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*CONVENTION INFORMATION ON PAGE 16 FOR
“A LITTLE WODEHOUSE ON THE PRAIRIE”*

Who is Bertie Wooster’s “Best Friend Forever”?

BY ELLIOTT MILSTEIN

I HAVE LONG mused on the expression “A friend in need is a friend indeed.” While we may ask any old acquaintance for a fiver or a lift to the airport, when pain and anguish wring the brow, it is only the truest and bluest of friends—our “best friend”—to whom we turn. The Wooster/Jeeves saga is densely populated with Bertie’s friends, or, to use his most common expression, “pals.” In fact, the entire saga is “pal-centric,” with nearly every story involved in helping out some friend or other. *The Code of the Woosters* is, after all, entirely about helping a friend in need.

Musing on this centrality of friendship in the Bertie Wooster stories, I began to wonder who, of all these pals, would one consider Bertie’s best friend? The first step in such an investigation would be to put together a comprehensive list of the Friends of Bertie (FOBs). I began with the Ring/Jaggard *Millennium Wodehouse Concordance*—in this case, volume 6—but I found no specific list of FOBs, so I decided to assemble my own and came up with the following (eschewing the Reggie Pepper stories):

Bruce (“Corky”) Corcoran
Rockmetteller (“Rocky”) Todd
Francis (“Bicky”) Bickersteth
George Caffyn
Richard (“Bingo”) Little
Oliver (“Sippy”) Sipperley
Charles Edward (“Biffy”) Biffen
Freddie Bullivant
Hildebrand (“Tuppy”) Glossop



*Elliott Milstein (back row, far left) and a few
of his BFFs from the Pickering Motor Company*

Marmaduke (“Chuffy”) Chuffnell
Augustus (“Gussie”) Fink-Nottle
Rev. Harold (“Stinker”) Pinker
G. D’Arcy (“Stilton”) Cheesewright
George Webster (“Boko”) Fittleworth
Claude Cattermole (“Catsmeat”) Potter-Pirbright
Reginald (“Kipper”) Herring
Harold (“Ginger”) Winship
Tipton Plimsoll
Orlo J. Porter

Let’s begin by removing the obvious losers.

Although he and Tuppy Glossop eventually get over the little imbroglio with the rings over the swimming bath, and although they ultimately become (we assume) related by bonds of marriage, Bertie never really has a

kind word for Tuppy and he never refers to him as a “pal.” Cross Tuppy off the list.

Bertie and Stilton Cheesewright certainly are not close, although when we first see them together in *Joy in the Morning*, Bertie gives the impression that they were somewhat friendly while at school, though Stilton was “not one of my bosom pals.” Shortly after, they are not friendly in the least, and in the opening of *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit*, Bertie says, “Considering that he and I have known each other since . . . we were so high . . . we ought, I suppose, to be like Damon and what’s his name, but we aren’t by any means.” So much for Stilton.

Much of Bertie’s time is involved in helping Gussie Fink-Nottle, but it is not so much for Gussie’s sake as it is to keep himself out of the mulligatawny. He gets mixed up with Madeline Bassett initially to help Gussie, so there must have been some sense of friendship there. But Gussie is introduced to us with the phrase “it wasn’t as if he and I were in any way bosom,” and subsequent events over the course of four novels don’t make them any bosomer. Scratch Gussie.

When first spotting O. J. (Orlo) Porter in a protest march, Bertie describes him as “an old acquaintance . . . who had been on the same staircase with me at Oxford. Except for borrowing an occasional cup of sugar from one another and hulloing when we met on the stairs, we had never been close.” The events in the first half of *Aunts Aren’t Gentlemen* certainly seem to bear that out (Bertie even compares him, unfavorably, to Roderick Spode). Later, however, their relations grow warmer, and at the end of the book, Bertie goes out of his way to help Orlo get his inheritance; but considering that by this time they have only just begun to call each other by their Christian names, I don’t think we can include him in the list of likely candidates in our search. Forget Orlo.

Having eliminated the obvious, we turn now to those with whom Bertie is actually pretty chummy, starting with the first novel, *Thank You, Jeeves*, and Marmaduke, fifth Baron Chuffnell. Certainly Bertie has warmer feelings toward Chuffy than the four unpleasant fellows mentioned above, but he is not particularly effusive in his account of their relationship, merely remarking, “He’s a fellow I’ve known more or less all my life, he and self having been at private school, Eton and Oxford together.” Hardly a description of a deep, abiding friendship, especially when we compare it to the level of pally-ness Bertie provides for such short acquaintances as Rocky Todd (“I was fond of old Rocky”), Biffy Biffen (“we’d been lads together about town”), Freddie Bullivant (“a pal of mine”), George Caffyn (whom “I got pally with”), and especially Bicky Bickersteth, with whom he says he was “extremely pally.”

The only remaining friend from the early stories (except Bingo Little, more on whom shortly) is Oliver Sipperley. Bertie calls Sippy “a dear, old friend” on more than one occasion, but while their relationship seems as friendly as any of the others, there is nothing there to set him apart from the more casual acquaintances that Bertie seems to have inexplicably bound to himself with hoops of steel.

We can dismiss Tipton Plimsoll similarly. Bertie calls him “my American pal” (as if he didn’t have any others) and has no compunction in ringing him up the morning after a celebratory night, but their friendship is really undefined; he is only used in *Aunts Aren’t Gentlemen* as a plot device to get Bertie to the doctor, E. Jimpson Murgatroyd. I suspect that Wodehouse simply enjoyed, in this final novel, the idea of gratuitously creating one of the very few, slim tendrils connecting Bertie and Jeeves to Blandings.

Catsmeat Pirbright is a puzzle when considered as an FOB. Bertie and he certainly seem pretty close; in *The Mating Season* Bertie refers to their being “at private school, public school and Oxford” together, and in *Much Obligated, Jeeves* he couples Catsmeat with Kipper Herring as one of his oldest friends. But the only stories and reminiscences about Catsmeat all come from antics at the Drones—none from school. Further complicating matters is that Bertie was on quite intimate terms with his sister, Corky, when they were young children (“we were in the same dancing class”), and throughout *The Mating Season* he seems closer to her than he does to Catsmeat. This would indicate that Bertie and Corky are the same age, so unless Catsmeat and Corky were twins, Bertie and Catsmeat must be separated by a number of years. It is true that in *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit* he refers to Catsmeat as a “boyhood friend,” but he is simply making excuses to Stilton for being out late, so one can dismiss that as an exaggeration invented in the moment as a hasty defense.

One must, therefore, conclude that Catsmeat is actually somewhat younger than Bertie—old enough to have been at the same school at the same time, but probably not in each other’s social sphere. This temporal anomaly is further supported by the fact that Catsmeat is playing “juvenile roles” on the stage while Bertie is getting past that age, and that once, in *Thank You, Jeeves*, Bertie refers to him as “young Catsmeat.” So the old school tie is rather loose in conjoining these two, and throughout *The Mating Season*, the only book in which they are together, there is not one word from Bertie that Catsmeat is a “friend” or “pal” in any close way.

In fact, we can’t really rely on Bertie’s own words as testimony in the matter of friendship. Actions speak

louder than. Although the case of Catsmeat clearly shows this, the best example of Bertie as an unreliable narrator is Bingo Little. When we are introduced to Bingo in “Jeeves in the Springtime” (later titled “Jeeves Exerts the Old Cerebellum” in *The Inimitable Jeeves*), Bertie calls him “a chap I went to school with, and we see a lot of each other still.” He continues in this vein throughout the early short stories and, in “Bingo and the Little Woman,” even pinpoints the beginning of their friendship when he says that “we’ve been pals for fifteen years.”

However, in “Jeeves and the Impending Doom,” we have a whole new history: “[We were] pals practically from birth. Born in the same village within a couple days of one another, we went through kindergarten, Eton and Oxford together; and, grown to riper years we have enjoyed the old metrop. Full many a first class binge in one another’s company . . .” This doesn’t quite measure up with the “pals for fifteen years” gag, and he never later refers to Bingo as his oldest friend (an honor Catsmeat and Kipper share in *Much Obligated, Jeeves*).

Most take this later recitation of the facts as read—the real and true history of Bertie and Bingo (cf. Ring and Jaggard)—so that, coupled with the number of exploits they have together, we seem to have here a pretty clear portrait of true best friends.

Now, one could make an argument against such a contention by pointing out that we only see them together a couple of times post Bingo and Rosie’s wedding, all further Bingo exploits described by Drones other than Bertie, but I would regard this reasoning as specious on two counts. First, just because Bertie does not add any more stories to his reminiscences does not mean he does not see Bingo. We have Bertie’s comment in *Stiff Upper Lip, Jeeves* that he puts in “an occasional weekend” with Chuffy and wife Pauline, née Stoker, which are all unrecorded, so any lack of further stories re Bingo is not necessarily a sign that their friendship is over. Second, as the various narrators of the Drones Club stories are all unnamed Crumpets, Beans, and Piefaces, who is not to say that one or more of them are not Bertie himself? They all write or speak very much in Bertie’s style, after all. Perhaps these stories are recorded in this manner only because Bertie chose not to write them down, as he was not a participant in the plot, so he merely spoke of them in the club, leaving the recording of them to some other unseen hand.

But I think not. I reject Bingo as a best friend because he is a taker, not a giver. Bingo is a friend in

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need in only one respect. He is always asking Bertie for help, and Bertie is always helping, usually reluctantly. This is not so much a friendship as some kind of neurotic codependency. Or, as Bertie puts it, “ever since I first knew him . . . I have felt a rummy feeling of responsibility for young Bingo.” No; old and dear as he is, Bingo is too self-centered to be a “best friend.”

At this point you may think I am leading up to some ingenious or poetic conclusion that Jeeves is Bertie’s best friend. But this cannot be. Jeeves is, of course, nothing more nor less than Bertie’s valet. It is true that their relationship is not the typical master-servant one (otherwise there would be no point to writing 11 novels

and several dozen short stories), but they never really step out of their traditional roles. Other metaphors for Jeeves’s role in their peculiar relationship have been proffered: keeper (Aunt

Agatha), nannie (Bertie himself), aunt (Usborne), spouse (me, elsewhere) to name but four. I suppose “friend” could be added to the list. But what we’re looking for here is a true friend, not a metaphorical friend.

Nor can I consider borderline candidates such as Sir Roderick Glossop and Aunt Dahlia, even though Bertie refers to each of them once or twice as a “friend” or “pal”. But, like Jeeves, they don’t fit. I believe that to be included on a list of FOBs, the friend must be roughly of the same age as Bertie, sharing the same life experiences, and moving in the same social circles. In a word, all of Bertie’s friends are Drones, or, if not actually members of that club, certainly they would not be out of place there.

This leaves us with Boko Fittleworth, Stinker Pinker, Ginger Winship, and Kipper Herring. Bertie consistently has warm words for all four and they for him. Indeed, Stinker actually says of Bertie, “He is one of my best friends.”

Nonetheless, we can eliminate the Rev. H. P. Pinker as Bertie’s “best friend.” We must concentrate on actions, not words. Stinker is aloof throughout *The Code of the Woosters* and *Stiff Upper Lip, Jeeves*. We never see Stinker and Bertie engaged in real camaraderie. He is always offstage or standing idly by while his fiancée, Stiffy Byng, dishes up plenty of dirty work for Bertie. Indeed, at the beginning of the later novel, he himself is the harbinger of what he clearly knows is bad news, viz. that Stiffy had a “job” for Bertie. Would a best friend do that?

Boko seems to be a very good friend, offering to “kill the fatted calf” to welcome him in *Joy in the*

Morning and “delighted to put [Bertie] up” when Wee Nooke is immolated. Furthermore, with Boko, unlike Stinker, we see Bertie actually enjoying his company. Yet Boko has no difficulty in coercing Bertie, against his better judgment, into breaking into Steeple Bumbleigh, and complains bitterly when the operation fails.

Also, much as he describes them both as buddies and pals, Bertie has some harsh words for both Boko and Stinker, including “silly ass” and “loony to the eyebrows” for the former and a “pumpkin-headed foozler” and “as pronounced a goop as ever preached about Hivites and Hittites” for the latter. Not exactly the kind of words that indicate a rift in the lute of friendship, but hardly the sort of thing one says about a best friend.

With Ginger Winship we are definitely getting much closer. No harsh words pass Bertie’s mouth or pen in re this Winship. Bertie tells Aunt Dahlia that they were “like Damon and Pythias” at university and later says, “Ginger was one of my oldest buddies, not quite so old as Kipper Herring or Catsmeat Potter-Pirbright, with whom I plucked the gowans fine at prep school and university, but definitely ancient. Our rooms at Oxford were adjacent.” Throughout *Much Obligated, Jeeves* they are friendly without cessation and they are a great help to each other, as Bertie canvasses for Ginger (who is running for election at Market Snodsbury) and works on his behalf to help him disentangle himself from Florence Craye, and Ginger loans Bertie his car on a moment’s notice.

But there are clues that this is not the closest friendship in the world. Ginger is a bit snippy with Bertie on a couple of occasions, and their conversation, while generally amiable, is not exactly that of two old buddies. Most significantly, until Ginger comes to Brinkley and Aunt Dahlia mentions this to Bertie, she did not know he and Bertie even knew each other, despite the fact that Ginger’s mother was one of Dahlia’s closest friends.

Contrast that with Kipper Herring. Bertie specifically mentions, at the opening of *Jeeves in the Offing*, that Kipper had been to Brinkley one summer and, when mentioning his name to Dahlia on the phone, she has no difficulty remembering who he is.

“A life-long buddy of mine, this Herring, linked to me by what are called imperishable memories” is how Bertie introduces him to us in the very first paragraph of the novel. And those “imperishable memories”—viz., suffering through life at Malvern House run by Aubrey Upjohn—form a substantial part of the plot of *Jeeves in the Offing*. The novel opens with Kipper and Bertie having breakfast together as Kipper is staying with Bertie while waiting to get into his new flat. In addition to this extended visit and Dahlia’s pleasant remembrance of

Kipper, there are other incidents of friendship in this book that are unique in the saga. For instance, when Bertie is coerced by Dahlia into breaking up the Willie Cream/Phyllis Mills romance, he enlists Kipper to take his place, and Kipper does so in a trice and without a murmur. Compare that to Gussie’s whining about having to replace Bertie at the prize-giving.

Upon reading in the newspaper that Bertie is engaged to Bobbie Wickham, a girl to whom he has just become affianced himself, Kipper drives to Brinkley, not to excoriate Bertie but rather to assure him that “we mustn’t let this thing break up our old friendship.” Compare that to the behavior of Tuppy, Orlo, and Chuffy, who, under similar circumstances, attempted or threatened to ascertain the color of his insides.

Later, after Kipper and Bobbie are reconciled and when one of her harebrained schemes falls apart, Bobbie lays into Bertie for being the cause of its failure. Kipper, with no pressing reason to do so, defends Bertie to Bobbie. He actually takes his friend’s side against his fiancée. That’s pretty strong, especially when that fiancée is so liberally endowed with red hair and all that goes with it.

Even more incredibly, when Bertie is called upon to push Upjohn into the lake so Kipper can save him, or to say nasty things to Upjohn so Kipper can defend him—two schemes that on previous occasions (with Bingo and Boko) Bertie had to be blackmailed into—on this occasion Bertie jumps to both without a hint of a *nole prosequi*. Here, in one novel, we have repeatedly unprecedented behavior and several examples of both interpretations of “a friend in need.”

While all of this empirical evidence makes the case convincingly, I think the strongest feeling one gets for the uniqueness of this friendship is more ineffable: the cozy conversation between the two in the second chapter of *Jeeves in the Offing*. Too long to quote here, I encourage you all to go back and read it. I know I am getting a little subjective here, but I think no other tête-à-tête in the saga between Bertie and another pal—not even with Ginger Winship—has the close, almost fraternal, feel of this conversation. It has, for me, the same flavor of some of the letters to Bill Townend in *Performing Flea*, or, letting your imagination wander a little as you read it, you can almost hear Plum and Guy Bolton as they saunter together some summer afternoon down Basket Neck Lane.

Bertie Wooster is a man blessed—or cursed—with a multitude of “pals,” but one can have only one “best friend.” I believe that, even though he appears in only one book, Reginald “Kipper” Herring fits that bill. He is, indeed, Bertie Wooster’s best friend forever.

Teaching P. G. Wodehouse

BY REBECCA A. BROWN

I ENCOUNTERED P. G. Wodehouse for the first time in June 2008 when my desk copy of *The Broadview Anthology of British Literature: The Twentieth Century and Beyond* arrived. As I flipped through the text one sultry summer evening, anxiously planning my fall 20th-century British literature class, I stopped on page 200. The right side of the page held a frightening visage: a bald, smiling, black-and-white illustration of P. G. Wodehouse. His ears were huge, and the deep lines in his face and neck were terrifyingly symmetrical. Suddenly, I remembered an Edwardian and interwar literary study from graduate school that referred to Wodehouse in a footnote. Although I could not recall the precise nature of the reference, the author dismissed Wodehouse's comical works due to their mainstream appeal in the 1920s and 1930s.

I decided to give Wodehouse the chance that the literary critic denied him. Within the first five minutes of reading "Honeysuckle Cottage" (the selection the anthology included), I was alternately cackling and chuckling. By the time I finished, I was enchanted by Wodehouse's unconventional ghost story, wherein the fictional detective writer, James Rodman, is haunted by a "miasma of sentimentalism" at the country cottage he inherits from his dead aunt, the acclaimed fictional romance writer, Leila J. Pinckney. I was especially impressed by Wodehouse's commentary on country life and city life as well as his flawless stylistic shifts from detective fiction ("Silently, like a panther, he made one quick step to the desk, noiselessly opened a drawer, drew out his automatic") to overly sentimental romance fiction ("On the mat stood the most beautiful girl he had ever beheld. A veritable child of Faerie"). I felt an unwavering conviction to teach the story in my fall class.

My first opportunity to teach Wodehouse to a group of undergraduates at a university in the south end of San Antonio, Texas, was highly memorable. On September 25, 2008, the 7:00–9:45 P.M. class tackled the story after a disheartening hour and a half devoted to Virginia Woolf. At 8:30 P.M. the class was so stupefied into near-apathy by Woolf's stream-of-consciousness writing in the short story "Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street" that I suggested we turn the discussion to Wodehouse. Instantly, all 21 students smiled. One particularly vociferous undergraduate shouted, "I love this story! It's so funny!" I asked my students to get into small groups and to formulate answers to three brief questions about



Rebecca Brown prepares another lesson.

"Honeysuckle Cottage." Then, I told them, we would have a full class discussion based on their answers. Two questions concerned humor, while the third question asked students to consider the connections between the setting of Wodehouse's story and the setting in Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows*, which we had read a few weeks earlier.

The answers to the third question ranged from relatively superficial ("both stories take place in the English countryside") to extremely thoughtful ("Grahame seems to idealize the countryside while Wodehouse exposes it in a hilarious manner. This is not the countryside of Edwardian house parties; rather, it's a mildly frightening place that subsists on urban nostalgia"). One student even mentioned Wodehouse's hilarious repetition of "the apple-cheeked housekeeper," a line that, in the student's opinion, paints the country cottage as a decidedly "rosy, happy place" and mocks anonymous housekeepers throughout British literature.

We shifted our discussion to humor. Two lines that provoked much laughter occur right after James dives into the river to save Rose's obnoxious dog Toto from drowning. The girl whispers, "Yes, you are brave—brave." James responds, "I am wet—wet." James's mockery of Rose's response elicited much appreciation from the class, not only because everyone loathed Toto but also because of Wodehouse's wonderful stylistic imitation and repetition within these two lines of dialogue. Furthermore, students drew attention to Colonel Carteret's inability and unwillingness to remember James's name ("I may call you George?" / "No, John, my boy") as a source of humor. However, the most appealing part of the story was near the end when Wodehouse subverts the happy romance story conclusion: "Then, together, man and dog passed silently into the sunset." Although the class knew that James and Rose would not walk into the sunset, the idea

of “man and dog” doing so sent several students into fits of giggles.

Ultimately, that evening my students taught me, and each other, that Wodehouse’s humor not only operates in complex, thought-provoking ways, but that his unique genre bending and blending make his work a wonderful counterpoint to high modernists such as Virginia Woolf. Wodehouse, in short, enables students to fully grasp the diversity of interwar British literature in particular and 20th-century British literature in general. This was evident when, at the end of the semester, several of my undergraduates discussed “Honeysuckle Cottage” in their final papers. One student, Priscilla de los Santos, astutely noted that much of Wodehouse’s appeal to contemporary readers may be his ability to “send [the message] . . . that it is fine to not only laugh at yourself in certain situations, but also to let loose and relax even though things may not be going the way you envisioned.”

Wodehouse will always have a place in my 20th-century British literature classes, and my hope is to improve my ability to teach his works. In the meantime, I must admit that it is precisely for the reason Priscilla mentions that I have embarked upon my own adventures reading Wodehouse’s works. At the end of this stressful semester, *Leave It to Psmith* has been a welcome diversion from academic and nonacademic responsibilities; the novel has also enabled me to laugh at the residents of Blandings Castle, missing flower pots, bad poets, and myself.

Collecting Facsimile Dust Jackets

BY JOHN GRAHAM

WHETHER YOU CALL them dust jackets (as most Americans do) or dust wrappers (as Charles Gould and the English do), their presence adds considerably to both the cost and desirability of almost any book. In my experience collecting Wodehouse first editions for nearly 25 years, the presence of a dust jacket (I’m American, after all) in very good or better condition is likely to at least triple the cost of any book. And for Wodehouse titles published prior to 1950, a jacket can easily raise the asking price by a factor of 10 or more—sometimes much more—over the cost of the book alone. A book collector who is willing to forego jackets entirely can certainly save himself a lot of time and money, but I dare say he will miss out on a great deal of pleasure too. Dust jackets are notable for their publisher’s blurbs and period advertisements (which are sometimes the only way to identify a true first issue jacket), not to mention their unique, quirky, and often striking artwork. (My favorite front cover is the sublime drawing by Sax of Beach and the Empress looking like twin souls on the Herbert Jenkins edition of *Pigs Have Wings*.)



We see, courtesy of Laura Loehr, that one singing group in Buffalo has a good concept for the title of a choral program.



Twin souls?

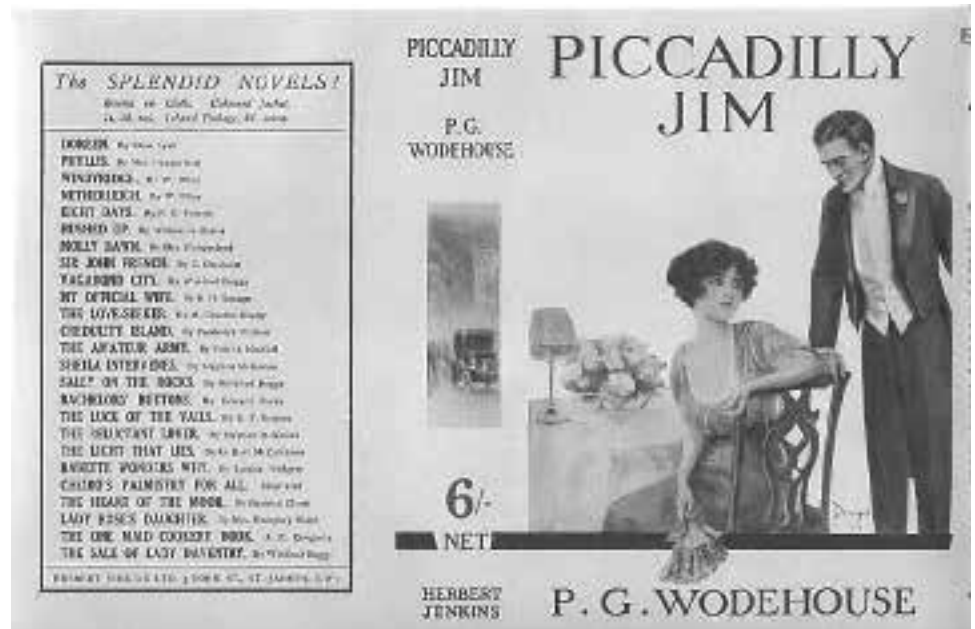
Fortunately, these days, there is a way to collect first-edition jackets without their considerable expense. Thanks to digital scanners, computers, and color printers, it is now possible to buy inexpensive facsimile reprints of many Wodehouse dust jackets, including some of the very rarest. When I say facsimiles, I am not talking about the mostly low-quality color photocopies that have become ubiquitous on eBay. Rather, there are now a handful of specialist dealers on the internet who create and distribute high-quality computer-enhanced reproductions of original dust jackets. For Wodehouse collectors, the name to know is Mark Terry in San Francisco, who can be reached by email at mterry9999@comcast.net or via his website <http://www.facsimiledustjackets.com>.

Since 1998, Mark, a former commercial printer, has been building an inventory of digital reproductions of vintage dust jackets copied from the libraries of book collectors all over the world. (How he gets collectors to share their treasures remains his secret.) After he scans the original jackets, he uses computer technology to fill in missing gaps and to eliminate wrinkles, tears, color fading, and other common imperfections. The result is a jacket as close to a pristine copy of the original as is humanly and technologically possible. To each reproduction, he adds "Facsimile Dust Jacket L.L.C." in small print somewhere on the front flap.

Currently, Mark's website shows 47 Wodehouse jackets for sale among the nearly 4,000 books he displays there. But, he readily admits that the website has fallen well behind his digital collection. If you send him an email, he can provide you with an up-to-date list of almost 200 Wodehouse dust jackets for sale, both English and American, firsts and reprints. Each of his jackets is priced at \$22 apiece, no matter whether you order relatively easy-to-find ones like *Full Moon* or *A Few Quick Ones* or virtually impossible-to-find ones. Among this later group are some real treasures, including both the U.S. and U.K. dust jackets for *The Little Nugget* and *A Damsel in Distress*. Originals of any of these four jackets would cost you more than \$10,000, if you could ever hope to find them.

Mark is not a Wodehouse collector himself (although he admits to having read a few), and as a

result, I don't think he fully appreciates how incredibly rare are some of the jackets he has uncovered. Among all of them, one title stands out for special mention: a first-issue dust jacket for the UK edition of *Piccadilly Jim*, the first Wodehouse book published by Herbert Jenkins in May 1918. This jacket is not described in Eileen McIlvaine's bibliography and I have never met a collector who has seen a copy, much less owns one. (Mark will only say that the original dust jacket is in a private collection somewhere in England.) What makes the jacket so special is that it uses artwork which was never reproduced on any later printings. On all other titles they issued, Herbert Jenkins reused the first edition artwork on all or most of their reprints, changing only the ads on the inside flaps and the price on the spine. (On *The Coming of Bill*, Jenkins did change the artwork rather early on, certainly by the 12th printing,



First printing in a Wodehouse-related publication?

as noted by McIlvaine.) Since Herbert Jenkins reprints tend to be plentiful, most collectors assume they are familiar with the designs of first edition jackets even if they have never actually seen a first. With *Piccadilly Jim*, however, this turns out not to be the case. As far as I know, the reproduction above is the first time this dust jacket has ever been printed in any Wodehouse-related publication. And for \$22 plus shipping, Mark Terry can send you your very own copy.

The hands of the clock pointed to three minutes to the hour. Porters skimmed to and fro like water beetles.

Piccadilly Jim (1917)

Life Imitates Wodehouse

BY MIKE ECKMAN

MY WIFE AND I recently enjoyed a crossing on the *Queen Mary 2* from New York to Southampton, and in preparation, I read both *The Luck of the Bodkins* and *The Girl on the Boat*. Space does not allow for a report on all the delights of the trip, but the comments below may be of interest.

— Food —

These kindly men, believing that there is nothing like a bite to eat for picking a fellow up, had provided five kinds of soup, six kinds of fish, and in addition to these preliminaries such attractive items as chicken hot-pot, roast veal, ox tail, pork cutlets, mutton chops, sausages, steak, haunch of venison, sirloin of beef, rissoles, calf's liver, brawn, York ham, Virginia ham, Bradenham ham, salmi of duck and boar's head, followed by eight varieties of pudding, a wide choice of cheese and ice-creams and fruits to fill up the chinks. Monty did not take them all, but he took enough of them to send him to the boat deck greatly refreshed and in a mood of extreme sentimentality. He felt like a loving python. (*The Luck of the Bodkins*)

Food is still taken seriously, with 160 of the 1200 crew members dedicated to cooking. The Britannia Dining Room offered us fare that would have had Monty's approval. The appetizers and soups one night included Paté en Croute, Cucumber Sauce; Smoked Salmon Terrine With Keta Caviar & Celery Hearts; Frog Legs Provençale; Cheddar Cheese Soup, Rye Bread Croutons; and Clear Oxtail Essence, Sherry Wine, Chester Stick. The list goes on and on: risottos, truffles, mascarpone Cointreau mousse . . . with the entrées and desserts matching the splendor of the starters. As you might conclude, there were many who like Monty felt like loving pythons at the end of dinner.

— On the Promenade Deck —

Lottie Blossom came out on to the promenade deck, to find it in the state of mixed torpor and activity which always prevails on promenade decks on fine mornings. There was a long line of semi-conscious figures in chairs, swathed in



Mike Eckman in Providence, before his Bodkin-like tour

rugs and looking like fish laid out on a slab, and before their glassy gaze the athletes paraded up and down, rejoicing in their virility, shouting to one another "What a morning!" and pointing out that twice more round would make a mile.

Here and there were groups which fell into neither division. A little too active for the fish brigade and a little too limp for the athletes, they leaned on the rail and stared at the sea or just stood about and looked at their watches, to ascertain how soon they might expect soup. (*The Luck of the Bodkins*)

In fact, three times around the deck of the *Queen Mary 2* adds up to 1.1 miles. I did make several laps of the deck, but found negotiating walkers, crew members, and shifting winds to be a real challenge. Alas, the *Queen Mary 2* does not serve mid-morning soup, a tradition now sadly lost.

— Ship's Concert —

Ships' concerts are given in aid of the Seamen's Orphans and Widows, and, after one has been present at a few of them, one seems to feel that any right-thinking orphan or widow would rather jog along and take a chance of starvation than be the innocent cause of such things. They open with a long speech from the master of ceremonies—so long, as a rule, that it is only the thought of what is going to happen afterwards that enables the audience to bear it with fortitude. This done, the amateur talent is unleashed, and the grim work begins. (*The Girl on the Boat*)

We found there was more than enough entertainment. There were shows and dances every evening, musical performances throughout the day, plays presented by graduates of the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts, guest lecturers, various classes, and even a planetarium.

However, to my delight, our program for our last day did promise “5.00 pm Guest Talent Show — ‘In the Limelight.’” No admission was charged, so I assumed that the orphans and widows had other sources of funds or had become “right-thinking” and desired no compensation from events such as this.

Our host Fred, who promised great entertainment, was followed by a couple of credible singers who began the program with “It’s a Sin to Tell a Lie” and “Unforgettable.” A would-be comedian read from a typewritten script that he has apparently used on other voyages. The humor became a bit technical when he tried to compare the number of his wife’s pairs of shoes to those of Imelda Marcos. He could not understand the criticism of British food as he had enjoyed great tandoori and Peking duck in London on prior visits. Next, two female singers came a little short of the high notes in a couple of songs.

The following act was a dramatic reading that was quite good: the devil describing hell as a place in which there is no one to love you and you are given a cold space only as small as a coffin. More music followed with a teenage pianist who was very good technically and a man who played a combination of “September Song” and “The Falling Leaves,” producing even more tinkle than Roger Williams did in the original. A woman provided an enjoyable medley of Broadway songs (no Plum songs) and the show closed with an older couple dancing the Cha Cha. The husband asked us to watch his wife so we would not “see what the old guy was trying to do”—good advice. Fred was effusive with praise, and all participants received impressive certificates.

Wodehouse’s characters would enjoy the onboard activities that have been added since his day, though there are definite differences from what they were used to. Dressing for dinner is more casual, with dark suits accepted as a substitute for evening wear. By day, very casual dress is allowed, but one could dress up as much as one wanted to. All animals are kept in a pet area, so one does not have to fear putting a hand into a wicker basket. And, of course, if one just wanted to stare at the ocean, one could do that also as there certainly was enough of it to go around.

Perhaps it was more fun in Wodehouse’s day, but it still sure beats traveling by air.



Worcestershirewards

BY LAWRENCE DUGAN

In 2008, Larry Dugan presented the following to the great edification of Chapter One. We’re sure Larry would be happy to give you the 24-page version if you’d like!

HOW DO YOU summarize an academic paper? People do it all the time at conferences and symposia of various kinds. But what about my project: “Worcestershirewards: Wodehouse and the Baroque?” The paper is 24 pages long, with several dozen endnotes. I had been invited by Susan Cohen to deliver it to the Wodehouse Society’s Philadelphia chapter at a meeting on March 30 last year. My wife Deborah and I had joined the society after being invited by Barbara Van Hook—who extended the invitation after seeing the title of my unpublished paper in a publicity flier for a poetry reading I had given the previous fall at the Free Library of Philadelphia. So far, so good.

The meeting was held at the Dark Horse Inn on Head House Square in Society Hill.

I had decided to reduce the paper to a dozen talking points. I finished up with 16. The thesis is that for the Jeeves and Wooster books, Wodehouse invented a new literary style, much different from the classical bent of his earlier books (and many of his later, when not writing about Jeeves and Wooster).

1. Wodehouse wrote his early novels, i.e. Psmith books, in straightforward prose. (*Psmith in the City* is the best, in my opinion.)

2. As in later books, Wodehouse’s early characters were often middle- and upper-class Englishmen and their servants, with the occasional American.

3. When he created the manservant, Jeeves, he also created the master, Bertie Wooster.

4. Jeeves is not really as important as Bertie. His role is more *deus ex machina*, a wonderful character who saves the day.

5. Bertie’s voice is the heart of the comedies. He tells the stories.

6. Because of this, Jeeves and Wooster novels are written in a radically different style from the Psmith, Uncle Fred, and Emsworth books.

7. But why?

8. Because the novels are told in the first person, which lends itself to particular voice.

9. The Jeeves and Wooster novels are farcical—unlike some of Wodehouse’s other books.

10. Bertie is a unique character. He’s a member of the upper class, wealthy and popular, but also vain, incompetent, and anxious to please.

11. He is chivalrous with friends and relatives who are willing to take advantage of the above qualities, especially if they are women.

12. The key to starting the comic stories is that women expect so much of a man who seems to have so little to offer, and that Bertie accepts this.

13. *In this he is completely different from other Wodehouse heroes*—Psmith and Uncle Fred, for instance. They do whatever they please, within limits, even considering that Uncle Fred is carefully watched by his wife, the Countess.

14. This quality of Bertie's demands a unique voice, which I call baroque.

15. It twists and turns language, uses outrageous mixed metaphors, clichés, slang, makes absurd use of initials, anything but ordinary English.

16. I capped my argument by reading several of Bertie Wooster's riper statements. Here are a few of them.

"She drove off, Gussie standing gaping after her transfixed, like a goldfish staring at an ant's egg."

The Mating Season

"Such was the v. that rose before my e., as I gaped at that c.d. [closed door] and I wilted like a salted snail."

Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit

"It is pretty generally recognized in the circles in which he moves that Bertie Wooster is not a man who lightly throws in the towel and admits defeat. Beneath the thingummies of what-d'you-call-it his head, wind and weather permitting, is as a rule bloody but unbowed, and if the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune want to crush his proud spirit, they have to pull up their socks and make a special effort."

Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit

No other Wodehouse character sounds anything like Bertie. I hope this look inside the world (or the mind) of the man presenting a paper about Wodehouse Ipse (himself, as the Irish say) has been instructive. And many thanks to Susan Cohen (Rosie M. Banks) for inviting me to speak.

She rippled once more. That looking-fondly-at-idiot-child expression on her face had become intensified.

Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit (1955)

The Discretions of Archie

BY CHARLES E. GOULD, JR.

At the 1991 TWS convention in New York City, Charles Gould gave a legendary presentation called "P. G. Wodehouse: The Last of the Great Russians." In Providence in 2007, Charles delighted us again with a variation of that paper, presented herewith. Copyright Charles E. Gould, Jr., 1991, 2007, and 2008.

MS. TILLSON, Ladies and Gentlemen and Newts, and Boys—if such be present—I do not detain you long, as another Newt fancier once said, but I propose on this Providential occasion to feel compelled to say a few suspicious words, for I feel less like Gussie Fink-Nottle than the English schoolmaster who was invited to speak on his special subject at Cambridge University. The don who invited him mentioned that there would be an honorarium of fifty pounds, and asked for a prompt reply. The schoolmaster sent a wire, with all convenient speed: "Delighted to accept your most kind invitation. Do you require the fifty pounds in advance?"

On that basis, though I note that here I actually *did* pay in advance, I assure you that this is not a very scholarly address, quite free of the pettifogging pedantry and palely parabolic PG puffery to which of course I secretly aspire. Not very scholarly myself, I was for 32 years at Kent School, an institution famous mostly for putting oars in the water at Henley and pulling them out again, the cause of but indifferent scholarship in others, the general attitude of my pupils being one that Wodehouse himself would have shared: if we humor this haggard wreck for a time, he will let us go out and play in the sunshine. It's not, of course, that I don't know a lot. I do. I know an awful lot. But I can't remember much of it, and my lips get so tired these days when I read that it's difficult to keep up with what I've forgotten. Mostly, I can't even remember what I've forgotten, and turning to a book like Norman Murphy's—not that there *is* a book like Norman Murphy's—just compounds the difficulty. As Groucho Marx once said, outside of a dog, a book is man's best friend; inside of a dog, it's too dark to read.

I do recall, however, that in the first scene of *Hamlet*, a funny play by Shakespeare, whom Ogden Nash once called "the Elizabethan Wodehouse," the guard Marcellus says to his fellow guard Bernardo, or perhaps actually Bernardo says to Marcellus, "What, has this thing appeared again tonight?" And as I see you whispering roughly the same thing to your neighbor, though it's only a little before cocktail time, I assure you that my brain still works like lightning: it flashes for a bit, and then there follows a great but harmless



Charles Gould (or Archie?) in good form at the Providence convention in 2007

noise. The Londoners here, particularly, now wistfully recall the lyric Wodehouse wrote for *Oh, Lady! Lady!*—“There was I, and there were you, three thousand miles apart.”

As to my topic, “The Discretions of Archie,” which Jean Tillson accepted at sight and bet on heavily—else I would not be before you: I wish I could tell you that Wodehouse’s *Indiscretions of Archie*, a picaresque novel so seamless that it’s probably not nearly so picaresque as the autumn foliage here in New England, was derived entirely from the first line of Shakespeare’s Sonnet 94: “They that have power to hurt and will do none.” Therefore, I *do* tell you that. Every indiscretion committed by Archibald Moffam (pronounced “Moom,” to rhyme with “Bluffinghame”—or “Bloomingdale’s” or “Macy’s”) is an act of kindness, the will to do no hurt, prompted by what in Chapter 21 Wodehouse terms “common humanity,” whether it be to The Growing Boy, The Sausage Chappie, Vera Silvertown with the fly in her eye, or the waiter Salvatore and his mother’s cigar shop, and even unto bidding up the statue of Pongo’s little brother (actually Pongo himself) to please old Brewster, and his treatment of the snake Peter: “Somewhere beneath Peter’s three hundred ribs there had lain a heart of gold, and Archie mourned for his loss.” That Archie’s so-called indiscretions annoy his father-in-law, the pill Daniel Brewster—who needs to be taken with a tall glass of scotch and water—turns them into discretions after all, often for Archie’s love of Lucille, Brewster’s daughter, ending happily with the suggestion that Archie and old Brewster share a spot of sherbet; and Wodehouse’s title—“Indiscretions of Archie”—along with “The Great Gatsby” and “David Copperfield” emerges as a masterpiece of irony.

So now I may turn to my special subject, on which you inadvertently invited me to speak and for the privilege of speaking on which I have gladly paid: “P. G. Wodehouse: The Last of the Great Russians.” Of course, it goes without saying that I, a teacher of English literature and composition, don’t know enough about the Great Russians to buy a tram ticket in Omsk. I know even less about the not-so-great Russians. But I am here to tell you this: Wodehouse wrote one novel so sociological in its overtones, undertones, and half-tones, so bad-tempered and bleak in plot, character, and setting, that a copy of it—a book beneath the bough of

The Cherry Orchard, with or without the proverbial jug of wine—puts him in the mainstream of the Sorry-to-Intrude-but-Grandfather-Has-Just-Hanged-Himself-in-the-Barn-Again school of fiction. That novel is *If I Were You*, and for the next three hours I modestly hope to do it justice.

Now, actually, it should come as no surprise to this learned audience that so highly derivative and prolific a writer as P. G. Wodehouse should have at least once fallen beneath the somber, powerful Russian influence. He himself acknowledged it, you recall, in the Preface to *The Heart of a Goof*, as early as 1926:

The thoughtful reader, comparing this book with *The Clicking of Cuthbert*, will, no doubt, be struck by the poignant depth of feeling which pervades the present volume like the scent of muddy shoes in a locker-room; and it may be that he will conclude that, like so many English writers, I have fallen under the spell of the great Russians.

Disingenuously disclaiming this, he goes on to say that “It is, of course, true that my style owes much to Dostoevsky,” and even four years earlier, in the aforementioned “The Clicking of Cuthbert,” we have objective testimony to the darker side of Wodehouse’s literary achievement:

Vladimir Brusiloff proceeded to sum up. “No novelists any good except me. Sovietski—yah! Nastikoff—bah! I spit me of zem all. No novelists anywhere any good except me. P. G. Wodehouse and Tolstoi not bad. Not good, but not bad. No novelists any good except me.”

Vladimir Brusiloff, you remember, “specialized in grey studies of hopeless misery, where nothing happened till page three hundred and eighty, when the moujik decided to commit suicide,” and his acceptance of Wodehouse as “not bad” is not to be lightly dismissed. Less than a decade later, Wodehouse fulfilled the promise that Brusiloff evidently saw in him, with *If I Were You*, a novel which, though running to only 304 pages in the American edition, blessedly fewer in the U.K., is a grey study of hopeless misery in which nothing really happens at all.

Let’s look first at the plot, and then, if time permits, glance at character, setting, and style. (I have spent a third of a century on this. Of you I ask only an evening.) The plot is old and tired, cold and hard like a picnic egg. David A. Jasen, who is to Wodehouse what Alexander

Worple (not to mention Audubon) was to birds, tells us in the Bibliography that it was derived from Anstey's *Vice-Versa*, which Wodehouse and Bolton then turned it into a play entitled *Who's Who?* Later it became the novel *Laughing Gas*, understood philosophically, scientifically, evolutionally, last year by the amazingly best-selling Richard Dawkins. But we had already seen its germ—and so had Wodehouse—in the *Menaechmi* of Plautus (60 B.C.). (Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors* owes something to it, and so does his *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, and so does the Rodgers and Hart musical, *The Boys from Syracuse*.) This plot has gone round the block like a London taxi waiting—with good reason—for American fares to emerge from the Washington Hotel on Curzon Street, near Heywood Hill's bookshop.

Wodehouse got hold of it somehow. Mr. Wetherby, the lawyer in *If I Were You*, reminds us that

. . . this changing of one baby for another of greater rank has been the basis of a hundred *Family Herald* novelettes, and is such a stock situation of melodrama that the late W. S. Gilbert satirized it in his poem, "The Baby's Vengeance."

Gilbert even used it in *HMS Pinafore* and *The Gondoliers*, and a little bit in *The Pirates of Penzance*. As Dr. Robert Hall has pointed out, the novel has a "very serious" three-act structure, and, unlike most of the plots over which Wodehouse took such pains, this one must have practically written itself, leaving him time to study the sad effects on his characters of guilt, misery, and unsweetened gin.

But for those of you who have not lately looked into this, the most rancid of Wodehouse's attacks on humanity, let me summarize. Anthony Claude Wilbraham Bryce (Tony), Fifth Earl of Droitwich, and Syd Price, a barber, were switched in their infancy by Tony's nurse, Syd's mother, Ma Price. "She's a nasty old thing, and she drinks too much," we are told in Chapter 1, while in Chapter 2 we read; "She's a ghastly female, and the son's worse. A highly septic little bounder." Now, grown to man's estate, Tony, the earl as barber, is engaged to Violet Waddington, described in Chapter 16 as "a loathsome girl," who rejects him in his role as barber, even as he, seeing his error in getting engaged to her, falls in love with Polly Brown, his manicurist/assistant and, an American, the only decent woman in the book. At the same time, Syd becomes sick of being an earl, especially when he learns that as the barber he can own the rights to the patent hair-restorer *Derma Vitalis*; and Ma Price, variously influenced by alcohol, religion, and omens of cats and ladders, eventually withdraws

her testimony and Syd goes back to the barber shop, and Tony, now again the Earl of Droitwich, marries Polly Brown. The only thing that *happens* throughout the tale—unlikely even, or particularly, by Wodehouse standards, if I have made it confusing enough—is that the hero discovers he was engaged to the wrong girl.

It's hard to believe that this bad-tempered, virtually plotless story is the immediate predecessor to *Hot Water*, one of Wodehouse's most light-hearted, extravagantly and skillfully plotted, and funniest novels; but it is, and Mr. Jasen records that Wodehouse was working on them simultaneously, or at least had started *Hot Water* as *If I Were You* neared completion. The two have in common that one thing that happens: rejected, like the Earl of Droitwich, for his decent impulses, by Lady Beatrice Bracken, a snob and a manipulator like Violet Waddington, Packy Franklin discovers that he was engaged to the wrong girl and falls in love with Jane Opal, the American girl of his dreams. But while the same thing happens, plot, character, style, and tone are all markedly different. By the time he got through *Hot Water* (having scrapped, according to Herbert Warren Wind, as John Graham recently reported, 30,000 words), Wodehouse had worked the Russians out of his system. There is much more action in *Hot Water*: there are at least two sub-plots, involving the Vicomte de Blissac, Soup Slattery, and Oily Carlisle and their lost loves, Mrs. Gedge's jewels, Mr. Gedge's quite reasonable desire not to be made Ambassador to France, and Senator Opal's "copperizing" letter. Because there is so much more action, this novel—fantastic and romantic as it is—seems much more believable than the static reworking of the old changeling plot. In *If I Were You*, there is nothing resembling a subplot at all.

Years ago Barry Phelps remarked that there is only one truly bitchy woman in Wodehouse: the Princess von und zu Dwornitzchek, the wicked step-mother in *Summer Moonshine*; but she is nothing to Violet Waddington, who even Wodehouse says was "a girl nobody seemed to like much." Ma Price is "that awful old woman," a "yowling old nuisance" who gives Lady Lydia Bassinger "the creeps." There is no language like that in any other Wodehouse novel I can think of. Lady Beatrice Bracken, Florence Craye, and other snobbish and quasi-intellectual girls who want to mold their young men are allowed in character to mock themselves, as are Nannie Bruce in *Cocktail Time* and Nurse Wilks in "Portrait of a Disciplinarian," both old nuisances if ever there was one but never identified as such by Wodehouse. Even Slingsby the butler in *If I Were You* has a darker aura, grotesquely conscious of his situation in a way that a Beach or a Silversmith would never be,

without making himself funny as Wodehouse allows Binstead and Spink to do. His level of repartee is to call Syd an “impudent young ’ound,” and to tell Ma Price, when she says that she fears bad luck because she broke a mirror that morning, that she shouldn’t have looked in it. These characters are humorous in the literal sense: they are governed by overgrowths of humours, of inner complexions, most of them choleric, or bilious; they are laughable indeed, but they are not really very funny. “She’s a garrulous old fool,’ said Sir Herbert shortly, ‘and in her present condition goodness knows what she might say to the servants”” is the dialogue not of the sunny and effervescent Wodehouse that we hear behind Bertie’s description of Aunt Agatha as wearing barbed wire next the skin, or behind Mr. Gedge’s thought that before marrying him his wife might have been a lion tamer, but of the sunny and effervescent Wodehouse with Dostoyevsky on his mind.

A glance through Richard Usborne’s *Wodehouse Nuggets*, a concordance of Wodehouse nifties, turns up only five from *If I Were You*, a surprisingly small number from a novel of the decade that produced *Very Good, Jeeves*, *Big Money*, *Heavy Weather*, and *The Code of the Woosters*, to name but a few that Mr. Usborne richly mines—astonishingly small, until we remember the unaccountable but unmistakable debt Wodehouse was working off to his eastern predecessors; and even they are macabre, grey, and atypically grotesque, the rainy Sunday in St. Petersburg as opposed to the Shropshire sunshine:

We just happened to be sitting in a cemetery and I asked her how she’d like to see my name on her tombstone.

Slingsby loomed in the doorway like a dignified cloudbank.

She went out in the Park to look for rabbits. Never seen one before. Not running about, that is, with all its insides in it.

The bottle had the subtly grim look of champagne which has been bought at a public house.

What did me in was the horse kicking me. Three times in the same place. Most sure-footed animal I ever saw. Blimey, if I sat down now, I’d leave an ’oofprint.

Each of these nuggets is a little tarnished, as from exposure to an evening with Raskolnikov or one of the

Sisters Karamazov. Even the line about the butler has nothing in it of the justly more famous, “Ice formed on the butler’s upper slopes”: the latter is pure poetry, a double metaphor conveying at once an image of Beach’s appearance *and* his attitude, whereas the former is a mere simile without any particular interest or reverberation. Even if we credit “dignified” as a personification, it’s just a description.

Like James Rodman, the mystery writer who turns mushy in the environment of Honeysuckle Cottage, left to him by his Aunt Leila J. Pinckney the sentimental novelist, Wodehouse in *If I Were You* is writing in an uncharacteristic mood, coming perilously close to purveying what as a writer he normally avoided: a message, that there is something to class distinctions after all, and that we, like Syd Price and his dreadful mother, forget that to our own distress. That mood is reflected in his characterizations, most of which are openly satirical, in his rhetoric, which is unusually leaden, and in his taking up a plot that had no freshness left after Henry Fielding got through with it in *Tom Jones* in 1749. What there was in the private life of the man to render his imagination susceptible to the powerful impression of his great Russian forebears, I must leave to Mr. Jasen and other biographers to discover and disclose; but of that powerful impression there can be no serious critical doubt whatever, as, in conclusion, examination of just a couple of passages will prove.

Let me read first the conclusion of Chapter 23 of *If I Were You*, in which Ma Price, confronted by Sir Herbert, Lady Lydia, the butler Slingsby, and the lawyer Mr. Wetherby, decides that she will not after all sign the paper stating that her son Syd Price is not, after all, the rightful Earl of Droitwich.

Ma Price rose and approached the desk. It stood by the window, and through the window, as she advanced, her eyes fell on the pleasant lawns and shrubberies without. And suddenly, as if riveted by some sinister sight, they glared intently. She had picked up the pen. She now threw it from her with a clatter.

“Coo!” she cried.

Sir Herbert jumped.

“What the devil is it now?” he demanded irritably.

Ma Price turned and faced them resolutely. The sight she had just seen had brought it home to her that she had been all wrong in her diagnosis of the black cat. It had been sent to warn her—yes, but to warn her against signing the paper. Otherwise, why, as her fingers

clutched the pen, should this other portent have been presented, as if for good measure?

“I’m not going to sign!”

“What! !”

“I’m not!”

“Why not?” cried Lady Lydia.

Ma Price pointed dramatically at the window.

“I just seen a magpie!” she said.

We turn now, by way of comparison, to a passage near the end of Chapter VII, Book 9, of *The Brothers Karamazov*, by Fyodor Dostoyevsky:

Mitya got up and went to the window. The rain lashed against the little greenish panes of the window. He could see the muddy road just below the window, and further away, in the rainy mist, a row of poor, black, dismal huts, looking even blacker and poorer in the rain. Mitya thought of Phoebus the golden-haired, and how he had meant to shoot himself at his first ray. “Perhaps it would be even better on a morning like this,” he thought with a smile, and suddenly, flinging his hand downwards, he turned to his torturers.

It’s all right there, isn’t it? In both passages, we see a character in possession of a secret, confronted by lawyers and other authoritarian people, who, getting up to look through a window—in a symbolic act of gaining new perception—sees in an image of nature an omen which, in controverting a previous antithetical omen, leads to a change of heart which in turn results in a *peripeteia*, a reversal in fortune and plot. Mitya’s dismal huts and rainy mist are Ma Price’s magpie, her black cat an inversion of his shining Apollo.

Dostoyevsky’s masterpiece was published in 1880, the year before Wodehouse was born; but we need not engage, airily or glibly, the bootless or fruitless quest of proving that Wodehouse was familiar with it—though it’s evident, undoubtedly, that he was. It is sufficient to recognize that betwixt the points of these mighty opposites, these two giants of our 20th century literary heritage, between Mitya and Ma Price, there fall even mightier archetypes . . . the window, the magpie, and the mist, upon which literature is made.

“. . . the whole nub of the [Revolution] seems to be to massacre coves like me; and . . . I’m not frightfully keen on the idea.”

“Comrade Bingo” (1922)

All Around the Wode, Wode World

In the last issue of Plum Lines, *Katherine Lewis* suggested that the loyal readers of this journal send in Wodehouse-related media findings. Here we compile the current potpourristic pile of clippings. Thanks to all who contributed, with special kudos to *Evelyn and John Baesch*, who apparently discover a steady supply of “PGW in the modern world” references.

In the *Peterborough Examiner*, James McCarten of the Canadian Press described the book *Going for the Green: On the Links with Canada’s Business and Political Elite* (2008, Key Porter Books), by Robert Thompson. The book uses golf to study Canadian power politics. Mr. McCarten quotes from “Ordeal by Golf” to introduce the topic: “The only way . . . of really finding out a man’s true character is to play golf with him. In no other walk of life does the cloven hoof so quickly display itself.” For the complete article, visit <http://tinyurl.com/bv8r29>.

Ralph Doty sent this along: Jasper Fforde’s novel *Thursday Next: First Among Sequels* (New York, Penguin, 2008) is based on the premise that books constitute a separate universe in which the characters are actual people: Like actors, they make their appearances and say their lines whenever someone is reading the book, but when the book goes back on the shelf, they knock off for a quick one. And where do they go for such refreshment? From page 211: “It was called the Paragon and was the most perfect 1920s tearoom, nestled in the safe and unobserved background fabric of P. G. Wodehouse’s *Summer Lightning*. To your left and right upon entering through the carved wooden doors were glass display cases containing the most sumptuous homemade cakes and pastries. Beyond these were the tearooms proper, with booths and tables constructed of a dark wood that perfectly matched the paneled interior. This was itself decorated with plaster reliefs of Greek characters disporting themselves in matters of equestrian and athletic prowess. To the rear were two additional and private tearooms, the one of light-colored wood and the other in delicate carvings of a most agreeable nature. Needless to say, it was inhabited by the most populous characters in Wodehouse’s novels. That is to say it was full of voluble and opinionated aunts.”

In the letters section of the *New York Times Book Review*, November 9, 2008, Chris Schneider replied to a David Thomson review of a Joseph Epstein book

about Fred Astaire. Where Thomson suggested that Astaire's movies had a "flagrant emptiness," Schneider mentioned contributors such as P. G. Wodehouse, George Gershwin, Irving Berlin, and others.

David Kirkpatrick has written an online short fiction piece, entitled *The Oldest Member*, which he said is a tribute to *The Golf Omnibus*. For the complete story, visit <http://tinyurl.com/cr6vby>.

The **Broadway Special** chapter has placed a video on YouTube called "How to Steal a Policeman's Helmet." You may watch the fun by going to <http://www.tinyurl.com/c29zvs>.

On October 20, 2008, Michael Gove in his Notebook in the *Times* (London), said that "you can never have enough P. G. Wodehouse, Dornford Yates or John Buchan in the house. No matter how ill or upset you are, they'll cheer you up."

On October 11, 2008, in the *Times* (London), reviewer Richard Morrison, in his article about the production of *Partenoupe* at the London Coliseum, stated that the "new English translation by Amanda Holden . . . seems plucked straight from P. G. Wodehouse."

On October 5, 2008, in the *Sunday Times's* Bookwise column, the following question appeared: "As head boy, he wrote sentimental poetry. Now in the Foreign Office he fell victim to the con man Ukridge, who persuaded him to invest in a scheme to train Pekinese dogs for the stage. So he stole his aunt's dogs." And on November 2, 2008, also in the Bookwise column, the question was asked: "This blue-eyed blonde novelist visited Brinkley Court. The hostess, her aunt, was seeking contributions to the literary magazine *Milady's Boudoir*. There, the girl become romantically entangled with Stilton Cheesewright." (Answers: George Tupper and Daphne Delores Morehead.)

In the December 14, 2008, *Washington Post*, Michael Dirda, in an analysis of Robert Louis Stevenson's lesser-known comic writings, said that *The Wrong Box* "recalls a P. G. Wodehouse romp. . . . In its way, it's really a kind of British good ol' boys' adventure. As Michael Finsbury observes of one soon-to-be-intoxicated friend: 'I never saw a man drink faster. It restores one's confidence in the human race.'"

On August 16, 2008, in the *Spectator*, A. S. H. Smyth stated that he found himself playing "Jeeves to Tim

FitzHigham's Wooster" after Mr. FitzHigham invited him along on the reenactment of a William Kemp stunt from the year 1600, a 150-mile Morris dance from London to Norwich."

In the September 22, 2008, issue of the *Times* (London), David Crystal wrote about the challenges lexicographers face as they decide which words to drop, and said that "you can sense the way the language has moved on when you read someone like P. G. Wodehouse."

In the October 10, 2008, issue of the *Times* (London) editorial page, the paper defended the committee that awarded the 2008 Nobel Prize for literature to Le Clezio, and listed several writers (including Wodehouse) who haven't won it.

In the Christmas 2008 issue of *Book and Magazine Collector*, Tom Stoppard listed *Thank You, Jeeves* as number 59 in his "100 Great Collectables."

In the August 16, 2008, issue of the *Spectator*, Dot Wordsworth commended an effort to guide BBC broadcasters to better pronunciation, and showed that today "valet" should be pronounced as "valett."

Anglo Disengagement

DIANE MADLON-KAY found this Wodehouse item: Sarah Lyall is the American wife of the Wodehouse biographer Robert McCrum. She has written a new, very humorous book titled *The Anglo Files: A Field Guide to the British*. She refers to Wodehouse in her chapters "Distressed British Nationals" and "Naughty Boys and Rumpy-Pumpy." In the latter chapter Lyall writes:

"Perhaps your man identifies with the clueless heroes in P. G. Wodehouse novels, who romanticize women as concepts but run screaming for a drink the moment they are confronted by real-life examples. . . . You can't really blame them, since Wodehouse's female characters might as well live on another planet, the Planet of Bizarre Notions. 'She holds the view that the stars are God's daisy chain, that rabbits are gnomes in attendance on the Fairy Queen, and that every time a fairy blows its wee nose a baby is born, which, as we know, is not the case,' Bertie says of Madeline Bassett in *Stiff Upper Lip, Jeeves*. In Wodehouse's work, the happy ending is not the engagement but the breaking of the engagement. His characters embody the famous saying by the Hungarian-born writer George Mikes that 'Continental people have a sex life; the English have hot-water bottles.'"

Convention Special: Soprano Selects Wodehouse!

IF YOU'VE HEARD Maria Jette on "A Prairie Home Companion," you know that she can sing anything from a Puccini aria to three-part Cuban swing. Luckily for us, this soprano likes to sing Wodehouse songs, fueled by sheet music from the University of Minnesota Music Library. Even more luckily, she has volunteered to sing Wodehouse songs at the convention and to bring along the brilliant Dan Chouinard to accompany her on the piano (it's an open question whether he will also bring his accordion). For those wondering about the "and program" after the convention's Friday evening dinner, now you know! Rumor has it that the performance will end with a sing-along, so you have an extra excuse for practicing "Sonny Boy" in the bath.



Maria Jette, from "A Prairie Home Companion," will be the special guest at the St. Paul convention, "A Little Wodehouse on the Prairie." Here she adds form to the Minneapolis skyline. (Photo by Ann Marsden)

Second Call for Prairie Contest Entries

HERE'S HOW the convention contest works: Envision "a little Wodehouse on the prairie," in all its glory. Interpret that vision in any medium, be it essay, sonnet, watercolor, needlepoint, ballad, diorama, neo-vorticist sculpture, or interpretive dance. Submit your contest entry by May 31 to the Amalgamated Northwodes Literary Society and Arts Board at www.northwodes.org. (A photo or video may stand in as needed for difficult-to-mail entries.) Winners earn prizes as well as fame and adulation.

What Every Convention-Goer Needs to Know

- As noted on the registration form included in this issue, space is limited for the river cruise and the trip to the horse races. Also, registration fees increase as of May 1—so register now!
- Official convention events run from the Friday evening (June 12) through the Sunday morning (June 14), with optional activities on either end.
- Please visit our website at www.northwodes.org for convention information, such as the Northwodes' favorite local sites to visit before or after the main event.



The Rummage Sale Returns! Clean out your closets now!

WODEHOUSEANS know when we're on to a good thing. The rummage sale at the Providence convention did a roaring trade, so naturally it will be reprised at the St. Paul convention. This is the place to bring your duplicate Wodehouse paperbacks, your spare Drones Club tie, the spats or Art Deco earrings you never wear, the "Jeeves and Wooster" videotapes that have been on the back shelf since you bought the DVDs—you get the idea. Those of you who have been making Wodehouse-themed refrigerator magnets (you know who you are) or knitting hot water bottle covers in Penguin orange can add them to the Crafts section. If you bring a few odds and ends in your suitcase to donate to the rummage sale, then you'll have room to take home the spiffing finds you'll pick up there.

Proceeds go to the TWS Convention Reserve Fund, which provides seed money for future conventions and makes some expensive extras possible without hiking up the registration fees. But it's also an efficient way to transfer Wodehouse-related items where they'll be most appreciated.

If you'd like to ship ahead or if you're not planning to attend the convention but would still like to help out, send items to Kris Fowler. Note: Donations cannot be returned if unsold, but anything left over will be forwarded to the planning committee of the next TWS convention (in this case, the Pickering Motor Company) to help stock their own rummage sale.

She was presiding over a stall in the shade of a large cedar at the edge of the lawn, and as soon as he could get his limbs to function he hastened up and began buying everything in sight. And when a tea-cosy, two Teddy bears, a penwiper, a bowl of wax flowers and a fretwork pipe-rack had changed hands, he felt he was entitled to regard himself as a member of the club and get friendly.

“Lovely day,” he said.

“The Right Approach” (1959)



My First Time, Twice!

The Family Inheritance

BY KATE SANDER

MY FATHER AND UNCLE were big Wodehouse fans. They had their own language formed of quotes from various books. I remember feeling excluded from the hilarity when they got together and laughed continuously about “Uncle Fred.” For quite a while I thought we had an Uncle Fred off somewhere—until my mother told me that it was from a story called “Uncle Fred Flits By” that my father and his brother found beyond hilarious.

My father was almost earl-like in that he was not particularly interested in the exploits of children, but he owned several PGW books that were old, dusty, and

unused on the library shelf. I remember being about 11 when *Leave It to Psmith* spoke to me to be read one long summer day. It was a damaged paperback, however, and the last part of the book was gone. So after reading what was there, I asked him how it ended. He, of course, could not remember. However, he found a hardback copy in a used book shop during his lunch break one day and brought it home for me, which was shocking in and of itself. After that we had a common interest other than my grades, the condition of my personal space, and whether or not I was using my “inside voice.”

My youngest sister in turn became a fan, especially of the opera singer who comes to lunch and damages the plaster walls with her singing. It makes her laugh till she cries every time she tells it. Now she and I have the same language to share, and her children, who are 17 and 15, have begun to read some of the short stories. My dad and uncle are both gone, but they do indeed live on in that they taught us to love language and wit—and our family tradition of passing along the Plum.

Unexpected Pleasure

BY OLIVER FERGUSON

MY FIRST TIME was in my mid-teens on a hot Tennessee afternoon. I was lounging in my father’s study, at loose ends and a little bored. Idly casting my eyes along a bookshelf, I paused at an odd title, *Very Good, Jeeves*. Curious, I took the volume from the shelf and glanced at the first page. Everything—situation, style, and especially tone—was unique in my reading experience. My glance became concentrated reading. By the second page I was smiling; a few pages further along, I was laughing aloud.

It didn’t take long that summer to exhaust the small town library’s limited supply of Wodehouse. I was now addicted, and in the manner of beginning enthusiasts, I wanted to share my pleasure. My father had given me the book, so I was free to lend it to my girlfriend of that summer. Both of us were slated to begin college in the fall, and in the confusion of preparation I neglected to recover my book before she left town. She enrolled in a school some distance from mine where, it’s my fixed opinion, she majored in bookkeeping. Not only did college end our relationship, but I never saw my father’s book again.

There’s more to my story. Several years after I’d married the right girl, I told her of my lost Wodehouse. The following Christmas her gift to me was a first American edition of *Very Good, Jeeves*. There’s a saying (one of Jeeves’s?) that all’s well that something that has slipped my mind.

John Hayward: A Tribute

BY MURRAY HEDGCOCK

If you were lucky enough to be at the Hooray for Hollywood! convention in 2005, you'll remember John Hayward, who reminisced off the cuff about those long-ago days when Wodehouse was briefly drawn into the Hollywood scene. Sadly, John passed away recently.



*John Hayward
(with Jean
Tillson) at the
Hooray for
Hollywood!
convention in
2005 (photo by
Elin Woodger)*

THE PHONE WOULD RING at odd hours here in London, a distinctive voice sounding sort of Australian would announce, “G’day, Mate,” and I knew it was John Hayward on the line.

At various times a radio presenter, DJ, and stage comedian, John was a dab hand at accents, as he demonstrated to the August 2005 convention in Los Angeles. He spoke in many voices on many topics, including his long membership in The Hollywood Cricket Club which, as Plum buffs know, boasted PGW as a founder-member when it was established in 1932.

Sadly, I was unable to attend the convention but I could imagine John’s contribution. I had got in touch with him when researching *Wodehouse at the Wicket* (Hutchinson, 1997), and he had proved a great help in spelling out Plum’s association with Hollywood cricket.

At the time of the convention, John was the club’s secretary, and he had also spent terms as captain and president. The club was founded under the inspiration of the actor Sir Charles Aubrey Smith—a good enough cricketer to have captained England in South Africa in 1888–89. I learned that John was born at Cliftonville in Kent in 1921, had served in the RAF—alongside many Australians—and in 1957 migrated to the USA, where he worked as a technical writer with Paramount before launching into radio with his own shows.

John had not known much about Wodehouse until our contact, but he threw himself into the study of Plum in typical fashion (“enthusiasm” must have been his middle name). He liked the sound of The Wodehouse Society, and I put him in touch with Jean “Pighooey” Tillson. He was promptly signed up to talk to the convention, and his lively anecdotes and presentation

were in the best tradition of these convivial gatherings.

Regular pilgrimages to Britain by John and June Hayward always included a visit to The Cricketer’s Pub on Richmond Green, just outside London, where cricket had been played since the 17th century. We would chat of life in England, of America, of cricket—and of PGW.

John’s health had deteriorated sharply in recently months, and he died on December 3, age 87, to the regret of all who had enjoyed his exuberant personality.

A Mulliner Menagerie: Numbers 4 & 5

BY KEN CLEVINGER

As you recall, in the Autumn issue of Plum Lines, the ever more eminent Mr. Clevenger introduced a series of articles about all that is reptilian, mammalian, or fowlish in the Mulliner universe. He continues his series with cartoons and worms.

No. 4 (Cartoon Animals)

M-I-C- (I see Annette Funicello) K-E-Y (Why? Because I had a crush on her in my misspent youth) M-O-U-S-E. But this episode of “Mulliner Menagerie” is not about the birds and the bees.

That’s right! All those snobby critics who denigrate Plum’s stuff as mere Mickey Mouse fluff have only this leg on which to stand: Wodehouse did mention that classic cartoon creature. There was the plush Mickey Mouse doll as a plot element in *The Luck of the Bodkins*. Then, in “Buried Treasure” the financial and artistic success of Walt Disney’s beloved, ubiquitous, capitalistic mouse is given its due tribute. It is worth noting, given the subsequent confused history of Plum’s political life, that this same Mulliner story, written in 1936, also opens with a satirical rag on Adolf Hitler’s moustache.

This tale, one of only two to mention cartoon animals, has the distinction of containing six of the total of seven cartoon animal references (including Mickey) in Mulliner. The story line is that the girl loves the impecunious artist but must marry another for his money to restore the family fortunes. The artist struggles to create a Mouse-like hero to secure his own fortune and make his artistic mark. Brancepeth Mulliner, for it was he, considered and rejected Hilda the Hen and Bertie the Bandicoot. A bandicoot is a species of large

Indian rat, by the way. If Wodehouse was doing a bit of self-promotion here with the Bertie reference, he might have chosen a more attractive animal, I must say.

In the role of muse, Muriel, the girl, suggests Walter the Walrus, well knowing both her father's features generally and his moustache specifically. But not even Picasso could make Lord Bromborough with a moustache sufficiently funny looking. Later, Phipps the butler muses on his lordship's remarkable likeness to Sidney the Surgeon of cinematographic fame. Sans moustache, Lord Bromborough apparently appeared rather fish-faced, to foreshadow the Animals as Human Descriptions category yet to be chronicled. But finally the artistic eye saw clear and whole and Lord B's face with the charred remnants of a once flourishing moustache revealed the next animal cartoon sensation—Ferdinand Frog!

As usual, a girl also plays a key role in the last cartoon animal appearance in Mulliner in "Those in Peril on the Tee." This girl is Agnes Flack, the champion amateur golfer, and in a twist, she is unloved by the male artist at risk of marrying her. He is only goggling at her to capture her face as a model for a new series of humorous drawings along the lines of Felix the Cat.

Now, I must confess that I have a small dilemma, which I'm sure you'll appreciate. In taxonomy, characterization is everything. Was Ferdinand Frog an amphibian best addressed in a prior segment of Mulliner Menagerie? If a bandicoot is a rat, should it not have been left for the forthcoming Rodent episode? In my defense, I ask, what heartless fiend would apply the disparaging word rodent to Mickey Mouse? I rest my case.

Now, we could easily play the cartoon end music, and say, "That's all, folks," but we will see you real soon in the next segment!

No. 5 (Worms, Part I)

I THINK IT WAS Shakespeare, or it may have been Bacon, who noted that a worm by any other name would be as creepy. In this category I have broadly defined worms to include leeches, slugs, and snails. Leeches appear only once, in "The Knightly Quest of Mervyn." There they are strictly medicinal. Wodehouse draws the striking image of an underripe strawberry, whitish or at best with a pale pink flush, as if the bright redness of a lush strawberry had been bled out by leeches. I hope you agree that the image is both vivid and creepy.

Snails invade the garden of Mulliner stories only twice. I say this with some regret as Wodehouse could work such magic with snails. One of my favorite

Wodehouse images is the pervading quietude of the rural countryside in which one could hear a snail clear its throat a mile away in "Jeeves Takes Charge." But in Mulliner we have the apt description of a male character wincing like a salted snail in "The Nodder." In fairness, Wilmot Mulliner was definitely suffering from a morning head when he rashly cast his eyes upon the president of the Perfecto-Zizzbaum Corp., a noted eyesore in any circumstances. The second appearance of a snail is much tenderer in "Unpleasantness at Bludleigh Court." This story, with 33 animal references, is the most animalistic of all the Mulliner Menagerie. Not surprising since it is also the story that contains that most excellent poem, "Good Gnus," a pure paean to potshots. There may be a debate over whether one says "Blood-ly" or "Blued-lee" Court but the snail in this Mulliner story is only toyed with by the heroine's dainty toe while love is in the air.

There is no love lost on slugs in Mulliner. In "Mulliner's Buck-U-Uppo" it is noted that the look of a lady bishopess through her lorgnette can wilt a curate like a salted slug. And speaking of wilting, slugs also make an unwelcome addition to the lettuce in suburban gardens in "Open House." Two additional slug sightings confirm their place in the pantheon of distaste. In "Best Seller" the slug is merely "disliked by some," but in "The Awful Gladness of the Mater" a slug is a "loathsome" intrusion in a rose garden. Slugs, in their defense, may not be technically worms, but obviously in Mulliner they are still the epitome of creepy.

Now, we must wriggle away, and can only promise more in the next issue where, in "Worms, Part II" we will dissect the subject thoroughly.

He knew what his wife was like when even the highest in the land attempted to thwart her; and this brave lad was but a curate. In another moment she would be looking at him through her lorgnette; and England was littered with the shrivelled remains of curates at whom the lady bishopess had looked through her lorgnette. He had seen them wilt like salted slugs at the episcopal breakfast-table.

"Mulliner's Buck-U-Uppo" (1926)



Chapters Corner

IT'S FUN BEING with other fans and reading about what others are doing. So please use this column to tell the Wodehouse world about your chapter's activities. Representatives of chapters, please send all info to the editor, Gary Hall (see back page). If you're not a member of a local chapter but would like to attend a meeting or become a member, you may get in touch with the contact person listed.

Anglers' Rest

(Seattle and vicinity)
Contact: Susan Collicott
Phone:
E-mail:



Birmingham Banjolele Band

(Birmingham, Alabama, and vicinity)
Contact: Caralyn Campbell
Phone:
E-mail:



ON SATURDAY, October 18, the Birmingham Banjolele Band had a Wodehouse reading hosted by Elder's Bookstore in Nashville, Tennessee. Thanks very much to Barbara Bowen, who provided lunch at her home before the readings. Barbara and other members Kim Huguley and Ken and Joan Clevenger helped with publicity for the event. Another Wodehouse reading will take place on Saturday, February 28, at Milestone Books in Vestavia Hills, Alabama, just south of Birmingham.

Blandings Castle Chapter

(Greater San Francisco Bay area)
Contact: Ed and Missy Ratcliffe
Phone:
E-mail:



NEIL MIDKIFF WRITES: Last fall, enterprising librarian Kate Gaidos, at the Sunnyvale (California) Public Library, noticed that Wodehouse was one of the most popular authors in their collection, and accordingly she contacted our chapter, asking if we'd be interested in presenting a Wodehouse program at the library. The Blandings group had been somewhat quiescent over the past few years, so it wasn't until almost the last moment that Ed Ratcliffe put together a short talk illustrated with images of early Wodehouse book covers. I also realized that we could reuse the readers' theater adaptation of one of the short stories which our chapter had done at

conventions. We chose "Lord Emsworth and the Girl Friend." Other chapter members showed up for moral support, and Len Lawson and Doug Stow also brought more items for the display table. Kate at the library did a bang-up job of publicity, and we had a turnout of about 75 audience members on January 8. Fewer than half had read Wodehouse, though a good sprinkling had seen the Jeeves and Wooster dramatizations on public television or other adaptations.

Ed started off with his talk, and I followed with a more general introduction to Wodehouse for the newcomers, ad-libbing more than I perhaps ought to have done. We then proceeded with "Lord Emsworth and the Girl Friend," which went over quite well. A lively question-and-answer session finished up the evening.

The program, in all its under-rehearsed and unedited glory, was recorded by the Library, and they've posted it to their website at <http://tinyurl.com/bbj8vk>. We earned high praise from those who turned in rating slips, and have been invited to do another program next year. A few folks signed up to be notified of our next chapter meeting. Many thanked us for introducing them to an author they hadn't read yet. So despite the hurried preparations, it went over well. I encourage any chapter to consider doing a similar presentation at your local libraries.

The Broadway Special

(New York City and vicinity)
Contact: Amy Plofker
Phone:
E-mail:



Amy has a go at the hot water bottle.

THE BROADWAY SPECIAL met on December 5, 2008, in the Grillroom of The Players Club in Manhattan to consider that holiday classic “Jeeves and the Yuletide Spirit.” Of course, being only feet from The Players’ bar, we indulged early and often in Yuletide spirits of our own, which lubricated the agreeable conversation.

Being of a particularly cerebral bent, the well-primed company conducted an experiment to discover just what does happen when a hot water bottle is pierced by a darning needle. Accordingly, we placed our victim on the examination table and ran it through. Then we ran it through again. Yet, no matter how gentle or savage we were, we could not encourage the water bottle to burst, squirt violently, or even leak to what would be the detriment of a slumberer. What the object did was merely weep an occasional tear, and we all felt pretty low down among the wines and spirits about it. Perhaps these days, hot water bottles are constructed of sterner stuff, or maybe this one just had a strong will to live. We may never know.



*Philip Shreffler and Dave Rabinowitz
toss cards into a hat.*

The Special then celebrated its traditional Poet Burns Night in the Card Room of The Players on January 23rd, with Vice President Amy Plofker in the chair. There was, as always, a good deal of clever badinage among those assembled. Perhaps the stars of the evening were Evelyn Herzog and John Baesch. John gave a wonderful presentation that featured as a visual aid a tin of haggis (don’t ask), and Evy gave dramatic readings of several Burns and Burns-related poems, including one by Ogden Nash telling us to cease calling him Bobby. So exhorted, the company ceased.

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

Phone:
E-mail:



ON NOVEMBER 16, 2008, Capital! Capital! gathered 32 of the faithful for good food, good camaraderie, and good Wodehouse. The venue was the Wine Room of Washington, D.C.’s Embassy Suites Hotel and the buffet dinner included, as they say, all the fixin’s.

The highlight of the evening unreservedly was the presentation by Ken Clevenger, a former CapCap member who is now doing Wodehouse missionary work among the *illiterati* in the wilds of Tennessee. Ken spoke on “Wooster and Wimsey;” a comparison of the Bertie and Jeeves duo and author Dorothy L. Sayer’s gentleman sleuth Lord Peter Wimsey and his valet Bunter. Examples of character similarities abounded as well, pertaining to the two authors’ writing styles and use of dialogue. Certain aspects of the two authors, however, as Ken noted, were different. Wodehouse, as we know, had a somewhat diffident and muted attitude toward the opposite sex, while on the other hand, Sayers . . . well, let Clevenger explain all this in a *Wooster Sauce* article that we all hope he will write and submit.

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 MEETING WAS HELD on November 9. We celebrated the birth of Doug and Debbie Bellew’s new baby, future Wodehouse fan Garrick Bellew. We celebrated the Philadelphia Phillies’ World Series win. I have composed the following ragtag rhyme in their honor: “Oh, do pass a hanky, so I can weep for the Yankees. Go bray at the Rays, and a pox on the Sox. The Dodgers are codgers. Fiasco Chicago. But, derry down dilly, let’s cheer for the Phillies. A gold bat and gold glove for the city of brotherly love. Wodehouse is smiling at you from a ballpark above.”

We toasted our new President because whether you are a Democrat, Republican, Libertarian, Tory, Labourite, Green, Whig, member of either the Free Silver or the Raving Loony Party, we assume every

Wodehouse fan wishes Obama well for the sake of our country in these hard times. The main event was the reading aloud of a scene from Mark Sacharoff's adaptation of Wodehouse's adaptation of *The Play's The Thing*. It was terrific. The Chaps are very proud of Mark and proud of our actors. Kudos to Mark, David Ruef, Laurent Sacharoff, John Sherwood, Bob Rains, and Denise Nordheimer for making us laugh very hard. Barring bad weather, Chapter One was due to meet again on January 18, with Dan giving a timely presentation on the Great Depression in Wodehouse's writings. Remember, no matter how gloomy Depressions are in reality, Wodehouse was hilarious on the subject. It should be a very amusing meeting and a great escape.

The Chicago Accident Syndicate

(Chicago and thereabouts)

Contact: Daniel & Tina Garrison

Phone:

E-mail:



The Clients of Adrian Mulliner

(For enthusiasts of both PGW and Sherlock Holmes)

Contact:

Phone:



The Drone Rangers

(Houston and vicinity)

Contact: Toni Oliver

Phone:

E-mail:

The Flying Pigs

(Cincinnati area and elsewhere)

Contact: Susan Brokaw

Phone:

E-mail:



The Mottled Oyster Club / Jellied Eels

(San Antonio and South Texas)

Contact: Lynette Poss

Phone:

E-mail:



The New England Wodehouse Thingummy Society (NEWTS)

(Boston and New England)

Contact: David Landman

Phone:

E-mail:



THE NEWTS's Yule nottle was held on December 6 according to the venerable tradition of conforming to the Leech Book of Baldar of the Crooked Teeth. It was convened in the condo-clubhouse of Dot and Bud Swanson according to the venerable tradition of avoiding cleaning-up-after. The annual grabbag of brittle gifts was greeted with groans of delight.

The highlight of the meeting was the accusation of Vampirism-Without-Permission (VWP) leveled at the assembly by NEWTS president David Landman. It happened during the venerable tradition of snapping a group photo. The president, taking advantage of a fortuitous accident, set the timer at 10 seconds, and, having raced to where the NEWTS were posed, arrived in time to say "Jeeves" as the flash went off. Returning to the tripod, he looked in the viewfinder and was knocked chilblain over corn-row to discover that *he did not appear in the photo!* It was then the accusation was hurled. After a prolonged episode of hyperventilation cured by breathing into David Nolan's tweed deer-stalker, it was pointed out to the president that what he had seen was the group in real time still standing en masse awaiting the traditional "backup" shot. He was not to be seen in the viewfinder because he was at the moment standing *behind* the camera. He seemed unconvinced, and nothing was the same thereafter. It was not long before the party broke up.

On a serious note, we regret to inform the Wodehouse world that Anne Cotton's two beloved dogs, so prominently featured in her presentation at the Providence convention, passed away in November. Emma died, apparently of a stroke, and Merlin days later of a broken heart. Anne has acquired a new canine companion named Chase.

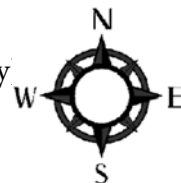
The Northwodes

(St. Paul, Minneapolis, and vicinity)

Contact: Kristine Fowler

Phone:

E-mail:



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

E-mail:



The Perfecto-Zizzbaum Motion Picture Corporation

(Los Angeles and vicinity)

Contact: Karen Shotting

Phone:

E-mail:



THE LOS ANGELES CHAPTER meets monthly, generally at Vroman's bookstore in Pasadena, the second Sunday of the month at 12:30 P.M. We occasionally change our venue for special events such as our annual Christmas and anniversary teas. We had a great turnout for our annual holiday binge at the Huntington Library, Art Collection, and Botanical Gardens. We were a festive band of eight and were honored to have Gertrude Butterwick (aka Melissa Aaron) rejoin our ranks for the occasion. Our man Doug had obviously consulted that helpful article in *Milady's Boudoir*, "What the Well-Dressed Young Man is Wearing," prior to choosing his tweeds, and he treated us to appropriate quotes from "Jeeves and the Yuletide Spirit" to set the tone for the afternoon. After a gentle stroll through the garden (gravel soil and company's own water), the gong sounded and we all donned the old feedbag and set about the serious business of afternoon tea. We're looking forward to our next meeting in February, hosted by Alice, to view the Four Star Theater version of "Uncle Fred in the Springtime," starring David Niven as Uncle Fred. In March we return to Vroman's bookstore to discuss Wodehouse's letters. It's Liberty Hall at Vroman's—all are welcome.

PGWinWNY

(Buffalo, New York, and vicinity)

Contact: Laura Loehr

Phone:

E-mail:



TO AVOID CONFLICTS with football fans (American football, that is), the Western New York chapter planned to meet after the Super Bowl—on February 8, 2009—at the house of faithful Plummie Jane Snowden, in Williamsville. A potluck lunch, highlighted by Jane's famous Chicken Curry, was to precede the viewing of as many of the Jeeves & Wooster videos as we could stand. We also had a visit from the director and one of the members of the Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus, who filled us in on their plans for their concert in March, which will

highlight "The Land Where The Good Songs Go" (see page 6). That was already in the works when they found out about our noble efforts to spread the good word about Wodehouse in WNY. Now they actually desired to broaden their education about PGW, and they found just the right people to guide them in their efforts. We'll undoubtedly troop enthusiastically to their concert in March, to make sure it's done right! And we'll also make a decision as to when and where to meet in the spring.

The Pickering Motor Company

(Detroit and vicinity)

Contact: Elliott Milstein

Phone:

E-mail:



THE YEAR 2008 may very well have been the most productive yet for the Pickering Motor Company. The Company met on seven occasions, "read" five books and one short story, and consumed a record amount of adult beverages.

In addition, two new meeting innovations were introduced: The brunch meeting, which is an alternative to evening meetings during busy weeks, was well-received by the members; and the holiday gathering and gift exchange perhaps established a new tradition for the Pickering Motor Company.

The Pickering Company Board of Directors met for the company Holiday Party on December 21, 2008, at the home of member Larry Nahigian. The bill of fare was simple but wholesome: mimosas to start, followed by a scrumptious brunch creation, an old family recipe whose Armenian name roughly translates into English as "a bunch of incredibly tasty stick-to-your-ribs stuff with eggs." Larry's beautiful and charming daughters served as if they had been tutored by Beach, and all members were stuffed to the eyeballs by the time the gift exchange began.

Arranged at the previous meeting, this gift exchange involved pulling the name of a fellow member from a hat and finding an appropriate Wodehousean gift for that person. Pigs and cow creamers figured heavily, of course, but some other creative gifts included a basket with all the ingredients for a May Queen, a pair of purple socks, and an engraved gavel for President-for-Life LuAnn Warren.

Discussion of the short story "Uncle Fred Flits By" was brief as there was much more important business to attend to. Tickets to *By Jeeves* had been purchased and had to be distributed. All members will be in attendance on opening night this June, just prior to heading off to A Little Wodehouse on the Prairie.

Dicron's motion to entertain a hostile takeover of General Motors was voted down on the argument that the Company's funds needed to be kept liquid for the 2011 convention, which Pickering is proud to be hosting in Detroit. Plans for the convention were then discussed. Convention Coordinator Elyse Milstein announced that we have narrowed choice of venues down to three locations. Committees were formed and committee chairpersons chosen, the most important of which, the Finance Committee, is being headed up by Claudia Sintat. Everyone was excited that it is all starting to come together.

The next book for discussion was to be *Quick Service* at our February 23, 2009. Once again, we encourage anyone within driving distance to contact us to join the festivities.

The Portland Greater Wodehouse Society (PGWs)
(Portland, Oregon and vicinity)

Contact: Carol James
Phone:
E-mail:



The Size 14 Hat Club
(Halifax, Nova Scotia)

Contact: Jill Robinson
E-mail:



The Soup & Fish Club
(Northern Virginia area)

Contact: Deborah Dillard
Phone:
E-mail:



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Volunteer Officers

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Kris Fowler

Membership Secretary (new-member inquiries,
contact information changes):
Ian Michaud

<http://www.wodehouse.org/inquiry/>
<http://www.wodehouse.org/membership/>

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Shamim Mohamed, aka Pongo

We appreciate your articles, First Time tales, and other observations. Send them along to Gary Hall.

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It's a long time until Christmas, but for the Plum-minded shopper, the "Civilized Butler Awakening Device" may have appeal. Here's a link if you have interest: <http://tinyurl.com/czklop>. (Thanks to Brian Taves for the latest reminder.).