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## P. G. Wodehouse Linguist?

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ONE OF THE WORLD's great comic writers, "English literature's performing flea" (according to Sean O'Casey), a linguist? Surely not. In the first place, we Brits have traditionally been resistant to learning foreign languages (on the grounds that English should be good enough for everybody); in the second place, P. G. received the then-standard English public-school education, which stressed Latin and Greek but certainly not any living foreign languages; in the third place the only foreign countries he visited, as far as I know, were France, Germany (through no fault of his own), and the United States, which became his home. Critics have not to my knowledge ever thought of him as a linguist; when Thelma Cazalet-Keir says "For me it is in his use of language that Mr. Wodehouse appears supremely,"<sup>1</sup> she is thinking of his highly literary style and "concentration of verbal felicities."

But linguists are born, not made, and this article will contend that P. G. had a natural gift for language, both for the almost endless variations on his own, and for a surprising number of foreign and pseudo-foreign tongues. He also wrote in several letters to Bill Townend that he thought of his books as stage plays, which means he was listening to his characters speaking as he wrote. In his first published book, *The Pothunters* (1902), we can listen to schoolboys: "That rotter, Reade, has been telling us that burglary chestnut of his all the



*Wodehousean and scholar Barbara C. Bowen*

morning. I wish you chaps wouldn't encourage him" (ch. 3); gamekeepers: "Got yer!" (ch. 8); a Scotland Yard detective; the local aristocrat Sir Alfred Venner; Dawkins the gym instructor and boxing coach ("The 'ole thing . . . is to feint with your left and 'it with your right," ch. 1); and assorted other low-class characters. A mixture of upper- and lower-class speech, in fact, which will be characteristic of nearly all the books to follow. And also like most of its successors, *The Pothunters* contains a surprisingly large proportion of reported speech, as compared to narrative.

### 1. British and American English

P. G.'s variations on British English are legion; to name the most obvious: Scottish (most notably in Lord

Emsworth's gardener McAllister), Irish (as early as the school stories), and a great deal of Cockney. Cockney servants deform words picturesquely, like the housemaid Elsie Bean's "Dishpot!"<sup>2</sup> and the valet Augustus Robb's "Brekfuss."<sup>3</sup> Londoners-in-the-street say things like "E's the bloke wot 't yer, Bill,"<sup>4</sup> or "Mordee! Cummere! Cummere quick! Sumfin' hap'nin!"<sup>5</sup> In the course of a discussion at a coffee stall among London cabmen we hear this: "Yus, I do wish I wos in Russher . . . Because you can Wade over yer knees in bla-a-ad there."<sup>6</sup> Perhaps the gem of the Cockney collection is pageboy Albert's recitation of Tennyson's "Maud":

'Wiv blekest morss the flower-ports  
Was—I mean were—crusted one and orl;  
Ther rusted niles fell from the knorts  
That 'eld the pear to the garden-worl.<sup>7</sup>

Occasionally important characters are Cockneys, like Syd Price and Ma Price in *If I Were You*, and the butler Chippendale (actually a broker's man in disguise) in *The Girl in Blue*.

We also recognize a number of English country speech patterns, not always easily identifiable except for the Yorkshireman's "Ba goom!"<sup>8</sup> Situation rather than form leads me to identify as country dialect Ukridge's Hired Retainer's "The 'ole thing 'ere . . . is these fowls have been and got the roop";<sup>9</sup> and Constable Butt's report to Wrykyn, the substitute for P. G.'s Dulwich in the early school books: "'Wot's this all about, I wonder?' I says. 'Blow me, if I don't think it's a frakkus.'"<sup>10</sup> And P. G.'s versatility produced hilarious examples of stuttering, Madeline Bassett's baby talk, the tautology of crossword addicts ("I'm so sorry," she murmured. "So very sorry, grieved, distressed, afflicted, pained, mortified, dejected and upset"),<sup>11</sup> pseudo-medieval English ("Ytte was such a dam near squeake as I never wante to have agayne in a month of Sundays"),<sup>12</sup> Lord Emsworth's pig man with no roof to his mouth ("Wah yah dah" means "What are you doing?"),<sup>13</sup> and the grandiloquent periphrases of the imaginary kingdom of Oom ("If you know a superior excavation, go to it").<sup>14</sup> P. G. has a keen ear for the comic distortions of lower-class speech, as in "Wodyer mean, you didn't tavvernaccident? . . . You muster radernaccident,"<sup>15</sup> or, à propos of a damaged hat: "Here's your rat. A little the worse for wear, this sat is . . . You can't step on a nat . . . not without hurting it. That tat is not the yat it was."<sup>16</sup>

This is already impressive evidence of P. G.'s mastery of the English language(s), I think. But he spent most of his life in the United States, and probably gives us as many varieties of American as of English. As well as the

gangsters Chimp Twist and Soapy Molloy, who crop up in at least half a dozen books published over a 50-year span, we meet many other criminal types ("Ah chee! . . . Quit yer kiddin'! What was youse rubberin' around de house for last night if you wasn't trailin' de kid?"<sup>17</sup>) as well as prizefighters, New York Irish cops, one Negro elevator man ("Misto' Jeeves done give me them purple socks, as you told him. Thank yo' very much, suh!"<sup>18</sup>); an American "synthetic Westerner" ("The West! Why, it's like a mother to me! I love every flower that blooms on the broad bosom of its sweeping plains, every sun-kissed peak of its everlasting hills"<sup>19</sup>); and a female private eye whose speech sounds to me like nothing on this earth ("Gladda meecher, siz Pett. Mr Sturge semme up. Said y'ad job f'r me. Came here squick scould."<sup>20</sup>). Perhaps the book richest in a variety of American voices is *Psmith Journalist*, set in New York, in which we meet the office boy Pugsy Maloney, who rescues a cat ("Dere was two fellers in de street sickin' a dawg on to her. An' I comes up an' says, 'G'wan! What do youse t'ink you're doin', fussin' de poor dumb animal?'); the cat's owner, Bat Jarvis, leader of the Groome Street Gang ("Pipe de collar . . . Mine, mister"); Kid Brady the boxer ("I ups with an awful half-scissor hook to the plexus, and in the next round I seen Benson has a chunk of yellow, and I gets in with a hay-maker"); an assortment of lowlife characters; and some New York policemen.

Numerous books put both Brits and Americans on stage, either because the characters travel or because Americans are imported into England. To take only two examples, in *A Gentleman of Leisure* the action begins in New York, and when it moves to London imports the Bowery burglar Spike and the crooked cop McEachern into the society of lords and baronets; and in *Bill the Conqueror* a quiet London suburb is invaded by American crooks, one of them a small boy (who pronounces Burgundy "Boigundy"). According to Richard Usborne, P. G. doesn't always clearly distinguish English and American—for instance, in *A Damsel in Distress*, George Bevan the American speaks just like a Brit,<sup>21</sup> and this may well be true. But I find quite convincing the times when characters who have been wearing a mask are forced to revert to their natural American speech (Mrs. Gedge in *Hot Water*), as well as the occasional exchanges about English and American: trousers vs. pants or tomato vs. tomarto (see Tubby and Pru in *Summer Moonshine*, ch. 24).

## 2. Foreign Tongues

But a linguist worth his salt, we feel, should also be at home in a few of the planet's five thousand or so foreign tongues, and P. G. shows some familiarity with

a surprising number of them. Apart from the frequent Latin tags and the fairly frequent French words and expressions, of which more anon, he gives us samples of real or pseudo-German, American Indian, Italian, Swedish, Hindustani, Cantonese, and possibly Swahili, besides charming examples of foreigners speaking English, like the Russian golf enthusiast in "The Clicking of Cuthbert" who says things like "Goot-a-bye," "Zank you," and "My friend Cootaboot." And let's not forget the ostensibly Filipino footman in *Laughing Gas*, whose "Excuse yes possibly . . . chap at door" (ch. 11) and "Excuse yes, you come no, please undoubtedly" (ch. 18) turn out to be fake—we're in Hollywood, and he's hoping for a movie role.

It is not always easy to decide whether P. G. is genuinely knowledgeable about languages or making them up as he goes along. We may be fairly sure that his samples of American Indian are not authentic, e.g., "Comrade Windsor was known to the Indians as Boola-Ba-Na-Gosh, which, as you doubtless know, signifies Big-Chief-Who-Can-Hear-A-Fly-Clear-Its-Throat,"<sup>22</sup> and I would have assumed the same of "Svensk!" exclaimed Mr. Swenson, or whatever it is that natives of Sweden exclaim in moments of justifiable annoyance"<sup>23</sup>—had not a helpful colleague informed me that *svensk* simply means "Swedish."

P. G.'s Italian can sound convincing, but was obviously minimal; he is a past master at creating the impression of authenticity, as with the exclamation "Casta dimura salve e pura!"<sup>24</sup> which in fact makes no sense. In *The Adventures of Sally* (ch. 16) we witness an argument between two Italian waiters whose speech is a hilarious mixture of Italian and Spanish with a few odd words thrown in: "Batti, batti! I presto ravioli hollandaise," says the first waiter. The second retorts, "La Donna e mobile spaghetti napolitana Tetrazina," the first comes back with "Infanta Isabella lope (sic) de Vegas (sic) mulligatawny Toronto," to be countered with "Funiculi funicula Vincente y Blasco Ibanez vermicelli sul campo della gloria risotto!" This is another excellent example of P. G.'s ear for phrasing and cadence—it's gobbledegook, but read rapidly it sounds very much like Italian.

We come now to the most intriguing case: the exotic words and expressions pronounced (or thought) by the retired British Army Captain Biggar in *The Return of Jeeves* (*Ring for Jeeves*). There are 19 of them, including "Krai yuti ny ma py" (ch. 5); "Mun py nawn lap lao!" (ch. 14), whose lap and lao could be Swahili; and "ghazi havildar" (ch. 8), two Hindustani words meaning, respectively, a crusader and a low rank in the British Indian Army. There are also (I am reliably informed)

several Cantonese words; a drink called a gin pahit; a Malay term; and two coins, a baht (Thailand) and a tical (Thailand and Burma). At the end of the book Captain Biggar is heard humming a Swahili wedding march (he's going to marry Mrs. Spottsworth), and at intervals in the text there are references to India and to Shanghai. Perhaps readers of *Connotations [or Plum Lines!—Ed.]* can help unravel this puzzle; I suspect that P. G. is doing here what he did with "Italian": making a list of words culled from different sources, which when put together sound like a coherent language.

Turning now to the languages P. G. obviously did know, German is not found as often as we might expect, probably in deference to the events of World War II. In *Summer Moonshine* he gives the comic name of Princess von und zu Dwornitzchek to one of his most unpleasant characters, and the apparently spoof book title *Die Zeitbestimmung des Tragbaren Durchgangsinstruments im Verticale des Polarsterns*<sup>25</sup> turns out to be an authentic astronomical work by one Wilhelm Dollen, first published in 1863. We hear the pronunciation of at least two German characters, a German servant named Adolf:<sup>26</sup> "In dze garten zis morning, I did zee you giss Violed"; and a German waiter:<sup>27</sup> "Der gentleman . . . haf everything exblained. All will now quite satisfactory be." This last example combines pronunciation and sentence structure, and the latter is the basis of the psychologist Schwertfeger's comments about the jilted lover:<sup>28</sup>

Having round the corner nipped and the good,  
stiff drink taken . . . the subject will now all  
food-nourishment refuse and in 87.06 per cent  
of cases will for a long and muscle-exercising  
walk along the high road or across country, at  
a considerable rate of speed and in much soul-  
agitation go.

This sentence shows a keen ear both for rhythm (verb at the end) and for German portmanteau words ("food-nourishment," "soul-agitation").

There are two languages with which we would expect P. G. to be thoroughly familiar. The first is Latin, in which he obviously had a thorough grounding at Dulwich, and which he uses less than we might have anticipated—for fear of being thought an intellectual snob, perhaps? The books contain a scattering of Latin clichés, used much as the French authors of the *Astérix* comic books use them: *nolle prosequi*, *carpe diem*, *tempora mutantur . . .* and half a dozen others including Jeeves's favourite: *rem acu tegisti* (= "you've hit the nail on the head"). Anything less well-known is translated in the text: *Archilochum proprio rabies armavit iambo*,<sup>29</sup>

Aequam memento rebus in arduis servare mentem,<sup>30</sup>  
Quis custodiet ipsos custodes,<sup>31</sup> and Medio de fonte  
leporem surgit amari aliquid in ipsis floribus angat,<sup>32</sup>  
obligingly translated by Jeeves for Bertie, who knows  
no Latin.

P. G.'s insouciant rendering of these chestnuts shows the familiarity with Latin which we would have assumed (I leave aside the enumeration of the bacteria of milk in *Doctor Sally*, ch. 16: *Cavillus acidi lactici, Bacillus lactis acidi* and eight others, since no Latin is necessary to consult a reference work). All the more astonishing, then, is his first use of Latin, in the first book he published, *The Pothunters* (1902). This is a correct line and a half of Latin hexameter: *Conscia mens recti* ("a mind that knows what's right,") *nec si sinit esse dolorem* ("nor if it allows grief to exist") /*Sed revocare gradum* ("but to retrace one's path;") I am, as so often, indebted to the classical expertise of my colleague Chris Brunelle), but there are two problems here.

First, this Latin quotation is attributed, not to any Latin author, but to "our friend Thucydides"—who wrote in Greek; secondly, it consists of a quotation from Ovid (the first three words), some words found nowhere in classical Latin (the next five), and a quotation from Virgil. What is P. G. up to here? This first book is a school story and the speaker a schoolboy; in 1902 presumably a majority of schoolboys (the intended readers) knew Latin, so is this a puzzle intended to be solved? I confess bafflement.

Finally, let's come to the bonne bouche: P. G.'s knowledge of, and use of, French. One of the early school stories already includes a French boy whose English is problematic: "M'Todd, he is downstairs—but to wait? No, no. Let us. Shall we? Is it not so? Yes?";<sup>33</sup> and as early as *The Man Upstairs* (1914) there are three examples of characters using French.<sup>34</sup> Well over 20 books have at least a few words and phrases in French, usually of the basic kind ("faute de mieux," "joie de vivre," "noblesse oblige," "Mais oui, mais oui, c'est trop fort!"); the only French Bill Hollister knows in *Something Fishy* is "L'addition" and "Oo la la!"). P. G. was obviously familiar with French casinos and fond of French food; I counted at least two dozen French menu terms ranging from *consommé aux pommes d'amour* to *ris de veau à la financière*, and not including some charming approximations ("le Bird of some kind with chipped potatoes").

As we might expect, P. G. has a very good ear for French people speaking English, especially Packy's friend the Vicomte de Blissac in *Hot Water*, and for characters pretending to be French, like Lord Biskerton in *Big Money*: "... is it that you could dee-reck-ut me to

Less-ess-ter Skervare?" He also rings variations on the Englishman trying to speak French, like Bingo in *Eggs, Beans and Crumpets* asking the hotel concierge: "Esker-vous avez dans votre hôtel . . . un oiseau avec beaucoup de . . . Oh hell, what's the French for pimples?" (The concierge, who no doubt speaks excellent English, supplies "boutons.") And *The Luck of the Bodkins* begins with Monty's attempt, mindful of the instructions of his fiancée Gertrude, to practice his French on a French waiter: "Er, garçon, esker-vous avez un spot de l'encre et une pièce de papier—note-papier, vous savez—and une enveloppe et une plume?" The waiter's fiancée, however, has told him that he must be sure to practice his English while working on the Riviera, so he returns to Monty with "Eenk—pin—ipper—enveloppe—and a liddle bit of bloddin-ipper." Later Monty rashly asks the same waiter if he knows how to spell "sciatica," which the waiter of course does—in French: "Comme ça, monsieur. Like zis, boy. Wit' a ess, wit' a say, wit' a ee, wit' a arr, wit' a tay, wit' a ku, wit' a uh, wit' a ay. V'là! Sciatique." While of no help to Monty, this once again shows up P. G.'s phenomenally keen ear for language difference.

Bertie's Aunt Dahlia has a French chef, Anatole, to whose cooking Bertie is devoted, and who (alas, only once) is infuriated to the point of delivering a fierce tirade about the man making faces at him through the skylight of his room. Part of this tirade runs as follows:

"Wait yet a little. I am not finish. I say I see this type on my window, making a few faces. But what then? Does he buzz off when I shout a cry, and leave me peaceable? Not on your life. He remain planted there, not giving any damns, and sit regarding me like a cat watching a duck. He make faces against me and again he make faces against me, and the more I command that he should get to hell out of here, the more he do not get to hell out of here. He cry something towards me, and I demand what is his desire, but he do not explain. Oh, no, that arrives never. He does but shrug his head. What damn silliness! Is this amusing for me? You think I like it? I am not content with such folly. I think the poor mutt's loony. Je me fiche de ce type infect. C'est idiot de faire comme ça l'oiseau . . . Allez-vous-en, louffier . . . Tell the boob to go away. He is mad as some March hatters."<sup>35</sup>

This is only one of three superb paragraphs of French-flavored English; later in the scene, after the man on the roof (actually Bertie's friend Gussie Fink-Nottle)

has been let into the room, Anatole is so moved that he reverts entirely to French: "Words like 'marmiton de Domange,' 'pignouf,' 'hurluberlu,' and 'roustisseur,' were fluttering from him like bats out of a barn."

P. G.'s preface to the 1974 reprint of *French Leave* tells us that in 1930–35 he lived near Cannes and tried to learn French in the local Berlitz school and by reading Colette, Courteline, and *La Vie Parisienne*. He also says there: "I never succeeded in speaking French," but it's hard to believe that a man who could play with a language on the page with such a keen ear (Jerry Shoesmith in *Frozen Assets* is addressed by the French police sergeant as "Zoosmeet") could not also speak it. *French Leave*, not surprisingly, takes place mainly in France; it contains many phrases in French and a protagonist named Nicolas Jules St. Xavier Auguste, Marquis de Maufringneuse et Valerie-Moberanne, who has a mundane job in a ministry as "employé attaché à l'expédition du troisième bureau (which means clerk)," (ch. 2).

### 3. Conclusions?

So may Wodehouse be justifiably referred to as a linguist? Not that Noam Chomsky or George Steiner would so recognise him, but if a linguist can also be someone with a phenomenal ear who likes nothing better than to play with how language sounds, and how to transfer that sound to the page, then I believe he qualifies. He can reproduce the effect of the languages he knows, British and American English, German, Latin, and French, either in the original or in fractured translation; he can create the impression that he knows Swedish or Italian by stringing words together into (actually nonsensical) phrases; and he can dream up an entire "language" which sounds authentic, out of words taken from who knows how many different ones, as he does with Captain Biggar's "African." Of course, his books are also about funny situations, funny objects, and funny characters, but readers have not paid sufficient attention, I think, to the almost endless varieties of English and to the quite numerous real, imaginary and mangled foreign languages spoken by those characters. Anyone, no doubt, could learn enough French to reproduce P. G.'s clichés and menu items, but only a natural-born linguist could render the rhythms of a foreign language in English, or play so successfully with a smattering of a given language to create an effect of mastery. Writing this article provided me with two surprises: the (so far unresolved) "African" language problem and the mystery of his first published sample of Latin. But it is surely no surprise that P. G. wrote so much for the theatre; he is constantly listening to his

creations as they talk, and they talk, as I hope to have shown, hilariously.

### Endnotes

Much gratitude to Matthias Bauer and Inge Leimberg, who encouraged me to produce this article; to my learned colleagues Tracy Barrett, Chris Brunelle, Simona Sawhney and Virginia Scott, who furnished valuable information; and to the advisors who tried valiantly to unravel the mystery of Captain Biggar's language: David Carpenter, Sue Erickson, Elizabeth Shadbolt and Susan Widmer.

- <sup>1</sup> In her introduction to *Homage to P. G. Wodehouse* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1973), p. 5
- <sup>2</sup> *Uncle Dynamite*, ch. 9
- <sup>3</sup> *Spring Fever*, ch. 2
- <sup>4</sup> *Psmith in the City*, ch. 15
- <sup>5</sup> *A Damsel in Distress*, ch. 3
- <sup>6</sup> *A Gentleman of Leisure*, ch. 9
- <sup>7</sup> *A Damsel in Distress*, ch. 9
- <sup>8</sup> *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit*, ch. 21
- <sup>9</sup> *Love Among the Chickens*, ch. 9
- <sup>10</sup> *Mike at Wrykyn*, ch. 9
- <sup>11</sup> *Meet Mr. Mulliner*, ch. 1
- <sup>12</sup> *The Luck of the Bodkins*, ch. 12
- <sup>13</sup> *Full Moon*, ch. 10
- <sup>14</sup> "The Coming of Gowf"
- <sup>15</sup> *Summer Moonshine*, ch. 19
- <sup>16</sup> *Mr. Mulliner Speaking*, ch. 9
- <sup>17</sup> *The Little Nugget*, ch. 6
- <sup>18</sup> *The Inimitable Jeeves*, ch. 10
- <sup>19</sup> *The Small Bachelor*, ch. 2
- <sup>20</sup> Miss Trimble in *Piccadilly Jim*, ch. 17
- <sup>21</sup> Richard Usborne, *Wodehouse at Work to the End* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1976), p. 82
- <sup>22</sup> *Psmith, Journalist*, ch. 11
- <sup>23</sup> *The Girl on the Boat*, ch. 2
- <sup>24</sup> *The Small Bachelor*, ch. 16
- <sup>25</sup> *The Old Reliable*, ch. 17
- <sup>26</sup> "Out of School" in *The Man Upstairs*
- <sup>27</sup> *Psmith, Journalist*, ch. 3
- <sup>28</sup> *Hot Water*, ch. 17
- <sup>29</sup> *The Girl on the Boat*, ch. 8
- <sup>30</sup> *The Girl on the Boat*, ch. 17
- <sup>31</sup> *The Code of the Woosters*, ch. 9
- <sup>32</sup> *Much Obliged*, *Jeeves*, ch. 17
- <sup>33</sup> *The Gold Bat*, ch. 10
- <sup>34</sup> In "Rough-hew Them How We Will," "The Man Who Disliked Cats," and "The Tuppenny Millionaire"
- <sup>35</sup> *Right Ho, Jeeves*, ch. 20

# Review of *Jeeves in Bloom*

BY DANIEL LOVE GLAZER

JANUARY 28, 2010



ON JANUARY 28 I saw a preview performance of *Jeeves in Bloom*, presented by First Folio Theatre in Oak Brook, Illinois. The show was billed as being "by Margaret Raether, based on the characters of P. G. Wodehouse." Two years ago, First Folio presented *Jeeves Intervenes*, also by Margaret Raether but based on the story "Jeeves and the Hard-Boiled Egg." Each of these shows is a pastiche, using familiar Wodehouse characters, situations, and dialogue, but put together differently from any one Wodehouse story.

Bertie has just returned from Cannes, where he was in the company of Aunt Dahlia and Madeline Bassett. Gussie Fink-Nottle has fallen in love with Madeline Bassett, from whose dog's paw he has extracted a thorn. With a series of telegrams, Dahlia summons Bertie to Brinkley Court. Bertie brings Gussie (and, of course, Jeeves) to Brinkley Court, where Madeline is staying. While at Cannes, Aunt Dahlia lost the money her husband Tom gave her to pay the printer of *Milady's Boudoir*. She wants Bertie to steal her diamonds and pawn them so she can pay the printer. Tom fears burglars and patrols at night with his shotgun.

Gussie is too shy to voice his love. At Jeeves's suggestion, Bertie plays Cyrano de Bergerac for the mute Gussie from the bushes, telling Madeline of his great love. Alas, Madeline discovers the ruse and concludes it is Bertie who loves her. She will marry him and devote her life to making him happy.

Meanwhile, Bertie somehow loses or damages—it isn't quite clear—Anatole's manuscript of his recipes that he hopes to publish. Anatole resigns. (This seems strained. Why not the standard Wodehouse ploy of depressed souls—Gussie, Bertie, and Dahlia could qualify, and maybe Tom upset by an income tax bill—refusing to eat?) Tom banishes Bertie from Brinkley Court.

In the end, thanks to Jeeves, Madeline is disentangled from Bertie and engaged to Gussie, Anatole's manuscript is restored, and Anatole resumes his post. One loose end is that Dahlia never gets the money she needs to pay the printer. This is a lapse that Wodehouse would never have countenanced.

Christian Gray and Jim McCance reprised their roles of Bertie and Jeeves from two years ago. Gray was adequate but cannot compare to Hugh Laurie or City Lit's Mark Richard. McCance was very good and avoided the trace of condescension to Bertie that slightly marred his previous performance. The star of the evening was Kevin McKillip, a perfect embodiment of Gussie Fink-Nottle, who lit up the stage. If he doesn't win a Jeff Award (Chicago's version of Broadway's Tonys) for best supporting actor, an injustice will have been done. The other actors were fine. James Learning deserves special mention for superbly and seamlessly sustaining the dual roles of Tom Travers and Chef Anatole. But for the program, one would not have suspected that one actor played both parts.

The audience, nearly filling the 125-seat theatre, was enthusiastic, and rightfully so. Despite my quibbles, the production, which included snatches of recorded 1920s jazz, was excellent.

## Ann Bishop

THE CHICAGO ACCIDENT SYNDICATE sadly said goodbye to friend and member Ann Bishop, who passed away recently at the age of 90.

Tina Woelke tells us that Ann was born in Oak Park, Illinois. Her godmother was Jane Addams, and she spent much of her youth at Chicago's Hull House, participating in the children's theatre there. (Ann also ran a theatre company, briefly, as an adult.) While in school at the University of Chicago, Ann took a job as an editor on the Manhattan Project—she always said she was chosen because she didn't understand what she was reading!

As an early indicator of her lifetime support of the arts, Ann was one of the founders of the Hyde Park Art Fair, where she helped artists gain attention.

Ann spent many years as an editor for the Scientific Research Association, where she wrote and edited much of the SRA Reading Program for schools. She taught and attended classes at the Newberry Library, where children's literature was her specialty. Ann wrote quite a few riddle books for children, such as *The Riddle Ages* and *Wild Bill Hiccup's Riddle Book*. She also wrote a textbook on the subject of teaching fairy tales, which was illustrated by her husband and fellow member of TWS, the late Leon Bishop.

The arts will suffer from Ann's passing, as she was a passionate supporter of many causes, including theatre, literature, film, and fine art. She also volunteered at local animal shelters. We will miss her quick wit, sharp intellect, and kind heart. She had pizzazz!

# Memories of Pauline Blanc

## BY NORMAN MURPHY



Pauline Blanc's "Elm Lawn"

THE MARCH ISSUE of *Plum Lines* reported the death of Pauline Blanc, one of TWS's longest-serving members and an extremely talented artist. I met Pauline when she came over for the first Wodehouse Pilgrimage in 1989 and I have never forgotten her.

Those of you who have been on a Wodehouse Walk will remember that I like to walk at what I consider to be a normal pace but which everybody else calls a smart trot. I can't think why but they do. It must have been on our first walk around Dulwich (we were all staying at the school) when I noticed that Pauline was always lagging behind us.

I thought first of all she was just a slow walker, but no matter how much I slowed my pace, she was always at the back. Confusion did not quite become irritation, but I honestly wondered what she was playing at. Always at the end of the line, always scribbling in a notebook, always looking around her when everybody else was listening to me. What was going on? It wasn't till the second evening that I decided to grasp the nettle. I spotted her outside the College, looking across the playing fields and, again, scribbling away in her notebook. So, from curiosity, I asked if she was keeping a diary of events. "Oh no. Just a few scribbles," she said and showed me the notebook full of sketches of buildings she had done as she walked along behind me. All I could say was "Good Lord! But we never stopped walking. How on earth . . . ?" And I went on to apologize for my harsh thoughts. My apology was rewarded by delightful and beautifully drawn Christmas cards for the next 15 years.

Pauline's drawings were reproduced in "A True and Faithful Account of the Amazing Adventures of The Wodehouse Society on Their Pilgrimage, July 1989." The drawing above is of Elm Lawn, the house in which Wodehouse lived while at Dulwich, and I can state firmly that it was done on the move in every sense of the word. She was a remarkable woman.

## A Few Quick Ones

Thanks to all contributors and, as always, special thanks to Evelyn Herzog and John Baesch, who are prolific and terrific QO finders. You may find many other items of interest on PGNet, where discoveries are announced and discussion is lively. (That forum is also an excellent place to get answers to Plummy questions you may have!)

Brian Yarvin writes in the February 14, 2010, *Washington Post*, of the delights of "Eating Eel at Ease in London." The most well-equipped eel-browsing restaurant seems to be S & R Kelly & Sons, in Bethnal Green, where, after Mr. Yarvin added some pepper and vinegar, "the whole thing came alive." We assume he meant alive in taste. He goes on to tell us "not to fear those eels!"

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In the January 19, 2010, *Daily Telegraph*, Roland Lambton of Cambridge says that "spats remove the doubts of the snootiest butler," and quotes Wodehouse in an anecdote where a butler indeed accepted Mr. Lambton properly once the butler saw his spats.

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According to Michael Corkery ("The Buzz" in the *Wall Street Journal*, January 23–24, 2010), "Jeeves and Mr. Belvedere are out. 'Alice,' from *The Brady Bunch*, is in," as he explains that household staff is still desired by the wealthy, though they prefer the all-in-one generalist rather than specialized staff.

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Paul Taylor, founder and artistic director of the Paul Taylor Dance Company, states in the October 18, 2009, *New York Times Magazine* that the worst dance he created was when he was a boy in prep school. He says, "I made up a song-and-dance routine for me and a pal. The song was 'Cleopatterer.' I had seen it in a movie, and we did it in drag. It was terrible."

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Charles Gould found an unlikely juxtaposition in Richard Russo's *That Old Magic Carpet* (2009): "His father alternated between literary pornography and P. G. Wodehouse, enjoying both thoroughly, as if *Naked Lunch* and *Bertie Wooster Sees It Through* were intended as companion pieces."

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*Nostalgia Magazine*, in their Winter 2010 issue, includes an article by Gary Phaup called "Nero Wolfe: The Case of the Durable Detective." P. G. Wodehouse is quoted in the article, explaining the lasting popularity of Rex Stout: "[He] passes the supreme test of being rereadable. I don't know how many times I have reread the Nero Wolfe stories, but plenty. . . . That's writing."

# That Frightful Ass Spode: Wodehouse Takes on Mosley

BY TODD MORNING

OF ALL P. G. Wodehouse's characters, one of the most intriguing is Roderick Spode. This is not because Spode is particularly original. In many ways he is the stock heavy from central casting: a dimwitted, brawny bully. But Spode is also a satirical portrait of Sir Oswald Mosley, the leader of the British Union of Fascists, and in 1938, when Spode made his first appearance in *The Code of the Woosters*, no British reader would have missed this. Mosley's followers were the Black Shirts; Spode's the Black Shorts. Spode is described as an "amateur dictator." Mosley aligned himself with Mussolini and Hitler, receiving funds from the Italian Fascists and marrying his second wife, Diana Mitford, at the home of Nazi propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels, with Hitler as a guest.

During the 1930s, to some in Britain, Mosley seemed like the coming thing: a charismatic, decisive leader who offered an alternative to the apparent failings of democracy. Mosley wrote that dictatorships were an "eternally recurrent phenomenon of British history, which invariably coincide with our great periods of dynamic achievement." Bertie Wooster, however, has a different view of dictators, which he expresses in chapter 7 of *The Code of the Woosters*: "The trouble with you, Spode, is that because you have succeeded in inducing a handful of half-wits to disfigure the London scene by going about in black shorts, you think you are someone. You hear them shouting 'Heil Spode!' and you imagine it is the Voice of the People. That is where you make your bloomer. What the voice of the people is saying is: 'Look at that frightful ass Spode, swanking about in footer bags! Did you ever in your puff see such a perfect perisher?'"

This telling-off by the quotable Mr. Wooster appears in nearly every biography of Oswald Mosley or Diana Mitford that I have come across. In fact, in these books this quote is usually followed with the implication that Wodehouse's lampoon may have hurt Mosley politically or at least was a sign of his declining fortunes.

Others who look back at this period share this view. The former journalist and current mayor of London, Boris Johnson, wrote in 1999, "There can scarcely have been a more devastating portrait of a fascist than in Wodehouse's *The Code of the Woosters*." Johnson goes



Todd Morning takes on Spode.

on to say, "It is to Wodehouse's credit that this satire of Mosley and fascism and all their hysterical pomposity appeared in 1938, which was the year of Appeasement and the Oxford by-election." [Norman Murphy says: "Johnson got it wrong! It was not the Oxford by-election but the Oxford Union debate that took place that year."—Ed.] The online edition of the *Daily Telegraph* contained this statement in 2007: "In the 1930s when many European countries were rapidly growing Fascist, Pelham Wodehouse usefully caricatured Mosley's home-grown Supermen: Roderick Spode and

his Black Shorts. After that tiny seed was planted in the national consciousness, the English could never really take domestic fascism seriously." The columnist Jasper Gerard, writing about the current ultra-right British National Party, said, "We British have a far cleverer weapon than outrage to deploy against the BNP, the smart bomb all demagogues fear: laughter. It is why P. G. Wodehouse depicted Spode, his Oswald Mosley caricature, as a closet lingerie salesman."

This led me to wonder—what was the reaction to *The Code of the Woosters* when it was published in Britain and America in October 1938? With war less than a year away and the fascist threat palpable, was the novel seen primarily as a satire of Mosley and his followers? Or was it viewed as it is today, as one of Wodehouse's best, with the satirizing of Mosley just one element in a novel admired for its frothy plot and many funny, memorable lines?

In order to answer this question, I looked up some of the reviews of *The Code of the Woosters* that appeared on both sides of the Atlantic in autumn 1938. In the *Times Literary Supplement*, the reviewer John Howard Davy said of the novel, "It is, in its kind, a masterpiece in the grand manner that characterizes the great moments in the Jeeves and Blandings sagas." No mention of Spode, however. The same is true of the reviews in the *Times* and *The Scotsman*. The *Times* review mentions Spode only in passing and begins with the laudatory statement, "The ardent devotee, it must be confessed, is always fearful that Mr. Wodehouse will one day come short of himself, but *The Code of the Woosters* may reassure him once more." *The Scotsman* ignores Spode and sums up the novel with this sentence: "Let it suffice

to affirm that the story presents Mr. Wooster in full mastery of the absurd, that felicitously imagined and polished absurdity which is the characteristic product of Mr. Wodehouse's ever-surprising invention." The only reference that I could find in the 1938 British press to Wodehouse's lampoon of Mosley came in a survey of the latest thrillers, published in the *Observer*, where a brief review of a novel called *Traitors Way* (about Britain becoming involved in a fascist plot to take over the world) began, "P. G. Wodehouse in his latest gravity-removing work has shown the British Black Shorts, in the person of Roderick Spode, just where they get off."

In America, the *New Yorker* offered a few sentences on *The Code of the Woosters*, with silver cow-creamers highlighted, but with no references to dictators of any sort. This is not really surprising since the United States had far more serious domestic matters to worry about, and European politics were not important to most Americans. The *New York Times*, on the other hand, gave a great deal of space to the novel in Charles Poore's "Books of the Times" column. Poore compared Wodehouse's satire of Mosley to a collection of writings by Westbrook Pegler. What a strange pairing! Pegler is remembered today, if at all, as a strident voice of the extreme, conspiracy-obsessed, political right. In the late 1930s, though, he was at his apex, with his syndicated column appearing in 116 newspapers. Poore began his column: "P. G. Wodehouse and Westbrook Pegler, two of our foremost moralists, have just published their newest studies in contemporary manners." He went on, "Both Mr. Pegler and Mr. Wodehouse are keenly concerned with the outstanding social, personal, and economic problems of our time." (Certainly this was the only time such a thing had been said about Wodehouse.) Most of the column is taken up with quotes from Wodehouse on Spode/Mosley and Pegler on the Italian fascists, before a sidetrack covers the authors' similar views on hangovers. By the end, one suspects that Poore has his tongue in his cheek, at the expense of Pegler: "Mr. Pegler, still the most predictably unpredictable of all commentators, is falling back gradually—as all iconoclasts must at last—to the position of disagreeing with himself, since obviously there will be soon no others left. There they are: Mr. Wodehouse never disgruntled and—as the Wooster practically said of Jeeves—Mr. Pegler seldom exactly gruntled. If ever."

While researching all this, I came across an academic paper, published in 2009, entitled "Never a Gabriel Over Whitehall: Fictional Representations of British Party Politics During the Mosley Era." The author was Steven Fielding, from the School of Politics and International Relations at the University of Nottingham, and his paper

was published in the weighty journal *Contemporary British History*. Issue number 4 of volume 23 is devoted to Oswald Mosley but makes room for Bertie Wooster. Professor Fielding's thesis is that the 1930s popular films and literature reflected a great deal of cynicism about politicians, portraying them as weak and corrupt, which Mosley hoped to exploit. After all, Mosley portrayed himself as strong and incorruptible. When Wodehouse introduced Spode, however, Mosley found himself lumped with other politicians as an object of ridicule. Fielding ends his paper by saying, "It was, therefore, tempting to speculate that ridicule—based on the idea that politics itself was inherently ridiculous—partly explains Mosley's failure."

If the reviews are anything to go by, however, Wodehouse's ridicule of Mosley was not why people bought copies of *The Code of the Woosters* in 1938. In fact, the only other 1938 references to *The Code of the Woosters* that I uncovered were on lists of suggested gift purchases for that year's Christmas. The novel was invariably included with other light fare that would help the reader temporarily forget the unsettling times. Of course, that's pretty much why people read the book today, long after the rants of a would-be British dictator have faded.

## Yet More Quick Ones

In the February 28, 2010, *New York Times Book Review*, Cathleen Schine complains (in the article "I Was a Teenage Illiterate") that reading Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* at age 14 (and absorbing only a tenth of it) ruined her for reading classic literature for two decades. Fortunately, at the age of 35, she married a man with an alphabetically arranged bookcase, and she worked her way from "the upper left hand corner (Jane Austen! J. R. Ackerley!) . . . to the lower right (Waugh! Wodehouse! Woolf!)." She is now ready "to give *The Idiot* another shot."

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The *Times* (London) of March 5, 2010, published an obituary of Ralph McInerny, the author of the Father Dowling mysteries. Describing McInerny's prolific output, the writer says that, after the first Father Dowling story was published in 1977, "many other books . . . followed with positively Wodehousian rapidity."

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The March 1, 2010, *Times* (London) reported that a "Children's Society poll of more than 1000 respondents aged 11 to 25 found that 30 per cent believed [Stephen] Fry would be the best prime minister, compared with 21 per cent who chose one of the current party leaders."

# What Great Writers Read Is Wodehouse

BY CHARLES E. GOULD, JR.

IT NEEDS NO GHOST come from the grave (not that I am one yet or coming from there now) to suppose that a writer as prolific and popular as P. G. Wodehouse must have, over a period of 70 years, attracted the attention of other writers. Some such attention is almost too well-known to mention: Hilaire Belloc's statement in a U.S. radio broadcast that "P. G. Wodehouse is the best writer of English now alive"; Evelyn Waugh's definitive observation in a BBC broadcast that "Mr. Wodehouse's idyllic world can never stale. He will continue to release future generations from captivity that may be more irksome than our own. He has made a world for us to live in and delight in." Though Mr. Belloc's praise raised some already highbrow eyebrows, no one who disagrees with Mr. Waugh reads Wodehouse anyway... and won't be reading this.

I have here several books dedicated to Wodehouse: by Agatha Christie, "To P. G. Wodehouse, whose books and stories have brightened my life for many years. Also, to show my pleasure in his having been kind enough to tell me that he enjoys my books" (*Hallowe'en Party*); by Edgar Wallace thrice, "To My Friend P. G. Wodehouse" (*The Ringer*, *A King by Night*, and *The Gaunt Stranger*); by Leslie Charteris, "To P. G. Wodehouse who had time to say a word for the Saint stories, when he could have written them so much better himself" (*Saint's Getaway*); by Anthony Berkeley, "To P. G. Wodehouse" (*Trial and Error*); and by E. Phillips Oppenheim, "To My Friend 'PLUM' WODEHOUSE Who tells me what I can scarcely believe, that he enjoys my stories as much as I do his" (*Up the Ladder of Gold*)—and I think there are others that are not here. The genre represented by these authors is not surprising, for, apart from Shakespeare, Tennyson, Sir Walter Scott, Keats and Wordsworth and Shelley, Walter Savage Landor, William Ernest Henley, Algernon Charles Swinburne, Kipling, Longfellow and Whittier, Thomas Moore, John Bartlett, Conan Doyle and James Graham First Marquess of Montrose, and Zeno (Eleatic philosopher of the fifth century B.C. whose famous Paradox still stumps me), they were evidently Wodehouse's favorite reading; and, had it been possible, each of those writers would have dedicated to Wodehouse a play or a paradox or an epic or a sonnet sequence or a collection of quotations or a poem bound in limp lavender leather. I wish the record were fuller (perhaps it is fuller than I know) of what particular pleasure his contemporaneous writers took in Wodehouse's work.

In *The Letters of Kingsley Amis* (Great Britain: HarperCollins, 2000) there are eight references to Wodehouse, none really illuminating. Apparently Amis wearied of reviewing Wodehouse to the point at which he wrote "pgw to you is sf to me." (I don't know, despite a third of a century among adolescent recreators of our language, here and in England, what "sf" means, but in the context of a thousand pages of Amis's letters I assume it is very rude.) Elsewhere he mentions that Wodehouse's *Punch* contributions in the Fifties are "too topical," and especially as an American I have rarely had reason to disagree with that.

On the other hand, for almost fifty years I have been saying that the two funniest novels ever written (that I have read) in the English language are Amis's *Lucky Jim* and Wodehouse's *Brinkley Manor/Right Ho, Jeeves* (setting aside *Cold Comfort Farm*, by Stella Gibbons, which is the funniest novel I can imagine in any language whatsoever, even if you don't recognize it as a parody, as I did not for years). The two novels have almost nothing in common except Gussie Fink-Nottle's drunken awarding of the prizes at Market Snodsbury Grammar School and Dixon's drunken "Merrie England" address at the end of *Lucky Jim*. I think Amis must owe Wodehouse a nod here, if only for the idea that having a character deliver a speech while intoxicated is a marvelous device of peripeteia, a sudden reversal of fortune for better or worse.

In a nonfictional reminiscence, "I Was a Teen-Age Library User" (*Odd Jobs*, Alfred A. Knopf, 1991, p. 836), Updike recalls the librarian Miss Ruth, who let him "check out stacks of books, and she never blinked":

Stacks of what? P. G. Wodehouse is the author that comes first to mind: the library owned close to all the master's titles, around 50 of them at that time, and they all struck me as hilarious and enchanting. They admitted me to a privileged green world of English men's clubs, London bachelor flats, country weekends, golf courses, roadsters, flappers, and many other upper-crust appurtenances fabulous to think of in wartime Berks County. A real reader, reading to escape his own life thoroughly, tends to have runs on authors; besides Wodehouse, I pretty well ploughed through Erle Stanley Gardner, Ellery Queen, Agatha Christie, and Ngaio Marsh.

Veritably Wodehouse's own stack . . . and how lovely to include London in the "green world" of Wodehouse's England (most often, Norman Murphy says, Shropshire). If (and he does) in this same vast collection of essays and criticism (page 718) Updike refers to Wodehouse's work as "not the most academically chic" and "often dismissably slim," he is at least describing me and my own works (though not, perhaps, my figure) accurately.

One of my many not academically chic and perhaps dismissably slim ideas for years has been that Updike (whom I revere as much for his poetry as for his fiction) was in American literature the direct descendant of Sinclair Lewis, whether he knew it or not: "When at last I came to read *Babbitt*, it was because its central character's name rhymed with that of a fictional character of my own. The parallels astonished me—the bondage to one's father-in-law's business, the baffled love for one's son, the dips into low life, and the scared skid home." (*More Matter*. Alfred A. Knopf, 1999; p. 239) In *Sinclair Lewis: An American Life* (McGraw-Hill, 1961), Mark Shorer writes:

Like his master, Dickens, he [Sinclair Lewis] created a gallery of characters who have independent life outside the novels, with all their obvious limitations, characters that now live in the American tradition itself. If they are not as numerous or as rich as Dickens's, they are nevertheless of the same breed—gigantic, nearly mythological figures that embody (I do not say duplicate) the major traits of their class.

So far, I am only 30% wrong in that dismissably slim idea. Nowadays, in America's prep schools (where dead white male novelists are best if not uniquely preserved against brown and bosomy competition), Fitzgerald is known only (and rightly) for *The Great Gatsby*; Hemingway is known only for *The Old Man and the Sea*, if that (it's only about 90 pages—"dismissably slim"!), and, being virtually unreadable, he is otherwise not read at all; and, now that I am no longer in the classroom, nobody under the age of 50 has heard of Sinclair Lewis. Give us both another thirty years, though:

On that day [August, 1928], meeting C. F. Crandall [a London newspaperman], he [Sinclair Lewis] asked him if he would be so good as to buy him all the books of P. G. Wodehouse for the voyage home, and from Paris, on August 17, he cabled Harcourt that he would probably want four months more to finish *Dodsworth* [a novel about an automobile magnate]. (*Ibid.*, p. 505)

A writer who once wanted "all the books of P. G. Wodehouse for the voyage home" (in 1928 they numbered almost 40, counting the school stories) is not forever tucked in the wallet at the back of Time, wherein are alms for oblivion.

I must add, however, that all three of those writers—like Wodehouse—thrive in the marts and thoroughfares (the dark alleys and muddy gutters) of the rare book trade: many of their pre-war first editions in reasonably good dust wrappers will command a dollar price with a comma in it, often with two digits to the left thereof. Doesn't mean anybody actually reads them. Some booksellers don't even read the titles: I have seen Fitzgerald's *The Beautiful and the [sic] Damned* offered in prestigious catalogues.

When Wodehouse wanted books for "the voyage home," he sent for Agatha Christie, E. Phillips Oppenheim, Edgar Wallace, W. Shakespeare . . . or Rex Stout. When Rex Stout heard of Wodehouse's death, February 14, 1975, he said: "He always used the right words, and nearly always used them well. As an entertainer he was unsurpassed. While apparently being merely playful he often made acute and subtle comments about human character and behavior." (John McAleer, *Rex Stout*. Little, Brown, 1977, p. 577)

As I am doing, at least in part, Wodehouse himself makes sport of Hemingway. (It is easy. It's not hard. Beans for lunch.) He gives three of his characters the name Hemmingway [sic]: two of them, Aline and Sidney, are con artists, i.e., crooks. The other, Wadsworth, an unpopular retired solicitor, is unaffectionately known on the golf course as "Palsied Percy." If this be error—or coincidence—and upon him proved, then Wodehouse never writ, nor no man ever loved. In chapter 24 of *The Mating Season*, Gussie Fink-Nottle says that the scales have fallen from his eyes regarding Corky Pirbright: "I think she would make an excellent helpmeet for somebody of the Ernest Hemingway type who likes living dangerously." Ten pages later, Bertie Wooster is confused when he says of Gussie, "He still admires her many fine qualities and considers that she would make a good wife for Sinclair Lewis." This PGW joke is, to me, supremely funny, even beyond Bertie's mistake. For, apart perhaps from serious drinking, Hemingway and Lewis had very little in common—nothing at all in their writing; and while the manly Hemingway might have been able to handle Corky (Cora) Pirbright, the comparatively effete—though in my opinion far greater writer—Lewis (like Gussie) would have found her overwhelming: too rich a mixture, being dust beneath her chariot wheels. Somehow Wodehouse knew all this, but I can't picture him curling up with either of these

authors, even out of the rain with a dachshund. Pure genius intuition, I surmise.

However, the back panel of the fine Oliver Hurst dust wrapper of *Pigs Have Wings* (Doubleday, 1952) proclaims: "P. G. Wodehouse has become, as Sinclair Lewis put it, 'not an author but a whole department of rather delicate art. He is the master of the touchingly inane . . . of the ultimate and lordly deadpan.'" I leave to greater scholars than I—the name Norman Murphy springs to mind—to find, if we want it, the published source of this splendid praise. But it's true. In Wodehouse we find the windbag Babbitt (Sigsbee Horatio Waddington), the industrial Dodsworth (Sir George Pyke, Lord Tilbury), the Main Street Girl from East Gilead (May Stubbs), the goofy god-driven Elmer Gantry (Roderick Spode), even Myron Weagle (*Work of Art*) the hotel keeper (think of Archie Moffam and old Brewster), transmuted from the touchingly serious of Lewis into the uniquely touchingly inane of Wodehouse. When I was a lad I served a term touched by the serious. Now, I rather prefer the inane, relying always, of course, on the lordly deadpan.

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## Dennis Chitty

**D**R. DENNIS CHITTY died on February 3, 2010. Dennis was a longtime member of The Wodehouse Society and an entertaining speaker at our conventions.

Dennis was gracious and witty, and he had a consummate lifelong curiosity. Born in 1912 in Bristol, England, he earned a B.A. from the University of Toronto and a D.Phil. from Oxford University, where he worked for 26 years. In 1961, Dennis became Professor of Zoology at the University of British Columbia. His research focused on understanding population cycles in small mammals. His move to Canada gave him the opportunity to teach undergraduates and to explain science to nonscientists. UBC awarded him a Master Teacher Award in 1973. He retired in 1978 as Professor Emeritus and began pursuing other interests, including cooking and Spanish. He was a superb mentor of students and was a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada. He was also awarded the Fry Medal of the Canadian Society of Zoology, and a D.Sc. from Oxford. His many scientific papers were widely quoted. His book *Do Lemmings Commit Suicide: Beautiful Hypotheses and Ugly Facts* was published by Oxford University Press in 1996.



Dennis Chitty  
at the 2005 Convention

# A Mulliner Menagerie: Numbers 8 & 9

BY KEN CLEVENGER

## No. 8: Reptiles, Part II

**A**CROCODILE makes just one appearance in Wodehouse, as the reptile who ruins an Indian peasant's day by biting him in half on the banks of the Ganges in "The Story of Cedric." The crocodile's first cousin, the alligator, appears twice. One alligator plays a key role in a test of how to tell if a man is a pipsqueak in "Strychnine in the Soup." And to show how deadly alligators may be, no departing lovelorn traveler who is setting out to "potter a while about the world" should go without a "pot of ointment for relieving alligator-bites" as advised by Bashford Braddock, the explorer, in "The Ordeal of Osbert Mulliner."

From the deadliness of alligators and crocodiles, we skitter on to the comparatively tame lizards in Mulliner. In "Gala Night," to illustrate the lizard's basic kindness and decency, a vicar speaking to a bishop and his lady bishopess of a harmless young man of good character whom the vicar refers to as a "poor lizard." The other lizard reference is less innocuous. In "The Knightly Quest of Mervyn," Oofy Prosser, recounting how he came to be suffering from a morning head, mentions his overindulgence in Lizard's Breath cocktails.

We considered snakes in Reptiles, Part I, and here in Part II we still grab serpents and vipers by the tail. If you are keeping score, it is Vipers 3, Serpents 2. The serpent references include the classic image of nursing to one's bosom in "The Rise of Minna Nordstrom." The second serpent reference is, not surprisingly, in "Something Squishy," wherein Simmons, the butler to Bobbie Wickham's mother (Lady Wickham), refers to Sidney the Snake as a serpent.

Like serpents, vipers get poor press. In "The Right Approach," vipers join snakes and serpents as dangerous objects to nurse to one's b. In "The Ordeal of Osbert Mulliner" a bad man, a home wrecker, is called a viper. To be gender fair, in "The Rise of Minna Nordstrom," a man who disapproves of a certain female's behavior calls her a viper. Hissingly, one imagines, assuming one can hiss a word without an "s" in it.

Whether they are serpents, vipers, or snakes, few find their particular pedigree acknowledged. The two exceptions are pythons, twice mentioned as such, and the venerable cobra of fictional mystery novel fame. If you will recall, an alligator helped form part of a test for pipsqueakness and a python coiled for the same exam.

The second python uses its reputation for swallowing a great volume of food whole to evoke the image of the torments of a starving python.

The last reptile in our zoological analysis of Mulliner is in "From a Detective's Notebook," wherein a cobra dropped down a chimney becomes a source of mayhem or murder. Scarcely a Wodehousian image but doubtless written in tribute to Arthur Conan Doyle.



## No. 9: Rabbits

**I**N THE ABOVE SEGMENT on reptiles, starving pythons were afoot, so to speak and so, naturally, rabbits came to mind thereafter. And rabbits do deserve this, their own column, as they make appearances in a dozen of the Mulliner tales.

Perhaps the most enduring image is the opening of "Unpleasantness at Bludleigh Court" which begins with a gaithered fellow entering the Anglers' Rest totting a "posy of dead rabbits." A sensitive poet viewing this drooping nosegay allows as how he prefers his rabbits "with rather more of their contents inside them." And speaking of the insides of rabbits, the residents of this awful abattoir, Bludleigh Court, consider as incomplete any rabbit without a deposit of small shot in it.

The Mulliner rabbits take one of four forms, if you don't count dead. They may be rabbits merely as rabbits, or as a Jack rabbit (once), or as hares (twice). They may also be incarnated as Aurelia Cammarleigh, according to Archibald Mulliner in "The Code of the Mulliners," where he calls her his "precious angel dream-rabbit."

The jackrabbit in "Romance at Droitgate Spa" was a simile for speed, and in many other stories it is the rabbit's reputation for speed that induces the comparison of the human character's behavior to that of a rabbit. It is not an infrequent event in any Wodehouse story that a situation arises making it judicious to show a bit of speed while departing. In "The Truth About George" rabbits illustrate the role of speed when a parched drinker "shot into" The Anglers' Rest like a rabbit, and again when George Mulliner's personal turn of speed was the subject of an "envious glance" shot at him as he ran past a hopelessly outclassed rabbit.

In a second classic role, rabbits magically appear in four Mulliner stories as an adjunct to a conjurer. This is seen, but we don't know how, in "The Man Who Gave Up Smoking," "Best Seller," "George and Alfred," and "Romance at Droitgate Spa."

You will find hares in two Mulliner stories. In "Archibald and the Masses" a hare is a rabbit-like image

for speed. And in "Unpleasantness at Bludleigh Court" there is that wonderful vignette in verse by Charlotte Mulliner in which puncturing hares is a recognized antidote to ennui.

"Timid as a rabbit" is a frequent image in Mulliner. One fellow, a quiet, retiring, sensible young man, is called a rabbit by a loving uncle, albeit a Bosher Street Police Court magistrate by trade, and is assured that there is no stigma attached to being a rabbit in "Something Squishy." Rabbits are also the only game in town when Dudley Finches are out of season for Lady Wickham's butler in "The Awful Gladness of the Mater."

But I mustn't poach on the future "Fowl" category.

In the next episode I will address another Mulliner animal category: the surprisingly docile gorilla.

## The 2013 Convention!

**Y**ES, THE 2013 CONVENTION can be yours! The details about how the host chapter is chosen are available in TWS's Convention Steering Committee (CSC) Charter. If you are unable to get it from TWS's website (<http://www.wodehouse.org/twsCSCcharter.html>) for some reason, please write to Elin Woodger for a copy (see below).

All bids for the 2013 convention must be submitted to Elin Woodger by January 14, 2011. You may contact Elin by e-mail at [elinwm@btinternet.com](mailto:elinwm@btinternet.com), or at 9 Winton Avenue, London, N11 2AS, U.K.

The host chapter selection will be made well in advance of the 2011 Detroit convention. The CSC Charter mandates: (1) Any chapter wishing to host a convention must submit their bid to the Committee by nine months before the next convention (in this case, by January 14, 2011). (2) The Committee will notify bidding chapters whether their bids have been successful at least six months before the next convention. Thus, chapters wanting to host the 2013 convention will be notified by April 14, 2011, whether their bid has been successful or not. (3) If the Committee receives no bids by the nine-month deadline, they will use those nine months to make their own convention plans—which may mean selecting a likely chapter and inviting them to play Persian Monarchs, with the honor of hosting the 2013 convention as the stakes.

For full host chapter selection criteria, you may download the CSC Charter from our website, or you may request a copy from Elin at the e-mail address or street address listed above.

# 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:



Ken Clevenger and Noel Merrill with banjolele

**A**PRIL 3, Knoxville, Tennessee: The Birmingham Banjoleles sponsored today's outing at the Carpe Librum bookstore, as TWS member and VP Ken Clevenger described the 54 (by his count) PGW books that had dedications, and the 42 people (by his count) so honored. Fifteen people attended the event.

Ken offered a kind of book bingo based on Wodehouse titles that he mentioned in his talk. The first prize was a copy of Ken's recent essay, "Editors: The Modern Raison d'Etre for the Horsewhip," published in

the January issue of the private amateur journal *Pennant Bravo*. Second prize was two copies of the same!

Upcoming Wodehouse events in Knoxville were advertised, including July 17 (an 11:30 A.M. luncheon in the outdoor patio of the Crown & Goose Pub, 123 S. Central Street, in Knoxville's Old City), October 9 (dinner and a reading at the home of Bill and Ruth Boys, in the Bearden neighborhood), and January 2011 (tentatively, a tea-themed gathering at the Gallery Tea Room in the Western Plaza Shopping Center on Kingston Pike.)

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



**The Broadway Special**  
(New York City and vicinity)  
Contact: Amy Plofker  
Phone:  
E-mail:



**T**HE OBJECT of our attention at The Players in Manhattan on March 19 was Plum's 1909 novelette *The Swoop*, which Wodehouse biographer David Jasen dourly informed us was written merely for the railway bookstall trade (but who brightened a little when he noted that its first edition was the second-rarest PGW collectible). This odd little opus, which concerns an invasion of England and the boy scout who stops it, and about which those who knew it were unenthusiastic, was suggested as our reading by David Rabinowitz, who then, conveniently, was unable to attend our meeting. As it developed, most of us found the book surprisingly funny, especially for such an early work.

In defense of David, we will mention that he did send along a closely reasoned document (well, as closely reasoned as the Broadway Special ever are) essaying the notion that *The Swoop* represents a bridge between Plum's school stories and his adult humor.

Amy Plofker voiced the opinion that "You take your chances reading Plum before 1920." David Jasen continued to grumble about *The Swoop*, but Maggie Schnader chimed in, "I can't hear you, David, and every word is precious." That's a pretty good motto for any Wodehouse convocation—well, without the "I can't hear you, David" part.

For the first time since its founding, the Broadway Special convened a gathering outside a club and outside a theater—in fact, just plain outside. A small, stalwart group met on Saturday, May 8, for the chapter's "Impending Doom Pique-Nique et Aventure Aquatique" in New York City's Central Park. We foregathered for lunch at the Boat Pond, in which model sailboats raced gracefully while we dined on a variety of comestibles, including the delightful cucumber sandwiches provided by Evy Herzog and John Baesch.

The story inspiring our convocation was "Jeeves and the Impending Doom," and since we intended to venture into Central Park's Lake in water craft, early morning rain and lowering clouds promised to make our nautical sojourn, appropriately, about as pleasant as A. B. Filmer and Bertie Wooster's.

But the front blew on through, the sun blazed forth, and the skies turned an enticing azure, lovely as any over Woollam, we cleverly note, Cheshire on a particularly fruity day. Accordingly, therefore, half a dozen of us took to the water: four of the ladies—Evy Herzog, Amy Plosker, M. E. Rich, and Molly Skardon—embarking on the Lake in an authentic Venetian gondola, while Dave Rabinowitz and Philip Shreffler pursued them in a rowboat, like pirates from *Treasure Island*, taking pictures rather than plunder.



*The Broadway Special enjoys a Wind in the Willows day.*

It was a thoroughly enjoyable afternoon, during the course of which no one was drowned or even marooned, and it proved that the Broadway Special is as comfortably at home in the howling wilderness as it is in the confines of its cozy club.

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



**O**N SUNDAY, April 25, members of Capital! Capital! met at the Army-Navy Country Club for dinner and for the mere pleasure of being together with other Wodehouse aficionados. The evening included a talk by The Wodehouse Society's national veep Ken Clevenger, then visiting the area with wife Joan, on Plum's book dedications, on numbers (or general lack of them) in the canon, and on the way that Plum brought words together so magically. The evening also included a game that Ken devised: Wodehouse Book Bingo. And bingo shouters even collected prizes. Fun, as they say, was had by all.

#### **Capital F.O.R.M.**

(Friends Of Ralston McTodd—Ottawa and vicinity)

Contact: Megan Carton

Phone:

E-mail:



#### **Chapter One**

(Greater Philadelphia area)

Contact: Herb Moskovitz

Phone:

E-mail:



**T**HE CHAPS HELD their winter meeting on January 31 at the historic Dark Horse Tavern. Our interim chair, Herb "Vladimir Brusiloff" Moskovitz, again filled in quite ably for Susan "Rosie M. Banks" Cohen, who is home for the time being. Before a roaring fire, we debated the relative merits of Poe's remains remaining in Baltimore or being dug up with a backhoe and hauled to Philadelphia, where he spent many productive years. The conversation shifted through many topics until John "Mike Jackson" Baesch brought up some newsworthy items from England. We then engaged in a sumptuous repast and did a truncated script-in-hand rendition of "Leave It to Jeeves," one of the great early stories. At our next meeting we will tackle "Uncle Fred Flits By."

#### **The Chicago Accident Syndicate**

(Chicago and thereabouts)

Contact: Daniel & Tina Garrison

Phone:

E-mail:



#### **The Clients of Adrian Mulliner**

(For enthusiasts of both P. G.W

and Sherlock Holmes)

Contact: Marilyn MacGregor

Phone:



**The Dangerous Intellectuals**  
(Florida)  
Contact: Alison Currie

E-mail:



**T**HE DANGEROUS INTELLECTUALS chapter is our newest. Organizer Alison Currie reports that the inaugural meeting on Tax Day was a rollicking success. Nicknames were assigned and resolutions made. April Fools' Day was made the official chapter holiday, and the chapter will meet the second Saturday of each month (beginning in June) in Gainesville. There will be directed readings, but there will be no public shaming of those who do not finish the books in time. A website is being constructed at [www.dangerousintellectuals.com](http://www.dangerousintellectuals.com), and the chapter is on Facebook under the not-surprising name "Dangerous Intellectuals." Other meeting topics included constitutions, support of literacy, and potentially hosting a convention. All in all, a terrific start for this new and energetic chapter!

**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:



**Friends of the Fifth Earl of Ickenham**  
(Buffalo, New York, and vicinity)  
Contact: Laura Loehr  
Phone:  
E-mail:



**The Mottled Oyster Club / Jellied Eels**  
(San Antonio and South Texas)  
Contact: Lynette Poss  
Phone:  
E-mail:



*Due entirely to an e-mail mix-up on the editor's end, the MOC/JE report was not included in the Spring Plum Lines. Therefore, these following paragraphs represent two issues' worth of those Mottled and Jellied.*

**W**E MOTTLED AND JELLIED aquatic types from here in South Texas have not been idle. The big news is that our confirmed and self-confessed Luddite (Jan Ford) sent out a link to a lovely slide show from the BBC at <http://tinyurl.com/289d8z6>.

If you knew our Jan you would certainly appreciate the miraculous progress that this act indicates. It is true that she and consort Randy keep a mouse or two in a cage as pets, but we have seldom known her to come nigh the technological version of this rodent, if she can help it.

Member Alan Ashworth sent out visual proof of his efforts to track down the abode of Bertie Wooster while sojourning in London recently (Alan, not Bertie). Alan is recovering nicely from an injury suffered during revelries of a year and a half ago, when surgery on a knee was required due to a cricket injury in that historic match-up of The Oyster vs. The Rangers. Actually he is quite proud of that badge of honor as the San Antonio gang certainly brought home the ashes in that event.

In the realm of near misses: I was hoping to report on a visit from a Fort Worth PGW aficionado, but her trip to San Antonio was postponed. We are nevertheless hopeful of a future possible breaking of bread (or throwing of rolls?) with Wynette Schwalm.

Toni Oliver, of the Drone Rangers, is another likely visitor in the not-too-distant future, so you can see what a rollicking time we might be having here ere long.

In the meantime, members Bryan and Janet Lilius, Liz Davenport, Alan Ashworth, Jan Ford, and this reporter ventured out on a stormy night in early January to discuss *Eggs, Beans and Crumpets* at Crumpets, the restaurant. Liz (the organized one of the group, whose head bulges suspiciously at the back and who is known to eat her share of fish) kept us on track by bringing her record of previous books discussed, as well as suggestions for future readings. As usual, a swell time was had by all.

**The New England Wodehouse Thingummy Society (NEWTS)**  
(Boston and New England)  
Contact: David Landman  
Phone:  
E-mail:



**T**HE VIBRANT FLOWERS both outside and within the attached hothouse were rivaled by the dancing colors of our hostess's lyrical and (to this writer) mystical paintings displayed on almost every wall. I speak of the home of artist and NEWT Ruth Lieberherr and her husband Kurt, hosts of our Spring nottle. The

newest of the efts, the anagrammatical "Stef" Adams, was accorded a hearty welcome. Stef brings a dash of youthful springtide to our chapter, and as a professional welder of titanium bicycles, she is especially welcome to the chapter's president, who by all indications will soon be in the market for a bespoked walker.

After a grand buffet, the group gave a dramatic reading of a Reggie Pepper story, "Concealed Art." Then the mood shifted to a sober discussion of the topic: "How can newts meet the global challenges of the 21st century?" The unanimous conclusion was that they cannot. Seeking consolation, the conferees turned to a sumptuous table of homemade desserts, and soon bonhomous give-and-take about Plum rang through the room. It was then that it was realized we had solved the problem and were at that very moment living it.

#### The Northwodes

(St. Paul, Minneapolis, and vicinity)

Contact: Kristine Fowler  
Phone:  
E-mail:



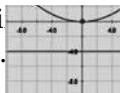
THE BIMONTHLY book discussions organized by Angie Meyer continue in full force. The second assignment was both parts of *Mike*.

*Right Ho, Jeeves* was up next, and listening to Jonathan Cecil's recording of the prize-giving speech almost brought the house down. We stayed long into the evening, noshing on delicacies provided by hostess Christina Heinrichs and assorted volunteers. The next book was our April discussion of *Love Among the Chickens*, at the University Club. Ukridge's theory for reducing the temperature of an incubator but running it longer was much admired. Following all this brain work, a purely frivolous meeting was held on (Kentucky) Derby Day. The Lexington in St. Paul is now used to serving us mint juleps and turning on the TV volume just in time for the race. As Super Saver beat the mud, Dave Fritz scooped in the pot, which was only fitting since it was his jaunty boater that had enabled drawing the horses. The summer agenda will include both book discussions (*Meet Mr. Mulliner* on June 22) and social gatherings.

#### The Pale Parabolites

(Toronto and vicinity)

Contact: Peter M.  
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:



IN MARCH, in addition to our regular meeting and lively discussion, representatives of our chapter determined that it would be appropriate to check out the horse racing at the Santa Anita racetrack, conveniently located near our regular meeting place in Pasadena. Like most Drones, we did not win, but we also did not bet our entire allowance for the month, so we won't be needing to touch any of you for a fiver.



*The PZMPCo Chapter in April*

The venue for the April meeting was changed to the corporate office of the Chapter's subsidiary in Santa Clarita, aka the Medulla-Oblongata-Glutz Motion Picture Company, aka Karen's house). The members enjoyed a festive tea and discussed *Spring Fever*. We also decided at this meeting to postpone the May meeting until May 23 (so as not to interfere with Mother's Day celebrations). Our discussion topic will be *Psmith in the City*. Our cricket outing to the Hollywood Cricket Club will also be postponed to July.

#### The Pickering Motor Company

(Detroit and vicinity)

Contact: Elliott Milstein  
Phone:  
E-mail:



**T**HE PICKERINGS have met twice since our last report, once in the home of Dicron and Sue Mahakian to discuss "The Clicking of Cuthbert" and once in the home of Michael and Sherry Smith to discuss *Jill the Reckless*. The meetings were pleasant, productive, and full of browsing and sluicing, but precious little discussion of books took place, as the Pickering Motor Company is now in full-court press as we plan the 2011 convention. At the last meeting many motions were made, seconded, and passed, most of them unanimously.

First, no more books are to be chosen for reading and discussion until after the convention. Any discussions will be confined to those books already read.

Second, committees were created, jobs determined, and responsibilities meted out for the various items and activities associated with the convention. Something was even found for David to do, although it was forgotten immediately by everyone, including David. Because she was absent, Claudia was given the most work to do. Larry was put in charge of organizing the loot bag for the convention and he promised to keep the cost under \$1,750 per bag.

Finally, LuAnn was confirmed President for Life once again, and the Board of Directors made a firm promise to Sherry that she would never hold any office, even if she were to retire from her regular job.

If you live in the Detroit area and have a love for Wodehouse and would enjoy working on the next TWS Convention, please join the Company now so we can take whatever responsibility was given to David and give it to you. Dicron's chocolate chip cookies will be served at every meeting from now until the convention. Let me tell ya—that's quite an inducement!

#### The Portland Greater Wodehouse Society (P. G. Ws) (Portland, Oregon and vicinity)

Contact: Carol James  
Phone:  
E-mail:



#### The Size 14 Hat Club (Halifax, Nova Scotia)

Contact: Jill Robinson  
E-mail:



**W**E HAD A BALL at the ceremony to celebrate the donation of Wodehouse books to the Halifax Public Library system. We also secured at least three new members. "Sonny Boy" was not performed during proceedings. Not even once. Perhaps this accounted for the fact that the event was such a whopping success! Professor Stephen Cloutier, preaching to the converted,

did his best to deliver unto us a responsible academic precis of a "comedy of manners." For a while Canadian politesse reigned supreme, but then Professor Cloutier began to read from the Master, and the audience, of course, coming to the event with every word long committed to memory, spoke along. There were great gusts of laughter as each anticipated the next line. It brought to mind the description of the costermonger roused from "Jeeves and the Song of Songs": ". . . it gave you some idea of what it must have been like during the French Revolution. From every corner of the hall there proceeded simultaneously the sort of noise which you hear, they tell me, at one of those East End boxing places . . ."

No one better understood the guerrilla power of a juvenile combatant than Wodehouse himself. So, he would have appreciated what followed. The good professor bravely announced that he would take questions and his chief interrogator was an astonishingly young new Wodehouse fan. Ninth-grader Mr. Zachary Mitchell revealed by the breadth and depth of his questions a true sophistication of knowledge and appreciation for P. G. Wodehouse and was immediately snapped up by the Size 14 Hat Club! Be aware, we give notice, we now have a formidable weapon at our disposal and are discussing plans to storm the Detroit Convention with our erudition and enthusiasm.

**The Soup & Fish Club**  
(Northern Virginia area)  
Contact: Deborah Dillard  
Phone:  
E-mail:



## The Llaboration of P. G. Wodehouse and F. Scott Fitzgerald BY DICK HEYMANN

*For his speech at the 2009 St. Paul convention, Mr. Heymann found little evidence of a connection between Wodehouse and Fitzgerald. So he opted to invent some correspondence between the two writers. Following you will find the fantastic fruits of his labors.*

**O**NE OF THE MANY nice things about the divine Divine Providence convention [in 2007] was Charles Gould's wonderful revelation of the influence that the great Russian novelists had on the works of P. G. Wodehouse—an influence of which I, for one,

was totally unaware. Possibly I was not the only one. Anyway, Charles's remarks were so delightful that when Kris Fowler broke the news that she and St. Paul were on the hook for 2009, it occurred to me that the influence of the prominent American writer and sluicer F. Scott Fitzgerald might be just as great as that of Tolstoy or Dostoyevsky, and might make for a nice talk at the convention.

Now the reason I mention Fitzgerald is that I knew that he was from St. Paul. I knew that because I lived here myself in 1971, clerking for the Minnesota Supreme Court. One of my duties as clerk for Mr. Justice Murphy was to drive him to and from the University Club, where he frequently lunched.

Since George Washington never slept there, the University Club in St. Paul, Minnesota, was content that perhaps F. Scott Fitzgerald drank there. That wouldn't be difficult to convince people to believe. Practically any licensed premises in Europe or America could get people to believe that Fitzgerald drank there. In 1971 the U Club menu featured a cocktail that bore his name, and the waiters—and, if you weren't quick on your feet, everyone else in the building—were happy to point out that Fitzgerald was a local product.

Naturally, when I suggested a talk on the Fitzgerald influence, I was assuming there wasn't one. Or, more precisely, that the Fitzgerald influence was comparable to the Russian influence. That would then give me a chance to knock the rust off a little poetic license and get creative. So, with every intention of shamelessly inventing the entire talk, I was rather looking forward to this afternoon's festivities.

You can well imagine my horror, therefore, when, not that long ago, Kris politely informed me that Plum and Fitzgerald actually knew each other. I felt as if I had just received one of those "Come at once!" telegrams. One day I was blithely contemplating that in the not-too-distant future I would take pen leisurely in hand and make up some amusing comparisons between Fitzgerald's output and Plum's. The next thing I know, someone has kidnapped my pig. Instead of looking forward to some innocent fun, I found myself looking askance at having to do some work. Or at least undertaking a little scholarship, which, now that I am guilty of impersonating an academician, I know to be less difficult than work but no less disagreeable.

Let me quickly add that—in case you were reminded of that one-liner of another famous Minnesota native, Bobby Zimmerman (aka Bob Dylan), "The crowd thinned out and I was about to do the same"—that I only teach at a law school. The lawyers among you can attest that at law school tradition is less fussy about

scholarship than, say, in a good English department, like Dan Garrison's at Northwestern. Indeed, it is probably fair to say that law school scholarship is to scholarship as *Milady's Boudoir* is to literature. Consequently, those of you who are still on this side of the exits needn't push to get out.

What follows will be, if nothing else, short, and it should be sufficient simply to follow the advice Bertie offered in connection with Gussie's prize-giving at the Market Snodsbury Grammar School—namely, that a suitable strategy on these occasions is merely to be as near the door as possible.

So, faced with the distressing news that Wodehouse and Fitzgerald might actually have been pals, I rolled up my sleeves and set out to discover how severely constrained my remarks would have to be. I perused McCrum. I searched Usborne. I read and reread Ring, Murphy, Donaldson, Jasen, and all the rest.

And I'll tell you what I found: Not much.

Wodehouse, as you know, wrote frequent and affectionate letters to his daughter Leonora. On November 14, 1923, while living in Great Neck on Long Island, he wrote to Leonora, then in France with Ethel, a rather long letter, the principal points of which were: (1) he was bored and had nothing of importance to say; (2) Jack, a Wodehouse cat, had recently bitten someone, which Plum found amusing (it sounds like one of those "you had to be there" stories, though—see point 1); (3) he was about 18,000 words into a new novel that he thought was "a corker" (it turned out to be *Bill the Conqueror*, which was panned by both the *New York Times* and the *Times Literary Supplement*—hardly "a corker," but then Plum was probably just lonesome and trying to keep his spirits up); (4) he wished that Leonora and Ethel would write more frequently; (5) since Leonora left for France, Plum had met "a lot of people you would like" including, quote, "the best candidate for your hand that we have dug up yet"; (6) Plum was curious if Ethel and Leonora thought the family should move to Paris, saying, "I have got very tired of living in America"; (7) he was playing more bridge and less golf (which probably explains why he was tired of living in America); and (8) Jerome Kern just spent \$10,000 on two original Joseph Conrad manuscripts.

Sandwiched between (6) and (7), Plum mentions, as an afterthought, that "I have also met Scott Fitzgerald."

This is the entirety of the published record of what P. G. Wodehouse had to say about F. Scott Fitzgerald:

"I believe those stories you hear about his drinking are exaggerated. (They weren't.) He seems quite normal, and is a very nice chap indeed. You would like him. The only thing is, he goes into New York with a scrubby

chin, looking perfectly foul. I suppose he gets a shave when he arrives there, but it doesn't show him at his best in Great Neck. I would like to see more of him."

That's it. Did he see more of him? Did he find Fitzgerald a local barber? Did he ask him to look after Jack when he was off playing bridge?

The true connection between P. G. Wodehouse and F. Scott Fitzgerald came as a great relief to me. It came as close as I had any reason to hope of vindicating my original plans. I was home free.

So, pursuing the strategy I had counted on in the first place, here is what I subsequently "found":

(1) Fitzgerald was proud of his St. Paul origins and inspired Wodehouse to include frequent references to St. Paul in his own writing.

(2) Wodehouse introduced Fitzgerald to one of his own favorite writers, and she and Fitzgerald came to share ideas and comments on one another's work.

(3) Wodehouse and Fitzgerald collaborated more than we ever knew. Indeed, their joint efforts are what prompted the initial title for this presentation, which was "The Collaboration of P. G. Wodehouse and F. Scott Fitzgerald." Given the evidence, though, I dropped the "co" in favor of the actual title.

Let's look closely at these three links.

Here is what I found:

(1) Wodehouse's works are replete with references to St. Paul. In both *The Inimitable Jeeves* and "Sir Roderick Comes to Lunch" he refers to Sir Roderick Glossop, the noted brain specialist, as having an enormous head "with no hair on it, which made it seem bigger and much more like the dome of St. Paul." Then, in "Bertie Wooster Sees It Through," Bertie describes Stilton Cheesewright's head as being "not like a pumpkin [but] a touch of the dome of St. Paul perhaps."

In "The White Feather," a story contained in *The Pothunters*, one of Wrykyn's boxers faces a tough opponent in a boy from the St. Paul School. Robert McCrum reports that in Plum's last ever visit to Dulwich, he filed a report on a cricket match against St. Paul. A coincidence? I think not. And in a story entitled "An International Affair," Wodehouse writes of an up-and-coming enterprise whose headquarters are on Broadway, but who also has an office in . . . St. Paul!

Finally (and this is actually true), two biographical websites state that Plum went to boarding school at the famous St. Paul School in Concord, New Hampshire. Which, of course, he didn't.

(2) My "original" research has also uncovered a fascinating exchange of correspondence, the seed for which appears to have been planted by Plum. First, we have a letter to Fitzgerald that can only have been

written by Rosie M. Banks. I say "that can only have been written by Rosie M. Banks" partly because it purports to be from her, it is on her letterhead, and it bears her signature. But in addition, the style is pure Banks: gushing, flamboyant, emotional, pretentious—just like her novels.

Next, we have Fitzgerald's reply. It reflects more of the Hemingway influence than that of Mrs. Little—i.e., it's short. In it we see what appears to be the genesis of one of Fitzgerald's most characteristic qualities—the ability to write basically the same story over and over again. It worked for Banks. It worked for Plum. Fitzgerald figured it would work for him, too.

Lastly, we have a letter from Fitzgerald to Wodehouse. As possibly the only amusing thing Fitzgerald ever wrote, it is of great scholarly importance.

Interestingly, there really are some similarities between Wodehouse's work and Fitzgerald's. Here are four quick examples:

(1) They were both fascinated by the Jazz Age. Plum gave us the Mottled Oyster, for example, and Fitzgerald essentially married the Jazz Age when he married Zelda.

(2) They were both shaped by their boarding school experience. Plum gave us his school stories, Wrykyn, and more. Fitzgerald wrote of boarding school life in *This Side of Paradise* and his creepy "The Diamond as Big as the Ritz."

(3) Both had seen the very wealthy up close. Plum gave us all the Threepwoods and countless dukes and earls and their offspring. Fitzgerald gave us the Divers, the Buchanans, and about a hundred characters somebody once knew vaguely at Yale.

(4) They both wrote about Hollywood. Plum gave us, among others, Corky Pirbright (Catsmeat's actress sister), Corky's dog-of-mixed-parentage Sam Goldwyn, and lots of movie producers. Fitzgerald's output included Rosemary Hoyt in *Tender Is the Night* and his unfinished novel *The Last Tycoon*.

Fundamentally, however, Wodehouse and Fitzgerald were as different as Dahlia and Agatha. Indeed, Fitzgerald might be the perfect straight man to set up that famous gag of Plum's:

I believe there are two ways of writing novels. One is mine, making a sort of musical comedy without music and ignoring real life altogether; the other is going right deep down into life and not caring a damn.

Fitzgerald opted for the latter and drank himself to death at the age of 44. Wodehouse opted for the former and lived to be 93.

*Rosie M. Banks's letter to F. Scott Fitzgerald, which she wrote upon being prodded by Plum:*

Dear Scott,

Our dearest of friends, dear, dear Plummie, suggested when last we met that I might take pen in hand and share with you a soupçon of the literary joie de vivre that God has seen fit to bestow upon me over the course of my career as a Novelist of the Heart.

He (Plum, not God) tells me that you have pledged your soul to sharing the many and mysterious vicissitudes of life that we successful novelists can offer our fellow man, and that you have made a promising start. Courage, young Fitzgerald!

Plum encouraged me to read *This Side of Paradise*, which I have done. And I tell you with the utmost sincerity that I found it deeply moving. The passionate confusion of your hero—wherever did you come up with him?! He's so sensitive, so languid, so full of himself. One cannot help but feel the emotional uncertainty of one so young making his way from placid provincial privation to the glitter and danger of setting off to live among the paragons of power and privilege in a—dare I say “the”—new world!

But thrilling and sensitive as the story may be, it lacks the credibility of one who has actually been there. One of my great strengths has always been my honest dedication to writing what I know—what I feel. I don't know whether any other great writers have ever viewed their craft this way, but I have come to think that a writer should write about what she knows about. I urge you to consider infusing your own experience into your characters and your stories. Open your heart to the thrill of unbridled emotion! Tremble with the passion of honest toil! Be true to your heart, young Fitzgerald!

And lastly, perhaps if you are having trouble getting started you should consider putting a little gin in your orange juice. Rosie M. Banks often thinks that a little gin can do wonders when it comes to freeing oneself from the emotional constraints of one's past. That must be especially true if one's past is rooted in this St. Paul place you come from, poor fish.

Best of luck,  
Rosie M. Banks

*F. Scott Fitzgerald's reply to Rosie:*

Dear Rosie,

Thank you for your thoughtful letter. I am intrigued by your advice to develop plot and character based on personal experience. On the one hand, there is always the risk that one's work will all sound more or less alike. Rather like P. G. W.'s. On the other hand, our cook is a great fan of your stuff and tells me that *Only a Factory Girl*, her favorite, is more or less like *All for Love*, *A Red, Red Summer Rose*, and all the rest, none of which, I confess, have I read myself. And their similarity (or should I say “consistency,” which sounds better) seems to have done no harm to your sales, so maybe you're on to something. As for *This Side of Paradise*, it sold 40,000 copies. Maybe if I had stuck with *The Romantic Egotist* (the original title) it would have done better.

Your advice respecting the gin, too, sounds promising. I'll have to give it a try.

Very truly yours,  
F. Scott Fitzgerald

*And Scott's puzzled query to Plum about the nature of this Rosie bird:*

Dear Plum,

Who the hell is Rosie M. Banks? Is this because I happened to sneeze during your backswing on fourteen last autumn? I must say, it's never difficult to distinguish between a golfer with a grievance and a ray of sunshine. You may quote me on that.

Yours,  
Scott

\*\*\*\*\*

“One of those ghastly literary lunches. . . . This one was to honour Emma Lucille Agee, who wrote that dirty novel that's been selling in millions in America. . . . About fifteen of the dullest speeches I ever heard. The Agee woman told us for three quarters of an hour how she came to write her beastly book, when a simple apology was all that was required.”

*The Girl in Blue* (1970)

# Detroit (+ Dearborn) 2011 Convention Update!

BY ELLIOTT MILSTEIN

THOSE MEMBERS who were at the 2009 convention in St. Paul were treated to a presentation from the Pickering Motor Company on the site and plans for the next TWS convention, to be held in Detroit on October 13–16, 2011. In that presentation, many promises were made, and members were excited to a fever pitch over the coming festivities.

It now must be revealed that, while nearly all of the plans presented will continue, one aspect of the convention must change, viz., the host hotel. Members were shown pictures of the newly refurbished Book Cadillac Hotel in downtown Detroit and were visibly moved by its grandeur. Unfortunately, for reasons which we cannot go into at this time (fear of legal action, during which we would no doubt be represented by Jerry Shoesmith, and then where would we be?) the Book is no longer a viable option.

But fear not! The Pickerings, ever resourceful, have secured a location even more gorgeous and appropriate for such an important occasion: the beautiful and historic Dearborn Inn.

Some time in 1930, as the story goes, Henry Ford was watching travelers arrive at the Ford Airport just outside Ford headquarters in Dearborn. He realized that there was nowhere for his guests to sleep without having to go into Detroit. So he commissioned world-famous architect Albert Kahn to design and build the world's first airport hotel. Kahn, in consultation with Ford, designed a Georgian-style inn right across the street from the airport. Ford himself took an active part in the designing and building and personally oversaw many of the special features himself, such as the lovely Alexandria Ballroom, which is similar to a room he admired in Alexandria, Virginia.

The Dearborn Inn opened in July 1931, and, even though the airport closed two years later, established a nationwide reputation for quality lodging and dining so firmly that it became a "destination resort" of sorts.

Over the years it has had many famous guests, such as Orville Wright, Eleanor Roosevelt, Bette Davis, Norman Rockwell, and Walt Disney.

There have been a number of expansions and improvements. In 1983 it was designated an official National Historic Site. It was purchased by the Marriott Corporation and underwent a \$24 million renovation in 1989. It is, in fact, undergoing another renovation right now which will be completed long before October 2011. This one includes updating all the guest rooms, which, though they will all have flat-panel TVs and computer workstations, will nonetheless be kept in the traditional Georgian style.



*The historic Dearborn Inn,  
to be the site of the 2011 TWS convention*

The Dearborn Inn is situated on a beautiful 23-acre site right across the street from the Henry Ford Museum complex, which includes the incredible Greenfield Village (you can find out more about the amazing complex at [www.thehenryford.org](http://www.thehenryford.org)). If we are lucky enough to enjoy the color change (it does happen in mid-October sometimes), the grounds will be lovely beyond belief.

You may be concerned that such an exclusive hotel would command high prices, but the Pickerings have negotiated an extraordinary deal for standard rooms, which will make this convention not only one of the most exciting and original but also one of the most affordable. For those oofy members who like luxury as well as comfort, five replica homes were constructed in 1937, creating a small colonial village. Guests today can enjoy a stay in the reproduction homes of famous Americans: Edgar Allan Poe, Walt Whitman, Barbara Fritchie, Oliver Wolcott, and Patrick Henry.

For those who were looking forward to exploring downtown Detroit, do not despair. Transportation to the casinos, museums, and restaurants will be provided throughout the weekend, free of charge, courtesy of the Convention Reserve Fund. You can even visit the Book Cadillac Hotel, if you like!

# Wodehouse and Hippos and Newts, Oh, My!

BY HERB MOSKOVITZ

If you visit the newt exhibit at the Philadelphia Zoo, you will see a sign indicating that Chapter One is the sponsor of the exhibit. In the tank you will see a brightly



Gussie the newt puts on weight?

colored Mandarin Newt. Every year we take up a collection to feed our newt Gussie. The zoo thanks us with a certificate and a photo of our newt.

You can tell from the photo that Gussie has grown considerably since the last time we saw him. While proud that Gussie now weighed over 500 pounds, we realized that there'd been some kind of mix-up. And would it even be appropriate for us to care for a hippo? Had Wodehouse ever written about a hippopotamus?

Bertie Wooster says to Roderick Spode in *The Code of the Woosters*, "Have you forgotten already what I told you about checking this disposition of yours to run amok like a raging hippopotamus?" And there are other examples in "The Episode of the Financial Napoleon" ("... it's more like a bite from a hippopotamus"), *The Girl in the Boat*, *Uncle Fred in the Springtime*, and *Spring Fever*. And some of Wodehouse's books were published by Hippo Books!

This is all very interesting, but nowhere could I find a hippopotamus as a character. On the other hand, Gussie Fink-Nottle's newts were all over the place. No. We could not possibly be responsible for a hippo.

Something had to be done. I called the zoo, and their first response was that (and I am not making this up), if we were willing, "They could arrange an exchange. The hippo and our newt could each start at opposite ends of the bridge and walk toward each other as they crossed the bridge, just like in all the spy movies." Or, they went on to say, they could simply apologize for their mistake and reissue the proper certificates to us and the hippo's zoo parents. The next day the proper certificate, information sheet and two proper photos of our newt Gussie arrived in the mail, and order was restored.

## Treasurer's Report for 2009 BY KRIS FOWLER

Balance as of December 31, 2008 \$24,238.64

### Income:

Membership dues	\$10,524.23
2009 Convention income <sup>1</sup>	\$32,179.87
Drones Club ties	\$570.00
<i>Plum Lines</i> back issues, index	\$0.00
Interest, misc. <sup>2</sup>	<u>\$1,283.76</u>
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$44,557.86</b>

### Expenses:

<i>Plum Lines</i> production and mailing <sup>3</sup>	\$8,038.98
2009 convention general expenses	\$34,532.28
Canadian initiative <sup>4</sup>	\$1,068.63
Correspondence, supplies, other <sup>5</sup>	\$503.90
Drones Club ties (new inventory)	<u>\$1,391.09</u>
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$45,534.88</b>

### TWS Convention Reserve Fund:

Balance as of December 31, 2008	\$9,434.11
Pre-approved grant to 2009 Convention	<u>\$239.31</u>
Balance as of December 31, 2009	\$9,194.80

**Total Balance as of December 31, 2009**

**\$23,022.31**

<sup>1</sup>Including income/expenses reported in 2008, the 2009 convention very nearly broke even and thus used very little of the preapproved grant from the Convention Reserve Fund.

<sup>2</sup>Major items were the bequest for Canadian initiatives and a donation in memory of Ray Steen.

<sup>3</sup>Some 2009 mailing expenses are still outstanding.

<sup>4</sup>As reported in *Plum Lines* Summer 2009 issue.

<sup>5</sup>Main purchase was new software for the *Plum Lines* editor.



After the harrowing hippo/newt confusion, Gussie relaxes in his Chapter One-sponsored luxury.

# Mikes and More Mikes

**T**ony Ring sent this along, thinking *PL* readers might like a little background about a modern “Mike”:

“John Graham’s article (*Plum Lines*, Winter 2009) about Wodehouse’s story *Mike* can be brought up to date through a connection with a UK Society member. Wodehouse kept in touch with sport at Dulwich College and watched their cricket and rugby matches whenever he could. One of the younger stars he got to know this way was S. C. ‘Billy’ Griffith, who played for the college in the 1930s, and later England, and with whom Wodehouse corresponded extensively. Wodehouse became godfather to his son, christened ‘Mike’ (not Michael) in honor of Wodehouse’s character.

“Mike Griffith, who himself became a first-class cricketer, is a member of The P G Wodehouse Society (UK), and extracts from correspondence between his father and Wodehouse were published in *Wooster Sauce* in 2006. Mike has since captained the Society’s cricket team, The Gold Bats, in a match against a team from Hollywood. He has mentioned to us that he is very proud of the background to his Christian name, but that it caused considerable problems in his business life, as he was a director of a large insurance company, and was forever being asked to sign documents prepared in the name ‘Michael Griffith.’ Of course, they all had to be returned for correction. Mike now holds the influential position as Chairman of the Cricket Committee of the Marylebone Cricket Club, the most famous cricket club in the world.”

## Volunteer Officers

President of The Wodehouse Society:  
Gary Hall

Editor in Chief (AOM: Apprentice Oldest Member):  
Gary Hall

Treasurer (dues payments):  
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Website Development & Hosting:  
Shamim Mohamed, aka Pongo

*We appreciate your articles, research, Quick Ones, My First Time tales, and other observations. Send them to Gary Hall via email or snail mail at the addresses above!*

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