critical, factually accurate or a travesty of misinformation, which have been written about the 20th century's greatest humorist. Essays by serious philosophers such as Roger Kimball ("The Genius of Wodehouse," *The New Criterion*, October 2000) and Anthony Quinton ("P G Wodehouse and the Tradition of Comedy" in *From Wodehouse to Wittgenstein*, 1998) have considered his place in the philosophical hierarchy. Articles of interest to collectors have regularly appeared in *Book and Magazine Collector* as well as *The Antiquarian Book Review* and the *American Book Source Monthly*. And as the journals of the various Wodehouse Societies worldwide include many learned pieces in their pages, there is no sign of the flood receding.

The scope and variety of books and articles I have referred to makes it difficult to recommend a select few to represent fairly the man and his work in an average collection. For the enthusiast, there is no doubt that the McIlvaine *Bibliography* is essential, but Osborne's *Wodehouse at Work to the End* has a comprehensive list of books and theatrical productions adequate for most reader-collectors, and it is still the most respected literary analysis of Wodehouse's fiction. No other biography demonstrates the sheer research, scholarship, and succinct analysis to be found in McCrum. To complete a small representative collection, I would add French (*P G Wodehouse*), Morris (*Thank You, Wodehouse*), and Murphy (*In Search of Blandings*).

Books and Articles about P. G. Wodehouse from Tony Ring's Talk

Books Mentioned in the Text

| | | | |
|------|---|-------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 2001 | <i>Addendum to McIlvaine</i> | ed Tony Ring | IWA |
| 1991 | <i>After Hours with P G Wodehouse</i> | Richard Usborne | Hutchinson |
| 1970 | <i>A Bibliography and Readers' Guide to the First Editions of P G Wodehouse</i> | David A Jasen | Archon Books, USA |
| 1986 | <i>(Extended edition)</i> | | Greenhill Books |
| 1968 | <i>Blandings the Blest</i> | Geoffrey Jaggard | Macdonald |
| 1993 | <i>Bolton and Wodehouse and Kern</i> | Lee Davis | Heineman |
| 1974 | <i>The Comic Style of P G Wodehouse</i> | Robert A Hall, Jnr | Archon Books, USA |
| 2004 | <i>The Complete Lyrics of P G Wodehouse</i> | Barry Day | Scarecrow |
| 1973 | <i>Homage to Wodehouse</i> | ed Thelma Cazalet-Keir | Barrie & Jenkins |
| 1981 | <i>In Search of Blandings</i> | N T P Murphy | Private |
| 2004 | <i>The Novel Life of P G Wodehouse</i> | Roderick Easdale | Superscript |
| 1979 | <i>P G Wodehouse</i> | Joseph Connolly | Orbis |
| 1982 | <i>P G Wodehouse</i> | Frances Donaldson | Weidenfeld & Nicolson |
| 1966 | <i>P G Wodehouse</i> | R B D French | Oliver & Boyd |
| 1966 | <i>P G Wodehouse</i> | Richard Voorhees | Twayne Publishers |
| 1981 | <i>P G Wodehouse: A Centenary Celebration 1881-1981</i> | ed Heineman and Bensen | Oxford University Press (Hard cover) |
| 1981 | <i>P G Wodehouse—A Comprehensive Bibliography</i> | ed Eileen McIlvaine | Heineman |
| 1977 | <i>P G Wodehouse: A Critical and Historical Essay</i> | Owen Dudley Edwards | Brian & O'Keefe |
| 1981 | <i>P G Wodehouse: A Literary Biography</i> | Benny Green | Michael Joseph |
| 2001 | <i>P G Wodehouse: In His Own Words</i> | Barry Day and Tony Ring | Hutchinson |
| 1992 | <i>P G Wodehouse: Man and Myth</i> | Barry Phelps | Constable |
| 1975 | <i>P G Wodehouse: Portrait of a Master</i> | David Jasen | Garnstone Press |
| 2006 | <i>P G Wodehouse and Hollywood: Screenwriting, Satires and Adaptation</i> | Brian Taves | McFarland & Company |
| 1988 | <i>The Penguin Wodehouse Companion</i> | Richard Usborne | Penguin |
| 2002 | <i>Plum Sauce</i> | Richard Usborne | Ebury Books |
| 1981 | <i>Thank You, Wodehouse</i> | J H C Morris | Weidenfeld & Nicolson |
| 1979 | <i>The Theatre of P G Wodehouse</i> | David A Jasen | B T Batsford |
| 1987 | <i>Who's Who in Wodehouse</i> | Daniel Garrison | Peter Lang |
| 1989 | <i>(Extended edition)</i> | | International Polygonics, USA |
| 2004 | <i>Wodehouse: A Life</i> | Robert McCrum | Viking (UK); Norton (US) |
| 1981 | <i>Wodehouse at War</i> | Iain Sproat | Milner & Co |
| 1961 | <i>Wodehouse at Work</i> | Richard Usborne | Herbert Jenkins |
| 1976 | <i>Wodehouse at Work to the End</i> | Richard Usborne | Barrie & Jenkins |
| 1981 | <i>A Wodehouse Companion</i> | Richard Usborne | Elm Tree Books |
| 1980 | <i>Wodehouse the Fictionist</i> | M N Sharma | Munakshi Prakashan |

| | | | |
|---------|--|--|--------------------|
| 2006 | <i>A Wodehouse Handbook</i> | N T P Murphy | Popgood & Groolley |
| 1992 | <i>Wooster Proposes . . . Jeeves Disposes</i> | Kristen Thompson | Heineman |
| 1967 | <i>Wooster's World</i> | Geoffrey Jaggard | Macdonald |
| 1972 | <i>The World of P G Wodehouse</i> | Herbert Warren Wind | Praeger |
| 1995 | <i>You Simply Hit Them with an Axe</i> | Tony Ring | Porpoise Books |
| | Millennium Wodehouse Concordance | ed Ring and Jaggard | Porpoise Books |
| 1994 | <i>Wodehouse in the Clubhouse</i> | | |
| 1995 | <i>Wodehouse at the Anglers' Rest</i> | | |
| 1996 | <i>Wodehouse Goes to School</i> | | |
| 1997 | <i>Wodehouse among the Chickens</i> | | |
| 1998 | <i>Wodehouse at Blandings Castle</i> | | |
| 1999 | <i>Wodehouse in Woostershire</i> | | |
| 2000 | <i>Wodehouse with Old Friends</i> | | |
| 2001 | <i>Wodehouse with New Friends</i> | | |
| | Addresses Mentioned in the Text | | |
| 1982 | <i>P G Wodehouse, 1881–1981</i> | Donaldson & Usborne | Heineman |
| 1977 | <i>Dr Sir Pelham Wodehouse—Old Boy</i> | Richard Usborne | Heineman |
| 1983 | <i>Three Talks and a Few Words on a Festive Occasion</i> | McIntyre, Usborne, Douglas-Home & Muggeridge | Heineman |
| 1982 | <i>The Toad at Harrow</i> | Charles Gould | Heineman |
| | Articles Mentioned in the Text | | |
| 1958 | <i>New World Writing</i> No 13 | <i>P G Wodehouse: The Lesson of a Young Master</i> | John Aldridge |
| 1958 | <i>Selected Stories</i> | | |
| 1940 | <i>John O'London's Weekly</i> , August 30 | <i>Homage to Wodehouse</i> | Hilaire Belloc |
| 1910 | <i>Captain</i> , March | <i>Impressions of P G Wodehouse</i> | L H Bradshaw |
| 1978 | <i>South Atlantic Quarterly</i> , Autumn | <i>Another Last Victorian</i> | David Cannadine |
| 1974 | <i>Esquire</i> , May | <i>Checking in with P G Wodehouse</i> | Gerald Clarke |
| 1935 | <i>The Spectator</i> , November 8 | <i>P G Wodehouse and the Edwardians</i> | John Hayward |
| 1941–42 | <i>Saturday Book</i> | <i>P G Wodehouse</i> | John Hayward |
| 1963 | <i>The Listener</i> , May 30 | <i>P G Wodehouse and the Immortals</i> | Geoffrey Jaggard |
| 2000 | <i>New Criterion</i> , October 2000 | <i>The Genius of Wodehouse</i> | Roger Kimball |
| 1971 | <i>Sunday Times</i> , October 10 | <i>Well Played, Wodehouse</i> | John le Carré |
| 1961 | <i>The New Statesman</i> , August 4 | <i>The Wodehouse Affair</i> | Malcolm Muggeridge |
| 1984 | <i>Country Life</i> , October 25 | <i>Blandings Revisited: The Topography of P G Wodehouse</i> | Norman Murphy |
| 1984 | <i>Country Life</i> , November 8 | <i>Bertie Wooster's London</i> | Norman Murphy |
| 1927 | <i>Strand</i> , February | <i>The Popularity of P G Wodehouse</i> | Augustus Muir |
| 1945 | <i>The Windmill</i> 2 | <i>In Defence of P G Wodehouse</i> | George Orwell |
| 1974 | <i>The Listener</i> , October 17 | <i>Of Aunts and Drones</i> | Robert Robinson |
| 1982 | <i>Encounter</i> , Sept/Oct | <i>Wodehouse's War: The Two Texts of the Berlin Broadcasts</i> | ed Iain Sproat |
| 1959 | <i>Arizona Quarterly</i> 5 | <i>The Antecedents of P G Wodehouse</i> | Lionel Stephenson |
| 1972 | <i>Blackwoods</i> , November | <i>My Blandings Castle</i> | Richard Usborne |
| 1974 | <i>Blackwoods</i> , July | <i>P G Wodehouse's Family of Fiends</i> | Richard Usborne |
| 1985 | <i>Encounter</i> , July/August | <i>New Wodehouse Material</i> | Richard Usborne |
| 1933/34 | <i>Chums</i> | <i>P G Wodehouse: A Brilliant Chums Reader</i> | Toye Vise |
| 1961 | <i>Sunday Times Magazine</i> , July 16 | <i>Act of Homage and Reparation</i> | Evelyn Waugh |
| 1929 | <i>Strand</i> , January | <i>P G Wodehouse at Home</i> | Leonora Wodehouse |
| 1931 | <i>American Magazine</i> , October | <i>What His Daughter Thinks of P G Wodehouse</i> | Leonora Wodehouse |

This article appeared as part of The French Renaissance Mind: Studies Presented to W. A. Moore in the journal L'Esprit Créateur, XVI, No. 2 [Winter 1976], 63–77. It is reprinted here, with minor changes, by permission of that journal and of the author, then at the University of Illinois, now a Vanderbilt University emerita. Numbered endnotes are from the original article; lettered footnotes have been added for those of us who are not French Renaissance scholars. The research for this article was greatly facilitated by a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Fellowship in 1974–5, although this is not the project for which the Fellowship was awarded.

THIS LOOKS at first sight like an eccentric, perhaps even a pointless, comparison. Clearly Rabelais and Wodehouse are worlds apart, in many ways. For instance, Rabelais is primarily an intellectual and Wodehouse often aggressively anti-intellectual; Rabelais is deeply committed to the reform of religious, political and social institutions, while Wodehouse remains serenely aloof from society's problems; Wodehouse's novels are based on plot and its ramifications, while Rabelais' are based on ideas; Rabelais delights in unbuttoned comedy, while Wodehouse's is always decorous; nearly all Wodehouse novels are built around a romantic love story, while Rabelais is presumably not interested in romantic love, since he never mentions it. But equally obvious, both are great humorists whose comic worlds are poised on the indefinable dividing-line between reality and fantasy, and it is not really surprising that they have techniques in common. Sir Pelham was kind enough to inform me, in a private letter, that he had no very clear recollection of Rabelais, and that he thought their "stuff" was probably very unlike. I mention this because the intention of this article is not to claim influence of any kind by Rabelais on Wodehouse, but simply to compare a few of their common comic techniques, specifically in the domains of plot, characters, intellectual gamesmanship and use of language. I am not claiming either that no other comic writers use these techniques, but that they show us an astonishing, and instructive, similarity of literary method between a Renaissance Evangelical humanist and a twentieth-century English gentleman.

Plot and Action

FIRST let us look at the plots and general structure of both, again bearing in mind the obvious differences. Rabelais wrote four books, or five, if you accept the *Cinquiesme Livre* as authentic; Wodehouse wrote 96.¹

There are few fundamental plot similarities, though both repeat their plots: Rabelais writes essentially the same story in *Pantagruel* [P] and *Gargantua* [G], with the epic divisions of childhood / education / maturity through war, and similar characters surrounding the hero. Wodehouse frequently repeats plots: Bertie-blackmailed-into-stealing-*objet-d'art*, for instance, or Will-Lord-Emsworth-defy-sister-and-unite-young-lovers?



More importantly, both humorists' stories are at the same time authentic and parodic, and both derive from the epic. Rabelais writes an epic which is also a pastiche of the epic, like Folengo^a before him, so that we can simultaneously care about characters and appreciate their effectiveness as satiric weapons. In the storm scene of the *Quart Livre* [QL] (18–24),² Panurge is a hilariously comic coward and the incarnation of the faults which Stoic and Evangelical heroes must avoid. We sympathize with Bingo Little's romance with Rosie M. Banks, at the same time as we enjoy the satire of the "bilge" Rosie writes.

Most of Wodehouse's plots, like Rabelais', are concerned with "faits heroïques,"^b and the basic story line is hero-foils-villain, as it should be in an epic. Wodehouse's heroes, who unlike Rabelais' are usually foiling a villain in order to get a girl, are often presented as chivalrous knight-errants, whether they are hiding girls in taxi-cabs, stealing cow-creamers, painting statues in the middle of the night, or setting houses on fire. (Bertie Wooster, as one of the very few Wodehouse heroes who does not aspire to matrimony, is thereby closer to the true epic hero.)

^{1, 2, 3...} See notes at end of article for numbered references

^a Teofilo Folengo, 1496–1544, Italian burlesque poet whose epics parodied chivalric romance

^b heroic deeds

Comic references to chivalry are frequent in Wodehouse (“Just to think of it takes my appetite away,” said Russell Clutterbuck, cleaving his steak as Sir Galahad with his good sword clove the casques of men³), as in Rabelais; where Gymnaste has a sword named *Baise mon cul*^c (QL 41), Uncle Fred has his great sponge Joyeuse.⁴

As critics have pointed out, Wodehouse’s young men adhere to a feudal code of behavior, learned no doubt at their public schools (where many of them were football heroes), and even the unspeakable Ukridge never deliberately lets a girl down. There are done things and not-done things: Bertie may slide down a water-pipe to evade his Aunt Agatha,⁵ but he may not tell a ghastly girl that he doesn’t want to be engaged to her. Gargantua and Pantagruel may in frivolous moments eat live bears or urinate on Parisians, but their relationship to father, God and subjects is always taken seriously.

We are, in fact, in a world of fixed class structures. People may change—Panurge from privileged companion to despised coward, or Bertie from vapid *boulevardier* to articulate philosopher—but the relative place of each man in society does not change. Lord Uffenham may have to rent a house from his former butler,⁶ but their manner to each other remains exactly what it always was. And each author has his little list, as Gilbert would put it, of heroes and villains. Rabelais’ villains are theologians, monks, doctors, lawyers, and hypocrites; Wodehouse’s include poets, newspaper proprietors, policemen, big-game hunters, successful financiers, all small boys, and most aunts. Or to put it more simply, both hate oppression, hypocrisy, and smugness. And in both, villains are usually unhappy—a basically Stoic outlook? Rabelais’ heroes are Evangelical humanists, the downtrodden, and “bons Pantagruelistes”^d; Wodehouse’s are people who intrigue for the fun of it, ugly but kind young men, attractive nice girls, most butlers, most cats, and most members of the Drones Club. Both, moreover, despise humanity in the mass but are capable of great sympathy for individual members of it—as long as they do not try to step out of their place. Rabelais scorns “le peuple de Paris,” “tant sot, tant badauld et tant inepte de nature”^e (G 17), but his giants are considerate to poor people like Triboullet or the peasant of Papefiguiere; Wodehouse describes pejoratively any assemblage of the populace,⁷ but with indulgence such characters as policeman Garroway,⁸ Elsie Bean the housemaid,⁹ and Lord Emsworth’s cockney girl friend.¹⁰

Although, as already mentioned, these two humorists



have quite different attitudes to plot, there are certain resemblances worth noting. In each case a basically hackneyed plot outline is adorned with the zaniest kind of inventiveness. Is Panurge’s proposed method of building the walls of Paris (*P* 15) any more eccentric than the reasons a rich young man-about-town and an eminent psychiatrist are roaming Somerset in the middle of the night with, respectively, boot-polish and burnt cork all over their faces?¹¹ Panurge’s pranks are of the same undergraduate-rag type as those of the members of the Drones Club, Uncle Fred, and Galahad.¹² As Usborne says,¹³ many of Wodehouse’s characters, male and female, act like “a youngish and rather rowdy fifteen,” and like Rabelais’ they expend an extraordinary amount of effort for what seems like a trivial result. Perhaps Bobbie Wickham is the best comparison to Panurge, since she

creates havoc for the sheer fun of it, while Galahad and Uncle Fred are normally working, however deviously, toward a practical end. But in both authors, action is often not “real” action.

Pantagruel may fight genuine enemies, but Panurge prefers to expend a flurry of energy on trying to decipher the secret of a piece of paper which turns out to be blank (*P* 24), and the devious machinations of Bertie or Ukridge are often as pointless as Janotus de Bragmardo’s appeal for bells which have already been returned.

Both authors make use of stock situations familiar to their readers. Rabelais’ epic journey contains the regulation storm and fabulous monster, and Wodehouse’s love stories the traditional misunderstandings and reconciliations. Both also enjoy turning a stock situation on its head—what the Renaissance calls the world-upside-down *topos*.^f Rabelais gives us an *éloge des débiteurs et emprunteurs*^g in the *Tiers Livre* [TL] (3–5) and a description of Gaster which parodies Ficino’s of Love (QL 57). Wodehouse’s Corky Pirbright is not happy as an actress, having become one only because her mother wanted her to, and secretly yearns to retire to a quiet village¹⁴; and Jane Hubbard, the big-game huntress who rolls her own cigarettes with one hand, dreams of a gentle

^c “Kiss my ass”

^d good Pantagruelists

^e the people of Paris; so stupid, so foolish and by nature so inept

^f traditional motif or theme

^g praise of debtors and borrowers

clinging man who would be dependent on her and mix her whisky and soda when she came home.¹⁵

Both also like plots which turn on objects, to be defended, stolen, or otherwise manipulated. Rabelais thus uses books, bells, *fouaces*,^h an abbey, a cuckold's horns, sheep, chitterlings, and frozen words, where Wodehouse prefers dogs, pictures, valuable books, jewelry, a cow-creamer, and knock-out drops, to name a few.

The general atmosphere in both fictional worlds is also more similar than might appear at first sight. Rabelais' characters love enormous banquets and gallons of drink—but so do Wodehouse's. Think of Bertie's loving descriptions of Anatole's cooking, Gussie's passion for cold steak-and-kidney pie, Uncle Fred's recipe for the "May Queen," or the enormous meal consumed by Osbert Mulliner's two burglars.¹⁶ Wodehouse also has plenty of violence, though his comedy is much less ferocious than Rabelais'. But his characters set fire to houses, push each other into ponds or downstairs, fall off ladders, are chased with pitchforks or shot with air-guns, imprisoned in Turkish baths, harried by vicious dogs, bound and gagged, or marooned in the open during a storm.

All critics are agreed that there is no sex and no obscenity in Wodehouse.ⁱ Osborne quotes one passage which he claims is the only indication in all his books that a nice girl can be physically aroused.¹⁷ There is another passage which should be quoted in this context in the second version of *The Prince and Betty*¹⁸ ch. 14: "The contact of her soft flesh through the thin sleeve set loose in him a whirl of primitive emotions. He longed to seize her in his arms, to be brutal, to hurt her." But undoubtedly sex is usually left to the intuition of the reader. Obscenity, however, is quite often implied, though discreetly. Hall informs us¹⁹ that the recurring joke which runs roughly as follows: "if all the girls so-and-so has loved and lost were laid end to end, they would reach half-way down Piccadilly" is a laundered version of a popular joke of the 1920s: "If all the girls at a Princeton prom were laid end to end, it would be the Princeton men who would do it." Similarly we can easily guess where the monkey put the nuts, and that "go spit up a rope"²⁰ is a euphemism for an Anglo-Saxon word; and if the story about the young man of Calcutta²¹ is the celebrated limerick, it is certainly obscene. Euphemisms and periphrases, indeed, abound in both works, and Rabelais' synonyms for the sexual act can be paralleled by Wodehouse's for "drunk": fried, ossified, plastered, and so on.²²

The gusto of Wodehouse's world may be rendered in more "classical" language but is surely as vital and as infectiously enthusiastic as Rabelais'. Another general similarity is in the relationship between fantasy and reality. In both cases, improbable, even surreal, events occur in

entirely realistic frameworks. The war with Picrochole is fought over the countryside where Rabelais' family lived, and the minute descriptions of Market Blandings and Valley Fields create the illusion that they are real places. In both, time is similarly treated; though ostensibly linear, it is elastic enough to allow of lengthy flashbacks and improbably long pauses in the action. While the Andouilles are approaching in battle array, the companions conduct a lengthy discussion on language, a conversation about cooks and the preparation of the *Grande Truie* (QL 37–40); Psmith and Eve Halliday have time for a long argument and explanation between Baxter's appearance a few yards away and his arrival at their side.²³

I see a further similarity in each author's relationship with his readers. Rabelais often addresses his directly, and Bertie seems to do so even more than most first-person narrators. He worries about whether his regular readers will be bored by recapitulation of events they are already familiar with, and often asks rhetorical questions or appears to confer with his reader. Rabelais is often called a *conteur*,^j but he shares with Wodehouse the dramatic gift for staging a scene and creating characters by means of their speech. And both treat their readers as "customers" (Bertie's word) who have paid for the book and thereby acquired certain rights over it.

Characters

RABELAIS' main characters are giants, and many of his minor ones are grotesques. Wodehouse's protagonists are similarly larger than life, although the techniques used to characterize them may be different. Lord Uffenham, with his enormous pear-shaped body, his eyebrows, huge feet, and absent-mindedness, is typical: a few traits have been singled out for enlargement, so that the effect is of a two-dimensional caricature, as with Panurge's cowardice and Janotus de Bragmardo's self-satisfaction.

Both humorists have a fondness for truly horrible characters. I hesitate to compare the Sibylle de Panzoust to Lord Emsworth's sister Connie or to Bertie's Aunt Agatha (who is reputed to kill rats with her teeth), but surely Roderick Spode, Stilton Cheesewright or Captain Bradbury invite comparison with Picrochole or Loup-

^h a type of bread, similar to Italian foccaccia

ⁱ Since this article was written, some commentators have noted instances of coarse language in the books written during or soon after Wodehouse's wartime imprisonment, notably *Money in the Bank* and *The Mating Season*.

^j short-story writer

Garou by their single-minded determination to destroy the adversary. Such characters often appear to be eight feet tall in moments of stress, and in other ways behave like the ogres of folklore (sometimes they are compared to Apollyon straddling across the way). Still more revolting characters, perhaps, are those who are not physically enlarged, but in whom the trait singled out for exaggeration is repulsive to start with, like Percy Pilbeam's pimples or Honoria Glossop's laugh like "the Scotch express going under a bridge."²⁴

Among both lists of heroes I should perhaps have included "men with inquiring minds." Many Wodehouse heroes, from Psmith to Lord Uffenham, have the attitude of Jimmy Pitt in *A Gentleman of Leisure*, whose "impulse, when he met a man whose code of behaviour was not the ordinary code, was to chat with him and to extract his point of view" (ch. 17). They thereby resemble Pantagruel, "amateur de peregrinité, et desyrant tous jours veoir et tous jours apprendre."^k Intellectual curiosity, though directed to very different ends, is a characteristic of both authors.

There are closer resemblances in the interaction between characters. The Bertie/Jeeves relationship is not unlike the Pantagruel/Panurge one in reverse: Jeeves is the omniscient, condescending Stoic Wise Man, and Bertie the incorrigible optimistic fool. Panurge, who has been critically compared to Hamlet as a problematic hero,²⁵ is a good deal closer to Ukridge, who like him is totally irresponsible, especially about money, always convinced that the solution to his problem is just around the corner, incapable of seeing himself as others see him, and always straight-faced when everyone around him is laughing. And Galahad Threepwood and Uncle Fred are in many ways reminiscent of Frère Jean: always ready to rush with indefatigable energy into whatever fray is nearest, crushing the weaker-willed with scathing words, and creating mayhem always with the purest possible motives.

All Wodehouse people are "stock" characters in the sense that they are created to fill a certain function in the plot. They all behave consistently in recurring circumstances; when disaster strikes we know that Uncle Tom will curse the Government, Aunt Dahlia will turn purple and throw things, police constables will say "Ho!," Jeeves will allow one eyebrow to quiver, and Psmith and Jeff Miller will go on talking, just as we know that Frère Jean will swear and exert himself and Panurge will be terrified. Both authors assemble in one book an astonishing diversity of characters who apparently belong in quite different

literary genres. This is not so striking in Rabelais, whose characters appear successively in successive chapters, as in Wodehouse, where the average country-house party includes an absent-minded elderly aristocrat, an obnoxious interfering middle-aged female, a forceful but stupid businessman, a super-efficient secretary, a drooping heroine, a knightly hero, two unscrupulous criminals, and a pig. The juxtaposition of the different languages spoken by all these characters is perhaps funnier than the succession of such languages in Rabelais, although parts of the *Tiers Livre* come close.

Part 2 of this article will be published in the Autumn issue of Plum Lines.

1. The list in David A. Jasen's *Bibliography and Reader's Guide to the First Editions of P. G. Wodehouse* (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1971) stops with *A Pelican at Blandings*. Since have appeared: *The Girl in Blue* (1970), *Much Obliged, Jeeves* (1971), *Pearls, Girls and Monty Bodkin* (1972), *Bachelors Anonymous* (1973), and *Aunts Aren't Gentlemen* (1974).
2. References to Rabelais are to the two-volume Garnier edition, ed. Pierre Jourda, Paris, 1962.
3. For reasons of space I shall not give both titles of Wodehouse books in the many cases where the English and American are different; both can always be found in Jasen. For obvious reasons I shall give chapter numbers, not page numbers, for the novels.
4. *Uncle Fred in the Springtime*, ch. 10.
5. "Jeeves and the Impending Doom," in *Very Good, Jeeves*.
6. *Something Fishy*.
7. Especially in *Psmith, Journalist* and *Summer Moonshine*. Cf. also the many village concerts attended by Bertie and his friends.
8. *The Small Bachelor*.
9. *Uncle Dynamite*.
10. "Lord Emsworth and the Girl Friend," in *Blandings Castle*.
11. *Thank You, Jeeves*.
12. A recent article has shown that many Drones Club pranks, far from being surrealist inventions, are based on the real-life activities of the "Pink 'Uns" and "Pelicans": N. T. P. Murphy, "The Real Drones Club," *Blackwood's Magazine* 318 (1975), 124–135.
13. *Wodehouse at Work* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1961). In my opinion this is the only good book to have appeared on Wodehouse, and it is excellent.

^k *lover of wandering, and desiring always to see and to learn*

14. *The Mating Season*.
15. *The Girl on the Boat*, ch. 4.
16. "The Ordeal of Osbert Mulliner," in *Mr. Mulliner Speaking*.
17. Usborne, p. 126, quoting *Jill the Reckless*, ch. 4: "The touch of his body against hers always gave her a thrill, half pleasurable, half exciting." Usborne is quoted with approval by Robert A. Hall, *The Comic Style of P. G. Wodehouse* (London: Archon Books, 1974), p. 36.
18. See Jasen, pp. 39–41.
19. P. 51, n. 23.
20. Favourite expletive of Howard Steptoe in *Quick Service*.
21. "Jeeves and the Greasy Bird," in *Plum Pie*.
22. Geoffrey Jaggard, *Wooster's World* (London: Macdonald, 1967), lists the following in the Jeeves novels alone: awash, blotto, boiled, fried, full to the back teeth, lathered, lit, offcolour, oiled, ossified, pie-eyed, plastered, polluted, primed, scrooched, sozzled, squiffy, stewed, stinko, tanked, tight, under the sauce, whiffled, and woozled.
23. *Leave It to Psmith*, ch.10.
24. "The Hero's Reward," in *The Inimitable Jeeves*.
25. Jean Paris, *Hamlet et Panurge* (Paris, Seuil, 1971).

Answers to The Canine Connection

1. d
2. a (*Right Ho, Jeeves*)
3. c
4. b
5. d
6. c
7. b
8. a
9. b ("Ukridge's Dog College")
10. b ("Ukridge's Accident Syndicate")
11. b ("Tangled Hearts")
12. a
13. d
14. c
15. a
16. b
17. b
18. c ("Episode of the Dog McIntosh")
19. a
20. d
21. b (*Hot Water*)
22. a



Treasurer's Report for 2006

BY KRISTINE FOWLER, TREASURER

Total Balance as of December 31, 2005¹ \$15,546.39

| | |
|--|--------------------|
| Income: | |
| Membership dues and fees ² | \$10,948.68 |
| 2007 Convention general income | \$1,636.87 |
| Drones Club ties (orders) ³ | \$864.32 |
| <i>Plum Lines</i> back issues, index | \$63.00 |
| Interest, miscellaneous | <u>\$14.66</u> |
| Total Income | \$13,527.53 |

| | |
|--|--------------------|
| Expenses: | |
| <i>Plum Lines</i> production and mailing | \$9,820.51 |
| Correspondence, supplies, other | \$134.49 |
| 2007 Convention general expense | \$73.34 |
| Drones Club ties (shipping) | <u>\$56.45</u> |
| Total Expenses | \$10,084.79 |

| | |
|------------------------------------|------------|
| TWS Convention Discretionary Fund: | |
| Balance as of December 31, 2005 | \$6,370.21 |
| Convention Fund raffle proceeds | \$80.00 |
| Balance as of December 31, 2006 | \$6,450.21 |

Total Balance as of December 31, 2006 \$19,069.13

¹ Erroneously reported in the 2005 Treasurer's Report as \$15,541.39.

² Apparently lower than previously, because many members prepaid in 2005 for future years before the dues increase took effect. The number of members has increased about 7% from the end of 2005 to the end of 2006.

³ Inventory remaining worth \$681.86.



Plum Time

From Amy Plofker: PGWnet was very excited over a new product called the Voco Clock. It's a fancy alarm clock that wakes you up with a large collection of spoken messages, à la Jeeves, voiced by Stephen Fry. The chappie who invented it, Simon Carr, is kindly giving us two clocks to raffle off at the convention. Follow these links for more information:

<http://www.voco.uk.com/>



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:
E-mail:

The Anglers' Rest meets every other month (aside from holiday madness months when all bets are off) at various locales in the Puget Sound area. Much discussion of any topic in any way associated with Wodehouse takes place—and then everything else, too. We attend local arts events and try new restaurants, pubs, and teahouses. We read passages from favorite Wodehouse books out loud; trade interesting Wodehouse-related items; and lend books, tapes, CDs, and DVDs to one another with abandon. Join us for a relaxing or invigorating time with folks of like mind and attitude.

Blandings Castle Chapter

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



Phone:
E-mail:

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



E-mail:

After an unforeseen three-month hiatus due to the meteorological vagaries of life in the Northeast, The Broadway Special had a joyous reunion on May 5, beginning with a lunch at Portfolio restaurant, followed by the meeting proper at The Players in Gramercy Park, and capped by a viewing of the Kentucky Derby in the Grill Room. The day was a fine one, worthy of Psmith's exclamation: "How fresh the leaves . . . how green the herbage! Fling your eye at yonder grassy knoll." John Graham brought a welcome visitor from Zurich, Thomas Schlachter, who is translating Wodehouse works into German.

With 21 Plummies in attendance, we could at last tackle *Psmith Journalist*, which twice had been postponed. The usual lively banter ensued, with the invaluable David Jasen putting the story into context and commenting on Wodehouse's evolution as a writer still seeking his unique voice, still "finding his funny bone," in what the Special felt is essentially a school story that tackles more socially serious themes. Indeed, the subject of Psmith's socialist tendencies was much debated, specifically his ability to deal with his fellow men. His benevolent equanimity prevails—when mollifying the bourgeoisie of *Cosy Moments*, when establishing alliances with Bat Jarvis and the street-smart gangs of New York, and when challenging the capitalist oppressor, Mr. Stewart Waring, the celebrated tenement owner.

Conversation flowed for over two hours and ended only when the horse fanciers among us pricked up their ears and headed off to the races, where John Baesch, a noted tout, backed the winner. Indeed, considering the afternoon's designated story, perhaps we all should have tipped our Broadway Specials to the champion, Street Sense. As for the future, we'll be meeting soon by the light of the moon on the first of June, barring a monsoon, to sing or croon the praises of *Full Moon*.

Capital! Capital!

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

Phone:
E-mail:



On April 29, Capital! Capital! gathered once again to enjoy good fellowship and good food. Bruce Montgomery, owner and president of Syntonics LLC, gave a presentation on “Wodehouse, AP Watt, and Publishing,” based on Montgomery’s recent research at the University of North Carolina. The school’s archives contain business records of A P Watt, Plum’s London literary agent for many years. The documents, some in Wodehouse’s own handwriting, show that he was possessed of substantial business acumen insofar as the publishing business was concerned. Assembled CapCap members also enjoyed watching a DVD of the *Wodehouse Playhouse* production of “The Unpleasantness at Bludleigh Court.” What’s up next? Cricket in June.

Capital F.O.R.M.

(Friends Of Ralston McTodd—Ottawa and vicinity)

Contact: Megan Carton

Phone:

E-mail:



Chapter One

(Greater Philadelphia area)

Contact: Susan Cohen



Phone:

Fax:

E-mail:

Our March meeting was very special because Bertie Wooster was there. Yes, he really was. He came in the guise of John Sherwood, an actor, magician, and journalist who, in addition to doing a very good imitation of Bertie, is also a professional Sherlock Holmes impersonator. We were delighted to meet the charming Mr. Wooster, listen to him, and join him in a read-aloud of the Master’s work.

Because it was Mothering Sunday, U.K. (not to be confused with the more raucous Fathering Saturday Night), a number of Chaps read quotes from the Master relating to the subject of motherhood. This was a change from our usual focus on the subject of aunthood. We raised money to readopt our newts at the Philadelphia Zoo, examined a Voco alarm clock, and listened to its Jeevesian “Good Morning Sir,” done in the voice of Stephen Fry (see page 18 for more details). We found

time to thumb through a copy of the January ’07 issue of Isaac Asimov’s science fiction magazine, which contained a story with two characters bearing a striking resemblance to Bertie and Jeeves. What a meeting!

Chapter One met again in early May for a read-aloud of the wonderful story “The Clicking of Cuthbert,” with Herb Moskowitz the impresario in charge. Herb was joined by a talented cast of Chaps. Thanks to John Graham, we also had Thomas Schlachter of Zurich, Switzerland, at the meeting. Thomas has received raves in the German press for his translations of Wodehouse, and the Chaps enjoyed hearing him tell us about this. This was a resplendent meeting, our last until fall.

The Chicago Accident Syndicate

(Chicago and thereabouts)

Contact: Daniel & Tina Garrison



Phone:

E-mail:

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

The Senior Bloodstain will be held during the upcoming TWS convention, on Friday afternoon, between the end of the bus tour to Newport and the Clean, Bright Entertainment to be held that evening. It will be held in the sitting room of Anne Cotton’s hotel suite; the room number will be posted at the hotel. Marilyn MacGregor suggests “Mystery on the Orient Express,” her adaptation of “Teatime in Baker Street” by Russell McLauchlin. Anyone wishing to read a part may contact Marilyn for an advance script.

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



Phone:
E-mail:

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.” We browse and sluice at dinner meetings and share views.

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



Phone:
E-mail:

The Flying Pigs are looking forward to their second annual summer BBQ. This year we hope to locate Berkshire pork, give it a Midwestern treatment on the grill, and serve it up in a bun or on a plate. In the meantime, Todd and Kelly have hosted a few evenings of light musical entertainment, some of us are looking forward to the autumn convention in Providence, and some of us are studiously reading and enjoying our newly acquired two-volume *A Wodehouse Handbook* by Norman Murphy. Anyone living in the vicinity of Cincinnati who might be interested in joining us would be most welcome.

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

The Mottled Oyster/Jellied Eel contingent of Wodehouse admirers is short on regulars but long on enthusiasm. A group of six or seven of us plugs along, enjoying each other’s company immensely while reacquainting ourselves with the many works of our favorite author as we meet to consider the PGW book of the month. We have read biographies of Wodehouse. We bring in any articles we may find on his writing or on his internment in Germany. We share any mention of Bertie and Jeeves we run across, or political comments using the duo to satirize a situation, etc. Each year we

have a birthday bash for the author and have been known to cut the cake with that wonderful instrument, an authentic fish slice. One of our members owns a banjolele, and a few of us proudly display statuettes of the Infant Samuel at Prayer upon our mantels. We are always on the lookout for fellow enthusiasts who are not aware of our merry band, and we are anxious to get the word out to anyone in the San Antonio area who might be eager to join our happy bunch.

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

Phone:
E-mail:

We are now well into the throes of convention preparation, and we trust you all are leaping forth, pen and checkbook in hand, signing up for all the various events. It should be splendid! Of course, finding the hotel is your first challenge, as Providence is almost totally devoid of street signs; but you can always hail a cab, tell it to lead you to the Biltmore, and follow it there. Meanwhile, we NEWTS will meet at the Biltmore on June 9 and conduct a series of exploratory trips, lining up things to do, places to eat, etc. We have tentative plans for Nottles (meetings of NEWTS) on July 14 and August 11 for further preparation; and rehearsals for our skit (yes, you have to sit through another one) are also well under way. See you in October!

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

In a reminder of the appropriateness of our chapter name, a foot of snow arrived perfectly timed to put the kibosh on our February 25 gathering; only skiers and those on snow emergency plowing routes could get there. We had a Do-Over the following week in much more relaxed fashion, discussing a couple of Blandings short stories over pastries and coffee. With the coming of spring, we Northwodes began planning our traditional Derby Day celebration to be held in the venerable Lexington Restaurant’s bar, where we can drink a mint julep, chat about everything from *The Return of Jeeves* to the apostolic claims of the Church of Abyssinia, and—incidentally—watch the big race. Once a summer event is planned, details will be available on request to anyone in our neck of the woods.

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

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

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

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

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.

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

Perhaps it was the spring-like weather, or the sumptuous meal and libations, or the fact that we were discussing a top Wodehouse novel; or perhaps it was the unexpected presence of our charming new proto-member, Christine. Whatever the cause, the feast of reason and flow of soul had never before reached the pinnacle it had at this month's meeting. The Directors of the Pickering Motor Company were in for a special treat the up at the home of Larry Nahagian,



Christine approached all smiles and hors d'oeuvres. The dinner that followed was of Anatole quality (if Anatole had been Armenian, that is), and Dicron testified to its authenticity. The book under discussion this month was *Heavy Weather*, a new book for many members and an old favorite to keen Wodehouse scholars like Elyse. David pointed out an unusual and hitherto undiscovered tangential reference to the Great Depression, and Elliott gave a stirring reading of his favorite passage (we knew it was stirring because only a few members fell asleep).

Norman Murphy's new *Wodehouse Handbook* was discussed and read from, especially on the subject of chorus girls, the question having been raised in reference to the plot of *Heavy Weather*. Once the answer was given from the *Handbook*, all members who did not already possess one were quickly penciling the necessary order information. The upcoming Providence convention was discussed, a vote was taken, and it was unanimous that all members were to attend. Two motions were on the table for the next book to read and discuss: *Sam the Sudden* and *The Mating Season*. After a split vote, as Sue Mahakian pointed out, what's to stop us from reading both?! Time and place of the next Board meeting were set for June 23 at the Psmith home. To any in the Detroit area, Board membership is automatic, no company shares need be owned and no vote be taken. Just contact us and come join the fun!

The Portland Greater Wodehouse Society (PGWs)
Contact: Carol James
Phone:
E-mail:
(Portland, Oregon, and vicinity)

We met recently and voted to change our name from the Wodehouse Society to the Portland Greater Wodehouse Society so we can call ourselves the PGWs. (*Editor's note:* Sadly, the PGWs's leader, Ray Steen, died recently. Please see page 6 for more information.)

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

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

As head and sole member of the Soup & Fish Club, I got the wild idea some time ago to sponsor Best Antique in the annual local car show to promote Wodehouse. It costs me a hundred Washingtons for the privilege of picking a winner and handing over a trophy. The trophy is engraved with “The Soup & Fish Club” and various printed materials hark the moniker. My criterion is anything up to 1939 that could have been driven by any Wodehouse character on either side of the Atlantic. Giving out the trophy always creates a lot of interest in Wodehouse and TWS. Occasionally, I tackle other projects to spread the word about Wodehouse.

But the basic and noble aim of the Soup and Fish Club is to bring the joy of Wodehouse to the younger generation. I therefore visit school librarians to talk them into letting me give presentations on the Master’s great works to their students.

*L*ate-breaking news: A new chapter, the Birmingham Banjolele Band, has just been formed in Alabama. The ringleader appears to be Caralyn Campbell. We’re delighted to see a new southern chapter rise up! More info to come!

The Pale Parabola Award

BY JOHN MELLA

John Mella wrote this essay for Light: A Quarterly of Light Verse, which he edits. Our thanks to John for his permission to reprint and to Charles Gould for bringing this to the editor’s attention. We trust that Charles will keep us informed on future winners of the Pale Parabola Award!

In the immortal *Leave It to Psmith*, that greatest of modern novelists P. G. Wodehouse, otherwise known as “Plum,” has the elegant and natty Psmith (the “P” is silent), en route to his stint as a stand-in poet, in preparation for the moment when he will be asked to parse a passage,

open a volume of the poet he’s impersonating (Ralston McTodd, “The Poet Laureate of Canada”). He lights upon the following:

“Across the pale parabola of joy”

He goes no further. Why go on, when the very first step has left him immobile? Nothing! Nothing at all there! He tries it again: “Across the pale parabola of joy . . .”

Again it rebuffs his efforts at explication. “Across . . .”

But here we will leave our putative poet at his thankless task—the task which any benighted soul is saddled with who is constrained to read, and even more understand, almost all modern poetry.

Psmith goes on to his glory, a glory constructed in no small part of the remark he provokes, to the effect that he doesn’t look at all like one of these poet blokes.

The immensely comic “parabola” line, however, which is indistinguishable from what you might find in most contemporary literary journals, gives *Light* a nice lobbed ball to smack out of the field. Beginning with this issue [Spring-Summer 2006], *Light* will bestow on some scrivener with a bloated reputation the Pale Parabola Award. (Nominations for candidates are welcome.) Receiving the Pale Parabola Award is less easy than you might think, for it demands first a minimum of native talent, and then a ruthless grinding-out of what talent there is.

Light therefore bestows the first Pale Parabola Award to that poetaster whose skill lay in his childish ability to snipple lines and tags from other better poets, immerse them in his own glaucous sensibility, and paste them triumphantly on the inflated boundaries of his own huge ego.

We mean (and we’re not talking dog-catchers) *Ezra Pound*. Yes, the fellow whom Dante parked on ice, whose sole importance may have been his editorial work on “The Waste Land,” whose *Cantos* may have been spawned by a team of monkeys on the way to writing the works of Shakespeare.

Out-weariers of Apollo will, as we know,
continue their
Martian generalities,
We have kept our erasers in order.
 (“Homage to Sextus Propertius”)

Let’s stop there. Or no. One more clarion call. One more groaning at the bar (“Hurry up, please, it’s time”): “And poor old Homer blind, blind as a bat.” These lines being chanted on an afternoon of dense fog, our local Poet in Residence, eight years old at the time, piped up with an instant deflater: “Bats aren’t blind.”

Flying High with Wodehouse

BY WILLIAM (TOM) THOMAS



P. G. Wodehouse published his first novel a year before the Wright brothers first took to the sky, and he was working on one when he died in 1975, six years after humans first walked on the moon. In the intervening decades between *The Pothunters* (1902) and what became *Sunset at Blandings* (1977), airplanes flew all over the world, but they seldom entered Wodehouse's airspace. Horseless carriages could roll across his landscapes without intruding upon what Evelyn Waugh famously described as "Mr. Wodehouse's idyllic world," but Wodehouse had to draw the line somewhere, and he drew it not far above the ground. (Yes, it was a plane rather than a line, and that affords an opportunity for a number of puns, but we really must be moving on.)

In "Wodehouse and 'Flying'" (*Plum Lines*, Autumn 2001), Bart Pepermans included five instances of airplanes appearing in Wodehouse's works, along with birds, balloons, and a pig. He states that Wodehouse never took a plane in his life because he was afraid of flying, but this doesn't square with Richard Osborne's explanation in *After Hours with P. G. Wodehouse* (1991) of why the Wodehouses purchased a home in Le Touquet in 1935, one reason being "it was a short plane-hop to London where Wodehouse had plays running and Dulwich football and cricket matches to watch." Wodehouse's step-granddaughter, Sheran Hornby, in the preface to Osborne's book, says that Wodehouse often asked her and her husband about their frequent transatlantic flights: "How do I guarantee that the aeroplane will go where I want it to go, and more important still, how can I be sure that the person sitting next to me won't talk non-stop?" Her statement that "after the war he never travelled by aeroplane" does not necessarily mean that he had flown earlier, but her words imply that he had. Wodehouse scholar N. T. P. Murphy sums up the uncertainty best in his *A Wodehouse Handbook* (Volume 1, 2006): "As far as I know, Wodehouse never flew in his life."

Wodehouse was not a keen fan of flying, as evidenced in a 1946 letter to Guy Bolton (published in *Yours, Plum: The Letters of P. G. Wodehouse* [1990]) in which he reported that transatlantic sailing schedules were uncertain due to labor unrest, so "I nerved myself to go and apply for a seat on a plane," but flights weren't available. At any rate, we do have evidence from a note Wodehouse added to the 1962 edition of *Author! Author!* that Winky, one of a series of the Wodehouses' pet Pekingese, once flew across the English Channel. Wodehouse contracted with a pilot to

fly the dog from France to a safe place in England before reporting at a designated airfield as required of all pilots arriving from France, thus sparing Winky the mandatory six-month quarantine of dogs entering England.

Despite his lack of experience with flying, Wodehouse could not avoid the reality of airplanes, which first flew into his fiction as figures of speech in two of his early tales about life at boys' schools. In one—"Stone and the Weed," collected in *Tales of Wrykyn and Elsewhere* (1997)—the student W. J. Stone experiences a drive in which the "car touched the road here and there, but for the most part seemed to skim through the air like an aeroplane." In the novel *The Luck Stone* (serialized in 1908–09 under the pseudonym Basil Windham), Tommy Armstrong explains to Jimmy Stewart that as a lark he has pulled the emergency-stop cord in a train carriage and "shall have to sell my yacht and aeroplane" to pay the fine if caught. The socially significant yacht-airplane combination also appears in *The Prince and Betty* (1912) when Benjamin Scobell, casino financier on the Mediterranean island of Mervo, urges Prince John to return to the throne and attract business by doing unusual things that will make people talk: "Get a yacht [and] whoop it up [and] entertain swell guys [and] go around in aeroplanes and that style of thing."

In *Psmith Journalist* (1912), a gangster's gunshot grazes the boxer Kid Brady's ear, and a policeman asks, "Shot at you, did they?" Brady indignantly replies, "Think an aeroplane ran into my ear and took half of it off?" In *Something New* (1915), Lord Emsworth's ever-efficient secretary Rupert Baxter falls asleep while guarding the Blandings Castle museum and dreams he is hovering over the castle in an aeroplane from which J. Preston Peters drops a bomb (stolen from the museum) that strikes the castle "with a roar and a sheet of flame." (The commotion is actually caused by two young men falling down the stairs into a table of occasional china.) The canine narrator of "The Mixer-II" in *The Man with Two Left Feet* (1917) finds himself competing for the attention of his young master against a "toy aeroplane, which flew when you wound it up." When something goes wrong with the toy and it no longer flies, the dog once again becomes the fickle child's favorite plaything. In "The Rough Stuff" (1920), George Perkins, a golfer lacking confidence in the soundness of his game and "scared to the depths of his craven soul," strikes a ball that to everyone's surprise goes "singing over the water like a bird [and breasts] the hill like a homing

aeroplane” to the middle of the fairway, within easy distance of the green.

The novelty of flight—but at least it is a real flight—is mentioned in the first two of six episodic stories Wodehouse wrote with C. H. Bovill, published in 1916 and collected as *A Man of Means* (1991). Roland Bleke wins the Calcutta Sweepstakes and on a dare pays for a ride in an amusement park airplane, but he retains the pilot to fly him to France rather than perform stunts like loop-the-loop for the spectators. Mechanical problems force them to land “as gracefully as a bird” on the Sussex tennis lawn of Mr. and Mrs. Windlebird, and his adventures continue from there.

Airplanes are a bit less of a novelty in *Bill the Conqueror* (1924), in which Judson Coker tries to impress a Long Island butler by asserting, “I went up in an aeroplane once, scattering dollar bills over the city.” Later in the novel, a gardener at Wimbledon Commons stalls for time in answering Felicia Sheridan’s inquiry about how to pawn property by gazing “woodenly at an aeroplane which purred in the blue like a passing cat.” And in *Thank You, Jeeves* (1934), Pauline Stoker, having swum ashore from her father’s yacht, dismisses Bertie Wooster’s astonishment at finding her in his leased cottage in Chuffnell Regis by asking, “Do you think I came ashore by aeroplane?” Earlier in that novel, Bertie describes “Chuffy” Chuffnell’s young cousin Seabury, of whom he heartedly disapproves, as “a ‘smallish, freckled kid with aeroplane ears.’”

In the 1930s, Wodehouse began using airplanes as an interesting plot device, with his characters relying on the convenient London-Paris air service to cross the English Channel. Gordon Sinclair and Patrick Franklyn, strangers to one another visiting St. Rocque under French aliases in *Hot Water* (1932), engage in a half-page of small talk about the merits of flying, agreeing that “There is something about flying,” namely the advantage that it is “so much quicker” than train and boat by making the trip from England in “only an hour or two.” In “Jeeves and the Spot of Art” (1930), Bertie Wooster takes the train and boat for Paris to avoid visitors to his flat, but “in three weeks or so [when] Jeeves sent me the ‘All clear’ signal [I] hopped on to a passing aeroplane and a couple of hours later was bowling through [London].”

Airplanes soon became the ideal means for propelling young lovers through their tangled affairs of the heart, even if they once thought they were walking on air. Eustace Mulliner’s fiancée Marcella Tyrwhitt, in Paris on vacation in “Open House” from *Mulliner Nights* (1933), bounds on to the next aeroplane to London when she sees Beatrice Watterson walking the Pekinese she had left with Eustace for safekeeping. Both women had evidently traveled to Paris by train and boat, but Marcella’s

returning by air emphasizes her zeal in getting her hands on the man who had betrayed her trust. Similarly, in *The Luck of the Bodkins* (1935), as a result of an unexpectedly broken engagement, Monty Bodkin rushes home from Cannes, telling Reginald Tennyson: “I came back at once by aeroplane [but Gertrude] wouldn’t see me.” In *Uncle Fred in the Springtime* (1939), Horace Davemport assures Pongo Twistleton that Pongo’s sister Val will be “flying back today” from Le Touquet in time to attend the Bohemian Ball with Horace, her fiancé.

Airplane flights lengthened in due course to include oceanic crossings. In the opening scene of “There’s Always Golf!” (1936), the Oldest Member is asked whether Clarice Fitch is “The girl who used to fly oceans and things and cross Africa on foot and what not?” (She is.) By this time transoceanic flights were increasingly common, and N. T. P. Murphy, in *A Wodehouse Handbook* (Volume 1, 2006), describes five likely female aviators (aviatrixes back then) upon whom Wodehouse could have modeled the fictional Clarissa Fitch. Almost two decades later, Wodehouse again refers to transoceanic flight when, in *Ring for Jeeves* (1953), wealthy Rosalinda Spottsworth tells an old friend she encounters by chance in England that “I flew over for a visit a week ago.”

In his 2001 article, Bart Pepermans included a flight I had overlooked. An airplane plays a stealth role in *Service with a Smile* (1961), when millionaire James Schoonmaker arrives at Blandings Castle from New York only several days after receiving an urgent cable from Lady Constance. If we discount the possibility of mystical teleportation, we can attribute his quick trip to commercial aviation. More than a decade later, in *Bachelors Anonymous* (1973), when movie magnate Ivor Llewellyn transfers his business activities on behalf of the Superba-Llewellyn studio from Hollywood to London, his lawyer Ephraim Trout sees him off at the Los Angeles airport.

Clearly, by this time aviation had become a well-established fact, even in Wodehouse’s fiction. Still, Robert McCrum was right on target in *Wodehouse: A Life* (2004) when he observed that “Wodehouse had generally solved the problem of modernity in his fiction by ignoring twentieth century progress” and also noted that “his characters still took liners rather than jumbos long after air travel had become commonplace, and it did not seem to matter.”

Wodehouse did not need airplanes or other modern innovations to capture and hold the modern reader’s rapt attention, but I think it would have mattered a great deal if he had allowed them to appear more frequently than he did. Like Lord Ickenham in *Service with a Smile* (1961), Wodehouse was not entirely in tune “with the modern spirit of rush and bustle.” One can imagine a number of

ways he could have worked airplanes into his stories, and perhaps to good effect, but I hope no *Plum Lines* reader could admit to imagining an airstrip or, horror of horrors, a heliport on the ancestral grounds of Blandings Castle.

My interest in Wodehouse and airplanes goes back a long way and still flies high. In my earliest recollection of reading one of his books, I was trying unsuccessfully to suppress my laughter in a full airplane, when the passenger across the aisle leaned over to see what I was reading and reported to her companion, with a smile of obvious approval, that magic name . . . “Wodehouse.”

Mystery of the Green Swizzle—Solved?

BY ELIN WOODGER



I will admit that I am biased in this matter, being married to The Man Who Knows Almost Everything (TMWKAE), and though he sometimes goofs—who doesn’t?—I can’t help but feel that in this case he got it right.

Let us therefore consider the mystery of the Green Swizzle, that marvelous concoction that went over so well with Bertie Wooster and Biffy Biffen at the 1924 Wembley Exhibition (“The Rummy Affair of Old Biffy”). Said Swizzle was enjoyed at the “rather jolly Planters Bar in the West Indian section” of the Exhibition, and so memorable was this drink that Bertie rhapsodized if he should ever have a son, “Green Swizzle Wooster is the name that will go down on the register, in memory of the day his father’s life was saved at Wembley.”

Right, you remember the story. I knew you would. Now let us consider a question that has tantalized Wodehousians for decades—to wit, what goes into a Green Swizzle? At the 1995 convention in Boston, the NEWTS created their own version of this legendary cocktail, the ingredients of which I have now forgotten, and perhaps that is for the best. Internet discussion groups devoted to Wodehouse sometimes raise the question, and Hetty Litjens of the Netherlands—known to her online pals as Aunt Agatha—has researched the matter carefully and posted a recipe on her website (see <http://tinyurl.com/2tfxux>) that calls for the juice of a lime, powdered sugar, carbonated water, bitters, rum, and crème de menthe.

Ah, yes, crème de menthe—the key ingredient in almost every proposed recipe for Green Swizzles that I have read. Here in Britain it cropped up again in the March 3rd issue of the *Independent Magazine*, wherein writer Christopher Hirst culminated a series on great cocktails

by offering up his personal Top 10. Number 8 on the list was—the Green Swizzle, of course. Hirst writes: “Swizzles can be long (with mineral water) or short (without). I’d guess Bertie was on the short ones.” And the recipe? Very similar to Hetty’s solution, it entails a mixture of white rum, crème de menthe, caster sugar, bitters, and the juice of a lime.

So is crème de menthe in fact an essential ingredient in Green Swizzles? Not necessarily, according to TMWKAE. While Norman doesn’t dispute the attraction of the recipes mentioned above, he does dispute that these crème de menthe-based drinks are what Bertie and Biffy drank in the Planters’ Bar at Wembley. After all, sez Norman, just how common was crème de menthe in the West Indies back in 1924? Not very, I’d wager. It is much more likely that native ingredients were used.

We now turn to *A Wodehouse Handbook* (Vol. 1, p. 410), wherein we are told that, back at the time of the Wembley Exhibition, an article in *Punch* related a rhyme (of sorts) that was sung by the Planters’ barman as the drink was prepared:

One of sour,
Two of sweet,
Three of strong,
Four of weak.



Upon learning this, Norman telephoned the Jamaican High Commission, and before long he had the definitive answer—or as near to definitive as anybody can get. Herewith the recipe that he was given:

One measure fresh lime juice (*sour*),
Two measures uncoloured sugar syrup (*sweet*),
Three measures white overproof rum (*strong*),
Four measures water/soda/lemonade according to personal preference (*weak*).
Mix well and agitate (swizzle) with some finely crushed ice—and the result is a delightful intoxicating drink of a slight green colour.

So there you have it. Accept no substitutes and *no crème de menthe*—and remember that the rum must be white and *really* overproof. Try it, and you too may end up naming your firstborn son Green Swizzle.

We certainly appreciate the assiduous and dedicated research by Elin, and by TMWKAE. With this exceedingly relevant information in hand, we can now prepare to agitate and educate the bartenders in Providence! For some interesting information and alternative recipes, <http://www.smart.net/~tak/swizzle.html> may be the website for you!

—Ed.

A Celebration of P. G. Wodehouse at Symphony Space

BY DAVID MCDONOUGH

You know how the sun is always shining at Blandings Castle, unless one has been thwarted in love? Wodehouse always made the weather work for him, and March 7 was no exception.

“A Celebration of P. G. Wodehouse” at Symphony Space in New York City was supposed to be a three-person event. Commentary was to be by novelist Amy Bloom and the sagacious and knowledgeable *New Yorker* staff writer Adam Gopnik. And included in the program were these ominous words: “A SELECTION [caps are mine] from ‘Uncle Fred Flits By’ read by John Lithgow.”

Well, I mean to say. Who wants to hear a selection from the greatest short story by the greatest humorist? It’s all or nothing, don’t you know.

Fortunately, Wodehouse reached out from beyond the grave. Amy Bloom was unable to make the show due to an ice storm in Connecticut (the icy hand of Wodehouse, I maintain). And that freed up time for Lithgow to read the entire short story.

Now, I am a great admirer of Lithgow. From his early days in theater to his films (*Terms of Endearment*, *The World According to Garp*) to his Emmy-winning performance on TV’s *3rd Rock From the Sun* to his return to Broadway in the musicals *Sweet*

Smell of Success and *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*, he has consistently maintained his status as one of America’s great actors. And yet . . . *American* is the key word here. Could he pull off the distinctly British role of Uncle Fred?

The answer was obvious immediately. With all due respect to Jonathan Cecil and some of the other great readers who have tackled Plum on tape and CD, Lithgow gave the best reading of Wodehouse that I have ever encountered. He used his voice, body movements, and face to give life to Uncle Fred, Pongo, the Pink Chap, Connie, and even the parrot in a genuine tour de force that will live long in the memory. The audience response was overwhelming approval—quite a few of the many-headed seemed to be encountering the story for the first time, which was a source of envy for the few TWS members present. Due to the quick sellout of tickets, many Plummites who had planned to attend were unable to get in, and the event was not simulcast.

Lithgow’s magnificent performance made the discussion that followed seem almost anticlimactic. Adam

Gopnik led off the discussion by quoting approving things said about Wodehouse by W. H. Auden and Evelyn Waugh, and he trotted out the old anecdote about Hugh Walpole’s reaction when Max Beerbohm called Wodehouse the greatest living writer. (Walpole, a popular novelist of the early 20th century, was distinctly not pleased.) Gopnik also offered his opinion that Plum’s best stuff was from the 20-year period from 1933 to the late 1950s. That is the period in which Plum concentrated mostly on Jeeves novels and Blandings Castle epics. However, it should be remembered the Mulliner and golf stories came before that period, making debatable Gopnik’s point that, prior to 1933, Wodehouse was chiefly known for his work in musicals.

John Lithgow comes by his oral reading skills honestly—he said that his first exposure to Wodehouse came from his father’s readings. He (Lithgow) remembers that he used to read the stories aloud to his sister. Gopnik (who started reading Plum at age 10) reads the canon to his kids, too. He stated, “Jeeves got me though the minefield of adolescence.”

Both men expressed their admiration for “Uncle Fred Flits By”; Gopnik thinks it is Wodehouse’s best. “As good as *Uncle Fred in the Springtime* is,” he

said, “it doesn’t have the dense loquaciousness of UFFB.” Lithgow added that part of the joy of reading it aloud is doing the narration by the Egg who tells the story.

During a question-and-answer period, most of the discussion centered on Wodehouse’s wartime experiences, although time was made for a plug for both the *Jeeves and Wooster* TV series and *Wodehouse Playhouse*. Most of the information and debate were familiar ground for Wodehouse fans. But my favorite question came from a benign-looking matron who demanded to know if either of the gentleman could do an impression of a hen laying an egg. Lithgow merely looked bewildered, and Gopnik admitted that he was unable to fulfill the request. Neither, he added as an afterthought, could he perform the war cry known as “Pig-Hoo-o-o-ey!”

Well, I mean to say. Who wants to hear a selection from the greatest short story by the greatest humorist? It’s all or nothing, don’t you know.



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Where to submit articles:

My First Time and *Rivals of Wodehouse*: Dan Cohen
Chapters Corner: Susan Cohen (same address as Dan)
All other submissions: Gary Hall and Linda Adam-Hall

We appreciate all your articles, Quick Ones, quotes, and observations! Send them on, we'd love to have all you silent Wodehouseans represented in Plum Lines!

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Flash!

A *Wodehouse Handbook*, Colonel N. T. P. Murphy's recently published two-volume set of the world and words of P. G. Wodehouse, has been reviewed in the *Observer* (U.K.). To read, visit the following link: <http://tinyurl.com/2loyvd>

As Debrett's *Guide to Heraldry and Regalia* tells us, the rules were clear in this matter: "The mace was originally a weapon wielded by the clergy in battle where their holy orders forbade the shedding of blood with a sword." It was, however, deemed perfectly acceptable for these men of God to clobber their enemies to death with a blunt instrument.

From *A Wodehouse Handbook*, Volume 1, p. 113

Providential Flash!

Don't forget to register *now* for the Divine Providence convention. All the latest details about the convention are covered in the enclosed flyer. For any additional information, see the registration form (also enclosed), visit TWS's website at www.wodehouse.org/TWSprovidence, or contact Jean Tillson (see above left). See you in Providence!