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Comedy Among the Modernists: P. G. Wodehouse and the Anachronism of Comic Form (*Part One*)

BY LAURA MOONEYHAM

This article was originally published in 1994 in the academic journal Twentieth Century Literature, and was found in the online database JSTOR by Neil Midkiff. Professor Mooneyham White is now at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, and has graciously granted permission to reprint. Professor White has a terrific rapport with her students at UNL. We think those who take her classes are in excellent hands, given her deep and broad interest in and understanding of Wodehouse.

The roof of the Sheridan Apartment House, near Washington Square, New York. Let us examine it. There will be stirring happenings on this roof in due season, and it is as well to know the ground. The Sheridan stands in the heart of New York's Bohemian and artist quarter. If you threw a brick from any of its windows, you would be certain to brain some rising young . . . Vorticist sculptor or a writer of revolutionary *vers libre*. And a very good thing too.

THUS BEGINS P. G. Wodehouse's 1927 novel, *The Small Bachelor*. "It is as well to know the ground," indeed, because this particular roof will provide a stage for innumerable farcical events as the plot of the novel unfolds: impostures, concealments behind water towers, hasty retreats down fire escapes, the throwing of pepper into the face of an officious policeman, and more. Such farce, however, requires more than these comic free-for-alls; farce also requires comic belief. Readers must allow Wodehouse's characters to cavort as they do, and it is not accidental that Wodehouse prepares for this by heaving a hypothetical brick at those figures who represent an incapacity to believe in comic narratives: modernists. We are told by the comic spirit as it is embodied by the narrator that Vorticist sculptors and

Convention 2017 Still Up for Grabs!

EVEN AS WE prepare for another humdinger of a convention in Pseattle, hosted by the Anglers' Rest, some Plummies are already looking ahead to 2017. Who will our hosts be then? What city will be shaken to its core by a large gaggle of merry Wodehouseans uniting in laughter? The mind boggles.

But let us not boggle. Let us, instead, have a flurry of hands raised from chapters keen to host our 19th International Convention. **The deadline for bids has been extended to July 15.**

If no chapter has expressed interest in hosting by that date, then the Convention Steering Committee will assume responsibility for the convention—though we may come knocking on your door if your chapter is in the chosen city.

writers of revolutionary free verse should be beamed by bricks early and often. For Wodehouse knows that no force poses a greater threat to a welcoming reception of his comedies than the modernist sensibility of the twentieth century.

Can anything be more anomalous than the position of Wodehouse in twentieth-century fiction? What beyond quirkiness, after all, can explain Alexander Cockburn's claim that Wodehouse's Bertie and Jeeves saga stands as the "central achievement in the twentieth century" (p. xii)? Equally extreme praise has come from Hilaire Belloc, George Orwell, Evelyn Waugh, and W. H. Auden, among others.¹ Hugh Kenner, lamenting the betrayal of high modernism by the dons of Oxford (no don, it seems, would *really* read Joyce, Lawrence, or Pound on his own time), finds particularly galling the fact that "in 1939 Oxford conferred on Psmith's creator the honorary doctorate it'd not dream of offering Leopold Bloom's" (p. 34). Donnish enthusiasm in the long run has meant little, however, for the formation of the canon in twentieth-century literature excluded and continues to exclude Wodehouse.² Even one of the most perceptive of Wodehouse's critics, Stephen Medcalf, has held that Wodehouse seems to possess "neither the conscious irony nor the undercurrent of *Angst* which make [sic] Evelyn Waugh a candidate for high seriousness" (p. 190). Under such circumstances there is occasion to ponder why the brilliant comic plots that garnered the support of Waugh, Orwell, and Auden should fail to be considered worthy of serious scholarly interest.

Wodehouse's exclusion is curious given the ancient lineage of comedy. Comic structures—which characteristically include happy endings and a newly remade society marked by a sense of tolerance and accommodation—have been a central mode of the Western imaginative experience since the classical Greek theater. As Northrop Frye defines them, comedies embody a basic structural pattern which moves from unhappiness to happiness, through the eventual removal of obstacles erected by an intolerant and unjust society. The restrictions to be overcome may take the shape of overbearing parental figures, oppressive social institutions or, in more serious comedies, flaws and self-imposed bondages within the protagonist's own character. But eventually in a comedy all such bonds are cut, and a liberating and festive resolution follows, often signaled by the erotic consummation of a wedding or the social consummation of a feast, or both (pp. Frye 163–86).

It must be conceded that these sorts of traditional comic plots, which Wodehouse unrepentantly

fashioned, have become unfashionable in the twentieth century. Comic narratives, unfortunately, rarely find acceptance with modern audiences except when they occur in popular culture (the Hollywood film, the sitcom, the drugstore bodice-ripper, the mystery or detective novel). These genres of popular culture are immune to the requirements of literary modernism and postmodernism, requirements which insist that in serious literature human existence must be presented as alienated, fragmented, powerless, and absurd. In comedy, crisis—Tom Jones on the scaffold, Shylock's bared blade in the courtroom—must be temporary and illusory; moments later, Tom will be reprieved and Shylock's blade sheathed. Such a moment Northrop Frye describes as a waking from nightmare (p. 179). This pattern of peril and release—what we might term a structure of reprieve—commonly relies on our sense that the apparent bondage or crisis has been entirely illusory all along (see Kaul pp. 33–35). By the account of literary modernism, however, such crises are real rather than illusory. Ours is a culture which has, in Johan Huizinga's phrase, completed "a fatal shift towards over-seriousness" (p. 198, qtd. in Herbert p. 402). Over-seriousness incapacitates us from viewing comic endings as even remotely mimetic of experience. "To stress . . . the artificial, anti-realist factor in comedy," Christopher Herbert argues, "is to draw attention precisely to those elements that have tended to alienate modern sensibilities from traditional comic literature":

For a culture impregnated with the tragic sense of life, in which as Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg say, "tragic" and "realistic" are normally applied as . . . praise (p. 8), comedy seems bound to be mistaken for a vehicle for naive optimism and for facile evasion of real experience. (p. 408)

What, then, are the consequences of this bias in our day of ironic or tragic realism in terms of our construction of what constitutes true "literature"? What in particular are the consequences for the reception of comedies like Wodehouse's? Wodehouse's literary achievement has to be understood in terms of its place in literary history, particularly by its relationship to literary modernism, the dominant ideology of the period in which Wodehouse worked out his idiosyncratic practice of comedy. By the twenties, as modernism became the dominant mode of serious literary expression, Wodehouse had completed the refinement of this comic art, expunging from it the elements of sentiment, those manly schoolboy prefects or brave and chipper ingénues of his earliest fiction whose adventures were



Professor Laura Mooneyham White helps the students at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln “plum” the depths of great literature.

almost as melodramatic as they were comic (Quinton p. 84). Even as Wodehouse's novels were selling briskly in both England and America, the publishing houses began to be influenced by modernism's control of literary practice. As Norman Cantor explains: “There was a market for this kind of difficult and provocative literature, and the more established publishing houses began to show themselves receptive to it” (p. 45). Wodehouse's awareness of such market requirements surfaces frequently, as in this passage from chapter 10 of *The Return of Jeeves*, in which a former poet muses on the publishing biases of high modernism:

Although in her *vers libre* days in Greenwich Village she had gone in almost exclusively for starkness and squalor, even then she had been at heart a sentimentalist. Left to herself, she would have turned out stuff full of moons, Junes, loves, doves, blisses, and kisses. It was simply that the editors of the poetry magazines seemed to prefer rat-ridden tenements, the smell of cooking cabbages, and despair, and a girl had to eat.

Despite the requirements of poetry magazines, however, modernism's ascendancy was not complete until the study of modernism became institutionalized in the universities in the 1940s, when, as Gerald Graff has noted, “New Critical” practice achieved its dominance (pp. 146ff.). In the earlier period of roughly 1910–1930, when Wodehouse was honing his art into the purest of comic practice, universities were resisting the incursion of contemporary literature and modernist poetics. We will see that the grounds of Wodehouse's suspicion of modernism parallel to some degree those of the academic old guard of this time. Graff speaks of

the hostility to contemporary literature in this period as issuing from two concerns: the fear that much of contemporary literature was lowbrow, “journeyman literature,” and the belief that contemporary literature was injurious to the moral fiber: “Though ‘contemporary literature’ was coming to mean two different kinds of things depending on whether ‘highbrow’ or ‘lowbrow’ taste was at issue, most professors distrusted both kinds—popular . . . literature for its superficiality, the most serious literature for its immorality, materialism, and pessimism” (p. 125). Only later did English departments embrace modernism and its literature; after 1940, as Cantor comments, “The modern novel and poetry became the particular province or subject in whose interpretation English departments specialized. [Modernist literature] found [its] authentication in these institutions' work, and acquired a legitimacy which would otherwise have been difficult to obtain” (p. 49). This institutionalization of modernism in English and American universities meant that to be an educated person was to be conversant with the novels of Proust, Woolf, and Joyce, not (need it even be said?) Wodehouse.

Wodehouse remained beyond the pale because he practiced a discredited genre, and because he wrote to be popular. Modernism's bias against mass culture is entrenched and characteristic, as Andreas Huyssen points out: “Only by fortifying its boundaries . . . and by avoiding any contamination with mass culture . . . can the [modernist] art work maintain its adversary stance: adversary to the bourgeois culture of everyday life as well as adversary to mass culture and entertainment which are seen as the primary forms of bourgeois cultural articulation” (p. 197). “Bourgeois cultural articulation,” of course, can fight back, as Wodehouse did. Wodehouse would at least have been consoled by the reflection that modernism has never been the only game in town; his work has always sold better than Faulkner's or Joyce's, if we exclude those sales to undergraduates who buy to fulfill the requirements of syllabi.

The ascendancy of modernism hampered both the production of comedies and scholarly interest in comic theory. Modernism's hostility to comic structure flows in part from modernism's essential questioning of genre in general, but also from a philosophical aversion to the culminating happiness and formal closure that comedies promise. Serious literature since the turn of the century has barred comedy as a workable genre. The twentieth century was governed more and more by the ironic and/or tragic modes which question or deny to plots the possibility of stable, desirable ends. To close a narrative unironically with a marriage or a feast is to participate in anachronism. Comedy has become

tolerable only in the hybrid modes of absurdist or black comedy, tragicomedy, and the like. In the drama, comedy has moved from the humanitarian ethos of wit last represented by George Bernard Shaw to the alienations and grotesqueries of Brecht, Beckett, Ionesco, and Pinter. As Harry Levin comments, “absurdity is treated seriously, as indeed it must be when it breaks in on us from all directions and unsettles the presuppositions of daily living” (p. 191).

In the novel, when high modernists such as Joyce and Faulkner employ comic structure, they do so ironically, as a way to call attention to the fatigued and delegitimized status of comedy itself. The vestigial force of comedy runs through such works as *Ulysses* and *As I Lay Dying*, but the pure strain of comedy cannot be found among the works of high modernism. Near the end of Ford’s *The Good Soldier*, for instance, the impossibly short-sighted boor of a narrator reflects on the conventional quality of the story he has told:

Well, that is the end of the story. And, when I come to look at it, I see that it is a happy ending with wedding bells and all. The villains—for obviously Edward and the girl were villains—have been punished by suicide and madness. The heroine—the perfectly normal, virtuous, and slightly deceitful heroine—has become the happy wife of a perfectly normal, virtuous, and slightly deceitful husband. . . . A happy ending, that is what it works out at. . . . In order to set [this heroine] up in a modern mansion, replete with every convenience and dominated by a quite respectable and eminently economical master of the house, it was necessary that Edward and Nancy Rufford should become, for me at least, no more than tragic shades. I seem to see poor Edward, naked and reclining amidst darkness, upon cold rocks, like one of the ancient Greek damned, in Tartarus or wherever it was. (p. 252)

Our narrator’s uneasy use of erudition—“in Tartarus or wherever it was”—may recall some of the laughable illiteracies of Bertie Wooster, but Ford’s intention is not simply a comic one. Rather, Ford underscores the impossibility of feeling secure generically about the narrative end; both tragic and comic ends are invoked but we as readers can feel convinced by neither. Such pervasive irony even in the seeming endorsement of comic structures undermines the very idea of comedy.

Wodehouse’s literary achievement runs exactly counter to this prevailing fashion of generic questioning. Of his work he once wrote, “I believe there are two ways

of writing novels. One is mine, making a sort of musical comedy without music; the other is going right deep down into life and not caring a damn.” Wodehouse’s peculiar linking of pessimistic realistic fiction with apathy—“not caring a damn”—displays an antagonism to the modern literary achievement. Wodehouse seems even to defy modernism, especially in his implied claim that a truer depth of feeling wells up in the artifice of comedies than in the open and ironic forms the novel has employed since the turn of the century. It will be granted that modernist literature encompasses many different sorts of narrative practice, and any given modernist work must be read in the light of the particular contextual requirements of the author’s history and culture and of the work’s production. Nonetheless, one may still identify certain broadly shared characteristics of modernism against which Wodehouse sets himself firmly at odds.

First, Wodehouse places little value on the modernist dictum articulated by Ezra Pound: “Make it new.” Wodehouse was in fact so little troubled by the problem of originality that he felt only mildly disturbed to learn that *Summer Lightning* had already been used as a title by no less than five other authors; in the book’s preface he writes: “I can only express the modest hope that this story will be considered worthy of inclusion in the list of the Hundred Best Books Called *Summer Lightning*.” The same characters reappear in story after story; there are no fewer than forty-two stories or novels which feature either Bertie or Jeeves and some sixteen fictions about that pig idyll, Blandings Castle. Nor was Wodehouse discomfited by the charge that his characters resurfaced virtually unaltered from story to story. Again, from the preface to *Summer Lightning*:

A certain critic . . . made the nasty remark about my last novel that it contained ‘all the old Wodehouse characters under different names.’ He has probably by now been eaten by bears, like the children who made mock of the prophet Elisha: but if he still survives he will not be able to make a similar charge against *Summer Lightning*. With my superior intelligence, I have outgeneralled the man this time by putting in all the old Wodehouse characters under the same names. Pretty silly it will make him feel, I rather fancy.

More important than this casual dismissal of originality as presiding aesthetic value is his rejection of the modernist retreat from plot, the emphasis on the disorganized, particular, and fragmented flow of

experience. Where a modernist expects to discompose and baffle the realist expectations of his readers,³ Wodehouse always apologizes with a courtly spirit if the demands of exposition have left a given part of the narration unattended to; he evidently prefers that the paying customer never be confused or forestalled from learning something of interest. Changes of scene are commonly accompanied by explicit statements of narrative control such as the following from *Summer Lightning* (ch. 15):

It is a defect unfortunately inseparable from any such document as this faithful record of events . . . that the chronicler, in order to give a square deal to each of the individuals whose fortunes he has chosen to narrate, is compelled to flit abruptly from one to the other in the manner popularized by the chamois of the Alps leaping from crag to crag. The activities of the Efficient Baxter seeming to him to demand immediate attention, he was reluctantly compelled some little while back to leave Hugo in the very act of reeling beneath a crushing blow. The moment has now come to return to him.

Wodehouse's attention to the reader's need for intelligibility extends to a dismissal of modernism's proclivity for doing without the rigors of causal consequence (e.g., Alain Robbe-Grillet's willingness to have a given character murdered in one chapter and alive in the next). Wodehouse expected each of his narrative structures to be a unity, a seamless artifact of cause and effect. He was maniacal about plot, often writing preliminary synopses for his novels that ran over sixty thousand words to guarantee clockwork plot maneuvers. Accordingly, he seemed to believe that the highest aesthetic criterion would judge whether the arrow of action in a narrative flew true (see Galligan pp. 612–14). A common theme in his letters is his amazement that other writers can make do with less planning or plot development. After reading Trollope's *Autobiography* he muses in *Yours, Plum: The Letters of P. G. Wodehouse*: "I still don't understand his methods of work. Did he sit down each morning and write exactly fifteen hundred words without knowing . . . how the story was going to develop? I can't believe that an intricate story like *Popenjoy* could have been written without very minute planning" (*Yours*, p. 189). Even more disturbing to Wodehouse was the work of John O'Hara: "What curious stuff the modern American short story is. The reader has to do all the work. The writer just shoves down something that seems to have

no meaning whatever, and it is up to you to puzzle out what is between the lines" (*Yours*, p. 193). Wodehouse's obsessive interest in reader-friendly plot, as it were, connotes his deeper need to create an intelligible and orderly fictional world, a world in which the modernists' favorite game, the play of indeterminacy, is ruled out of court.

Intelligibility and orderliness make for conventionality of plot; action in Wodehouse runs by plot devices that Menander, Plautus, and Shakespeare would recall with fondness. Traditional elements such as feasting predominate, to the extent that many a plot revolves around determining who will be the employer of Anatole the master chef.⁴ The comic convention of the world turned upside-down is a Wodehousian staple, a world peopled by lords in stocks (or locked garages) and beggars on horseback (or private investigators drinking the best port). The traditional nature of Wodehouse's comedies is confirmed by his use of the *topos* of the green world, that realm for the central lunatic activity of comic plots identified by C. L. Barber. The green world in Shakespeare lies in the wild, away from the pressure of authority and law, like the Forest of Arden in *As You Like It* or Titania's moonlit wood in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Wodehouse's green world is drawn largely from Shakespeare's (he read Shakespeare every day of his adult life), but in Wodehouse the green world is usually the country estate, complete with bijou residences for pigs, gamekeeper's cottages, swan-infested lakes, and gardens in which to conspire, woo, and bung into hoes and ladders. Such green-world excesses can be found in *Something Fresh* (ch. 6) when the hero muses on the dreamlike quality of the revels:

His life had changed from an orderly succession of days to a strange carnival of the unexpected. . . . Life had taken on the quality of a dream in which anything might happen. . . . It was strange that [Joan] should be here in the pitch-dark Hall in the middle of the night, but—after all—no stranger than that he should be. In this dream-world . . . it had to be taken for granted.

This reliance on the Shakespearian model underscores the completeness with which Wodehouse accepts his chosen conventionality. We do not read Wodehouse to find innovations about how to close a narrative; rather, as Robert Hall points out, in reading Wodehouse, "the pleasure lies in admiring the ingenuity and verbal pyrotechnics by which the plots reach their predetermined ends" (p. 47). Those predetermined ends will always include reunited couples; typical is

the end of *Uncle Dynamite*, where Uncle Fred surveys the four pairs of happy lovers and comments that “it reminds one of the final spasm of a musical comedy.” The comic close also requires a general amnesty for those characters who have blocked young happiness. At the end of *The Code of the Woosters*, Bertie is in a position to dictate terms to the heavy of the piece, Sir Watkyn, but after the older gentleman has indicated his willingness to let the happy ending roll into place, Bertie is all magnanimity: “Jeeves, a snootful for Sir Watkyn,” he bids, and then, to the reader, “Probably quite a nice chap if you knew him.” Anthony Quinton sums up the conventional quality of Wodehouse’s plots:

In all the stories about young men . . . the ancient struggle of the young against the old . . . constitutes the main structure of the action. Impersonation and concealed identities, chases, aberrant behavior brought on by drink or falling objects, elaborate conspiracies fill the spaces between the chief structural members. Everything formal in Wodehouse’s work is traditional. (p. 83)

In Wodehouse’s work we always know where we are in terms of the plot; his characters are firmly placed along the axes of time and space. Wodehouse’s plots are in this sense historicist; that is, they assume the steady pace of time and the accrual of event moving forward to a presumed most-recent past. Time is never disjointed in Wodehousian narrative, the ordinary span of action being three or four days of frenzied comic doings. Wodehouse’s respect for the Aristotelian unities also means that we are always firmly set in the landscape. A typical setting of scene moves from panorama to a focused perspective (from, say, the bird’s-eye view of Blandings grounds to the focus on Beach in his butler’s pantry); the social whole is invoked to insure our surefootedness in the coming comic *melée*. Even the most minor of scenarios is set with a comically ruthless attention to spatial relationships. One chap can’t meet another chap without the imposition of navigational details: “We came together, he approaching from the nor’-nor’-east and self approaching from the sou’-sou’-west” (*The Mating Season*, ch. 19). Consider also the racecourse-like announcement of dog chases cat from chapter 15 of the same novel:

The pursuit rolled away over brake and over thorn, with Madeline Bassett’s school friend bringing up the rear.

Position at the turn:

1. Cat.
2. Dog.
3. Madeline Bassett’s school friend.

The leaders were well up in a bunch. Several lengths separated 2 and 3.

In Wodehouse we know where and when we are, even in the homeliest of details. Such strategies are both comic and relentlessly realist, because the humor lies partly in our knowing more than we need to know about our placement in space and time, an ethos directly opposed to the relativistic uncertainties about space and time spawned by Einstein and relished by literary modernists.

Plot’s tyranny in Wodehouse means the complete absence in his works of that subordination of plot to subjective experience which is a keynote of the modernist novel. Point of view is stable; we are not in the semi-transparent envelope of subjectivity championed by Virginia Woolf. If we move from one character’s mind to another’s in Wodehouse, we do so under the explicit guidance of the narrator; and the most common presentation of such inner views involves *erlebte Rede*, a mode of point of view which allows the individual’s consciousness to be represented but which also allows the narrator firm control over how, when, and what of that character’s mental workings will be read. For instance, in *Heavy Weather* Monty Bodkin must explain away a tattoo which bears the name of his friend’s fiancée: “He was blaming himself. Rummy, he reflected ruefully, how when you saw a thing day by day for a couple of years it ceased to make an impression on what he rather fancied was called the retina.” This is the language of inner view—“Rummy . . . how when you saw a thing”—shaped by the narrator’s superior perspective—“what *he rather fancied was called the retina*.” Delving into layers of consciousness is a rare event in the Wodehouse world, despite Jeeves’s reliance on knowing “the psychology of the individual” in his plots to ensure Bertie’s happiness (Sharma p. 214). Wodehouse, after all, believes in a comprehensible world, one in which narrative authority is needful and in which subjective experience without social authorization is meaningless.

Such a world is essentially realist. Peter Demetz has argued that the hallmark of the realist imagination is its creation of an “epic world by means of a comprehensive, encircling and inclusive narrative” (p. 336; trans. Fokkema p. 13). Wodehouse’s realism is of this sort, and he perhaps ensures its safety by *not* mining too deeply into individual psychology. After all, the modernist rebuke to realism came about, paradoxically, because

the search for mimetic adequacy that realism engenders led twentieth-century authors to move into the realm of the subconscious and its ephemeral workings in the individual. Such a movement beyond the realm of objective reality is ultimately hostile to a realist point of view because focusing on impressions which have no permanent or verifiable status leads to a dismembered world which does not admit of stable interpretation (see Scholes and Kellogg pp. 191–204). Wodehouse's realism is made possible by a certainty that the world he wishes to describe is complete and that the laws governing human existence in that world are knowable and intelligible. The corollary to this position is that human motivation is always a very simple proposition in Wodehouse; plots run on the assurance that, for instance, estranged lovers will be united if the male sustains an injury in the presence of the female, a spectacle which will lead the female to forget her previous disapprobation of the loved one in a surge of feminine solicitousness. That the female might ever react to the wounding of her man differently falls beyond the strictly uniform universe of human motivation that Wodehouse engineers.

This static world of motivation and action requires a purely traditional employment of characterization, which in Wodehouse follows the four central types of comedy that Frye has identified: the buffoon, the boor, the *eirón*, and the *alazon*. Jeeves operates as *eirón*, a figure who has an ironic perspective on events and manipulates them for his own advantage and for that of those he serves. Jeeves represents, in fact, a particular sort of *eirón*, the *servus dolosus* or tricky slave found in Roman New Comedy and later in Sancho Panza or Sam Weller. Bertie plays a deluded *alazon* to Jeeves's *eirón*. As *alazon*, Bertie is as commonly mistaken about his competencies and the consequences of his actions as are Don Quixote and Pickwick. Everywhere are the buffoons and boors, the playboys and killjoys, respectively, who are central to comedy's mission. Those who run riot—particularly Lord Ickenham (Uncle Fred), Galahad Threepwood, and Psmith—do so with complete abandon. Uncle Fred, like Gally and Psmith, operates, in Richard Usborne's phrase, as a "whirring dynamo of misrule" (p. 154). In *Uncle Fred in the Springtime*, a Drone identifies the very traits in Uncle Fred which make him a reincarnation of Falstaff leading the hapless Hal into revelry: "[Uncle Fred] has a nasty way of lugging [his nephew] Pongo out into the open and there, right in the public eye, proceeding to step high, wide and plentiful. I don't know if you happen to know what the word 'excesses' means, but those are what Pongo's Uncle Fred, when in London, invariably commits." Bertie Wooster figures as another

type of playboy, committed to the simple pleasures of darts, golf, the refreshing morning bath, Pat-and-Mike routines, and pinching policemen's helmets.

NOTES

¹ Belloc called Wodehouse "the best writer of English now alive" and "the head of my profession" (5, 8). Such an extreme judgment has its own political and moral agenda. Anti-modernists and Christians, Belloc, Waugh, and Auden, as Anthony Quinton observes, "are by no means pure aesthetics but the devoted and combative adherents of a moralistic faith; [in consequence] their exaggerated praise of Wodehouse is really not concerned with him so much as with the condemnation and discomfiture of less verbally fluent but more morally earnest authors whose moral bias is opposed to their own" (76). Perhaps similar motives impelled Arnold Bennett, the Edwardian novelist repelled by modernist experiments, who told Frank Swinnerton that Wodehouse was "awfully able. Far abler than any of these highbrows" (Swinnerton 370). Some such aesthetic unfairness surfaced as well when C. S. Lewis disparaged the opening lines of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (written when T. S. Eliot was a champion of modern nihilism): "For twenty years I've stared my level best / To see if evening—any evening—would suggest / A patient etherized upon a table; / In vain. I simply wasn't able" (1).

² Quinton surveys the standard general guides to English literature and concludes that they have "nothing or next to nothing to say about Wodehouse." Silence prevails in Albert Baugh's *The Literary History of England*, David Daiches's *Critical History of English Literature*, and Martin Seymour-Smith's *Guide to Modern World Literature*. Brief, patronizing notice is taken of PGW by *The Concise Cambridge History of English Literature*, G. S. Frazer's *The Modern Writer and His World*, and Cyril Connolly's *Enemies of Promise*. Only W. W. Robson's *Modern English Literature* gives Wodehouse credit as a substantive writer (Quinton 73–74).

³ Fredric Jameson rightly argues that the reading of modernist texts is always a double-layered event: "You will find it axiomatic that the reading of such a work is always a two-stage affair, first, substitution of a realistic hypothesis—in narrative form—then an interpretation of that secondary and invented or projected core narrative according to the procedures we reserved for the older realistic novel in general" (177). Modernist texts are thus decoded into the narrative logic of older forms that I would claim are much older than the model of the realist novel and closer to the codes structuralists like Frye have analyzed.

⁴ See Barbara C. Bowen on the range of Rabelaisian characteristics in Wodehouse, among them the feast, the world-upside-down *topos*, the fixed class structure, the zany inventiveness that adorns the traditional plots, the relentless parody of literary conventions, and the parody of epic conventions (“Where Gymnaste has a sword named *Baise mon cul*, Uncle Fred has his great sponge Joyeuse” [64]). For Wodehouse’s reliance on classical models of comedy from Greek and Roman New Comedy, see both Malcolm T. Wallace and George McCracken. [Ed.—Note that Barbara Bowen’s article was reprinted in full in Plum Lines, Summer–Autumn 2007.]

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[Part Two will be published in the Autumn Plum Lines]



The Riveting Talks—Revealed!

BY TOM SMITH

THE 18TH ANNUAL TWS convention is just months away. There are a lot of things going on at the convention, but for many of the delegates the centerpiece of the whole affair, perhaps the *raison d’être*, is the Riveting Talks held on Saturday, October 31, 2015. You read that correctly—Halloween.

We can now reveal the riveting talkers and their topics. Before we do that, you should know that we have a mixture of the tried and true: previous speakers who never fail to entertain and new speakers who will make their TWS debuts at Psmith in Pseattle.

So, here they are, in no particular order:

Elliott Milstein will give a talk entitled “It Wasn’t a Dark and Stormy Night: A Study of the Novels of P. G. Wodehouse.” A past TWS president, Elliott has spoken at several previous conventions.

Ken Clevenger’s talk, “Fish in Plum Sauce: A Tour de Fish,” is presumably about fish. We will find out along with you. Ken is also a past president of the society. If memory serves, this is Ken’s first time up as a speaker, but he did give a rousing performance in the Great Sermon Handicap at the Divine Providence convention some years ago.

The Reverend Canon William Scrivener, who was once a pale young curate, will deliver a talk called “Of Pale Young Curates and Me.” We think the talk may have something to do with pale young curates. The Reverend Canon, who goes by “Bill,” is a first-time speaker. While we can’t officially condone the making of book, as that would be against Washington state law, there are rumors circulating that Steggles may revive the Great Sermon Handicap.

Peter Nieuwenhuizen, from the Dutch Wodehouse society, will discuss “Wodehouse in the Comics.” Peter is another crowd pleaser and veteran speaker. We are given to understand that Peter will have many illustrations to share.

Elin Woodger, another past president, will speak on “P. G. Wodehouse, Feminist.” In her talk, she will destroy the idea that Plum’s female characters have little to commend themselves to female readers.

We are proud to introduce to The Wodehouse Society the author of the blog *Plumtopia*, Miss Honoria Glossop, who will tell us who reads Wodehouse. Miss Glossop’s talk follows Ukridge’s policy of giving a false name as an ordinary business precaution.

Mr. Tad Boehmer, a graduate student in library science, will speak about “Plumming the Vaults: Researching Wodehouse in Special Collections Libraries.”

Robert McCrum, author of *Wodehouse: A Life*, will talk about “Wodehouse in Wonderland.” This is Robert’s first appearance at a TWS convention.

Throughout the day, Tony Ring will read a series of short ghost stories written by Plum for *Punch* magazine. This series of readings will be entitled “Mr. Punch’s Spectral Analyses.” It is Halloween, after all.

If you had not planned on coming to Pseattle, perhaps this bit of information will tip the scales and you will fill out the registration form included in this issue of *Plum Lines* and send in your check. Our registration desk is awaiting—well, your registration.

“If you consider painting the portrait of Empress of Blandings a tuppenny job, I disagree with you,” said Lord Emsworth with dignity. “And he isn’t a penniless artist. Galahad tells me he is very well off, and he only paints pigs because he loves them.”

Sunset at Blandings (1978)

Ed Ratcliffe: Our Beloved Oldest Member and So Much More

AS WE WENT to press with this issue, we received notice that the Oldest Member, Ed Ratcliffe, passed away on May 16, 2015. Our next issue will have a full article about Ed and his great contributions to The Wodehouse Society, to *Plum Lines*, and to the lives of all with whom he came in contact. In the meantime, we will say that Ed was instrumental in making the society what it is today, and we will miss him very much. Ed is survived by his wife, Missy, his daughters Catherine and Gene, and three grandchildren.



Collecting “Extricating Young Gussie”

BY JOHN GRAHAM



BERTIE AND JEEVES, born in America, debuted 100 years ago in the short story “Extricating Young Gussie,” published on September 18, 1915, in the *Saturday Evening Post*. The story was illustrated by Martin Justice, who has the honor of drawing the first picture of both Bertie and Aunt Agatha (but not Jeeves). This was Wodehouse’s third work to appear in the prestigious American magazine which, according to Plum, published only the “Swells.” His novel *Something New* had appeared there in eight consecutive issues between June 26 and August 14, 1915, and his O. Henry-like story “At Geisenheimer’s” ran in the August 21 issue. The U.K. will not celebrate Bertie and Jeeves’s centenary until next year; the story ran in *The Strand Magazine* in January 1916, with illustrations by Alfred Leete.

In book form, “Extricating Young Gussie” was one of thirteen short stories collected in *The Man with Two Left Feet*, first published in England in 1917 by Methuen. That book (with red boards and a non-illustrated dust jacket) is among the rarest of all Wodehouse first editions. I know of only two copies with dust jackets in private hands today, one of which is pictured in McIlvaine. Even jacketless copies (often in mediocre condition) sell for \$3,000 or more. In the United States, a book of the same title containing a somewhat different collection of stories, but retaining “Extricating Young Gussie,” did not appear until 1933, when the reprint house A. L. Burt was granted the right to publish it by

Wodehouse’s American publisher Doubleday, Doran. Burt reprinted the book at least once, dropping the “first edition” statement from the copyright page. Very good copies of the first printing in dust wrapper sell for about \$750.

Although “Extricating Young Gussie” is widely acknowledged to be the first Bertie and Jeeves story, it retains an uncomfortable relationship with the rest of the canon, in terms of both its story line and its publishing history. During Plum’s lifetime, the story was never reprinted with any other Jeeves stories. It was not in the *Jeeves Omnibus* (1931), which collected the 31 stories told by Bertie in *The Inimitable Jeeves; Carry On, Jeeves; and Very Good, Jeeves*. Nor did it appear among the 34 stories in *The World of Jeeves* (1967), which added “Jeeves Makes an Omelette” and “Jeeves and the Greasy Bird,” as well as the only story narrated by Jeeves, “Bertie Changes His Mind.” As far as I know, the first time the story was included with the others was 1989, when Hutchinson in the U.K. reissued all eleven Jeeves novels and all 35 short stories in a five-volume paperback set called *The Jeeves Omnibus*. In the U.S., “Extricating Young Gussie” was one of eight early Jeeves stories in *Enter Jeeves* (published by Dover Publications in 1997).



They Got Hold of Each Other's Hands and Were Shaking Them Till I Wondered Their Arms Didn't Come Unscrewed

One school of thought as to why “Extricating Young Gussie” was excluded from the canon for so long is that it is not an authentic Bertie and Jeeves story. For one thing, Bertie’s surname (although never stated explicitly) would appear to be Mannering-Phipps. (In *Wodehouse at Work*, Richard Osborne reminds us that in 1915 Wodehouse was catering to American audiences who seemed to think all silly upper-class Englishmen had hyphenated last names.) The other problem with this story is that Jeeves has only two lines of dialogue (“Mrs. Gregson to see you, sir” and “Very good, sir. Which suit will you wear?”) and plays no active role in resolving his master’s problems.

Neither of these criticisms bothers me very much because there is simply too much about the story that feels right. First and foremost, there is Bertie’s unmistakable narrative voice. (For more on this, see the recent article “Celebrating 100 Years of Jeeves and Wooster” by Samanth Subramanian, published online at <http://scroll.in/article/708241>.) Second, this is the story that explains why Bertie is living in New York for his next four adventures in the *Saturday Evening Post* (and the *Strand Magazine*), which were collected in *My Man Jeeves* (1919). In the next story of the series, “Leave It to Jeeves” (*Saturday Evening Post*, February 5, 1916), Bertie explains that “I was sent over by my Aunt Agatha to try to stop young Gussie’s marrying a girl on the vaudeville stage, and I got the whole thing so balled up that I decided it would be a sound scheme for me to stop on in America for a bit.” When the story was revised for *Carry On, Jeeves* (1925) as “The Artistic Career of Corky,” Bertie begins this way: “You will notice, as you flit through these reminiscences of mine, that from time to time the scene of the action is laid in and around the city of New York.”

To my mind, a more convincing reason why the story was not included with the others for so long is that Wodehouse’s long-time publisher Herbert Jenkins simply did not have the right to reprint it. Rather, the rights were held by Methuen, who first published nine of Plum’s books, from *The Little Nugget* in 1913 to *Doctor Sally* in 1932. Recognizing Wodehouse’s value, Methuen remained an active rival to Herbert Jenkins for many years, reprinting all nine titles many times well into the 1950s. In 1934, they included “Extricating Young Gussie” as one of seven short stories in the pocket-sized *P. G. Wodehouse* volume in the series *Methuen’s Library of Humour*. This book is surprisingly scarce, although copies (even in its lavishly illustrated dust jacket) rarely go for more than a few hundred dollars.

Although I do not know the precise legal chronology, it is clear that Herbert Jenkins eventually

obtained publishing rights to all nine Methuen titles (beginning with *Doctor Sally*, which they reissued in a Frank Ford dust wrapper in 1952). Eventually, Herbert Jenkins (and their successor Barrie & Jenkins) would reissue the remaining eight titles with new introductions by Wodehouse himself. The first of these to appear was *Something Fresh*, in 1969. *The Man with Two Left Feet* came out in 1971. Surprisingly, its three-page introduction makes no mention of “Extricating Young Gussie,” as though Plum had forgotten about the story. Indeed, in a letter he wrote in to Lawrence Durrell in 1948 (reprinted in the book of Wodehouse letters edited by Sophie Ratcliffe), Plum mistakenly refers to the story as “Disentangling Old Duggie,” the American title of a Reggie Pepper story.

But, in truth, Wodehouse had not forgotten about his first Jeeves story. In his 1931 introduction written for the first *Jeeves Omnibus*, he confesses: “I find it curious, now that I have written so much about him, to recall how softly and undramatically Jeeves first entered my little world. . . . That was in a story in a volume entitled *The Man with Two Left Feet*. It was only some time later, [in] ‘The Artistic Career of Young Corky,’ that the man’s qualities dawned on me. I still blush to think of the off-hand way I treated him at our first encounter.”

That story, originally titled “Leave It to Jeeves” when it appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post*, will be celebrating its centenary in February 1916.

Aunt Agatha is one of those strong-minded women. I should think Queen Elizabeth must have been something like her. She bosses her husband, Spencer Gregson, a battered little chappie on the Stock Exchange. She bosses my cousin, Gussie Mannering-Phipps. She bosses her sister-in-law, Gussie’s mother. And, worst of all, she bosses me. She has an eye like a man-eating fish, and she has got moral suasion down to a fine point.

I dare say there are fellows in the world—men of blood and iron, don’t you know, and all that sort of thing—whom she couldn’t intimidate; but if you’re a chappie like me, fond of a quiet life, you simply curl into a ball when you see her coming, and hope for the best. My experience is that when Aunt Agatha wants you to do a thing you do it or else you find yourself wondering why those fellows in the olden days made such a fuss when they had trouble with the Spanish Inquisition.

“Extricating Young Gussie” (1915)

“Ring for Jeeves” in Moscow

BY MASHA LEBEDEVA

THE RUSSIAN WODEHOUSE SOCIETY awoke from a slumber of several years this winter. On February 15, 2015, the society gathered to celebrate Wodehouse's ageless works, with the help of the Russian charitable foundation Kislrod, at the “Ring for Jeeves” event in Moscow.

To create the atmosphere of the early twentieth century, the event took place in the small café named (and decorated) after the famous French movie *Les Enfants du Paradis*. As the café owner is a close friend of the foundation, all entrance fees were voluntary and went directly to the charity. The men who donated to the cause got handmade bowties, and the women received red and yellow paper flowers. (The flowers were quite reminiscent of the buttercup flowers that Tamaki Morimura handed out at the 2009 convention of The Wodehouse Society in St. Paul, Minnesota.)

The event kicked off with a short speech by Kislrod president Maya Sonina. She described the foundation's mission, which is to help those who suffer from mucoviscidosis, known in the English-speaking world as cystic fibrosis. (The Russian word for oxygen is *kislrod*, and you can find out more [in Russian] about the foundation at bf-kislrod.ru.)

After this introduction, the party began in earnest, with singer Thais Urumidis and her jazz band Estate performing “Sonny Boy.” She sang admirably and also had the good fortune that neither Bertie Wooster nor Tuppy Glossop preceded her in performing the same tune. Thus she managed to escape Cora Bellinger's fate! Thais confided to the audience that she liked the song very much and promised to make it a permanent part of her repertoire. As a result, we can now say that “Sonny Boy” has officially arrived to stay on the Russian stage. Thais performed a few more numbers and then, though she had another engagement to rush to, she left her jazz band to keep things swinging.

Young actor Dmitry Vozdvizhensky was next up. He amused the audience with a reading of the first chapter of *The Code of the Woosters*. Then came one of the big hits of the evening, a retro fashion presentation by Asiya Aladjalova, a fashion collector and historian. Girls from Asiya's studio demonstrated dresses from the mid-1910s to the end of 1920s. Some were replicas and some were originals from Asiya's collection. Asiya provided informative explanations of the fashions, and her descriptions were certainly worthy of publication in an issue of *Milady's Boudoir*.

After the conclusion of the fashion show, several audience members were lucky enough to be made up in the style of the 1920s, courtesy of Asiya. Additionally, those who wished to be photographed in retro style posed for photographer Elena Chereda.

The charity auction included unique items like a manuscript from the late Inna Bernstein, the prominent translator who introduced Jeeves and Wooster to Russian readers. The manuscript was an interesting collection of excerpts from the texts of Soviet author and satirist Mikhail Zoshchenko, whose stories, written in the 1920s, helped the translator find the right language and tone for her work on the Jeeves and Wooster saga.

Another item at the auction was an English policeman's helmet. It was of a decidedly small size and raised the question of the moral qualities of the person who would steal a helmet from the head of a policechild.

The most impressive item in the auction was a modern, though perhaps not Dutch, cow creamer. While not real silver, its appearance was sufficiently ugly that both Uncle Tom and Sir Watkyn Bassett would have approved of it.

Having finished with the main program, the audience moved on to the browsing and sluicing. The café's chef had included two special items on the card of the day: cucumber sandwiches and a version of the Jeeves cocktail. I didn't order the cocktail but observed that it was some type of reddish liquor. I sampled the sandwiches and they were more than acceptable. The culinary theme continued with a presentation of the published paper “From the Cookbook of Blandings Castle,” written by Svetlana Panich, a translator whose special interest is Blandings Castle cuisine.

In conclusion, I must give special thanks to the long-time Wodehouse devotee Maria Batova, the artistic manager of the Kislrod foundation, who organized such a wonderful party. With the success of this event, she demonstrated again that Wodehouse's works always bring sweetness and light to the world.



Russian belles adorn the ball, with retro-fashion assistance from Asiya Aladjalova.



My First Time

BY JEFF PORTEOUS

MY FIRST EXPOSURE to PGW occurred in the fall of 1976, during my junior year at Michigan State University. Fellow TWS member (and lifelong PGW devotee) Todd Parkhurst receives full, incontestable credit for this initial immersion into Plum's realm.

Todd, my trusted roomie and fellow hapless member of the vast MSU dorm population at the time, was at that time markedly more cognizant of the important things in life than was I. He would, in the bunk below mine, regularly ditch his studies to contentedly devour page after page of Wodehouse instead. I mean, he'd be down there, snickering unabashedly while I remained perched in the top bunk unsuccessfully trying to stay awake through such dreaded third-year assignments as *Madame Bovary* and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*—or at least the *Cliffs Notes* thereof.

Periodically, a fist jammed into my mattress springs from below would jolt me from my tortured stupor—whereupon Todd, after simply announcing, “Listen to this,” would deliver aloud a particularly delightful passage from whichever Plum classic was his book of the week. These excerpts were generally examples of Aunt Dahlia's colorful invectives, if distant memory serves.

This was certainly an unforgettable way to discover Wodehousian magic, though I must admit an early-life prescient bent in PGW's direction by virtue of having actually kept newts as a boy. This brought occasional horror to my mother when an escapee might be found days later brittle as a brickbat in the toe of someone's abandoned shoe. But that's another story for another day, and one which we shall certainly refrain from sharing with Gussie.

“Well, boys,” resumed Gussie, having shot his cuffs and smirked horribly, “this is the end of the summer term, and many of you, no doubt, are leaving the school. And I don't blame you, because there's a froust in here you could cut with a knife. You are going out into the great world. . . . And what I want to impress upon you is that, however much you may suffer from adenoids, you must all use every effort to prevent yourselves becoming pessimists and talking rot like old Tom Travers. There in the second row. The fellow with a face rather like a walnut.”

Right Ho, Jeeves (1934)

The NEWTS Chapter Report

BY JOHN FAHEY

APRIL WROUGHT a miracle. The mists and snows vanished and the NEWTS gathered to frolic. All agog to browse and sluice, I hallooed my way into the house of Lisa Grandquist and Tom Dorward. There I was reintroduced to Kirby, the resident dog. Perhaps five pounds on a good day, Kirby is a good canine egg.

My eye roved the expanse of kitchen and was drawn to a bucket of champagne. My body quickly followed. At which point I trod on Kirby. Action was swift. Kirby and I were of one mind in backing away. However, being of one mind extended to achieving a common end point and I unfortunately trod on Kirby again.

In a panic, I spied the dining room door ajar. I was through said door in a flash, at which point I trod on David Landman, who was crawling on the floor in pursuit of an errant shelled peanut. Reacting swiftly, I jumped back into the kitchen, promptly treading on Kirby a third time.

Desperate times call for desperate measures. I leapt through an open French door onto a deck teeming with NEWTS who, all standing erect, were in little danger of being trod on. Sheepishly, I called the meeting to order, and, dispensing with the business at hand, went directly to a Wodehouse reading.

The selection was a pip: one of the great Freddie Widgeon tales, “Goodbye to All Cats.” An array of pets is strewn throughout the story. In the drawing room scene, Freddie manages to tread on and sit on an endless bevy of cats. All great fun for the NEWTS, but for me hitting a bit too close to home.

At the conclusion of the story, a number of NEWTS, encouraged by Elizabeth Landman, reenacted favorite scenes. I, feeling chagrined over the Kirby incident, desired solace from a recently uncorked bottle of champagne.

I had just taken a restorative sip when a ray of sunlight illuminated a table strewn with Roberta Towner's pies. I made for said table with undue haste and Kirby, recognizing the familiar tread of shoe, emerged from under said table. The resulting collision led to a rather unfortunate cascade of several items. Suffice it to say that I spent the remainder of the afternoon in the corner functioning as a scullery maid while Kirby lapped up spilled champagne and pie with abandon.

There has been idle talk of possibly reading “Trouble Down at Tudsleigh” at our next nottle. Your intrepid reporter will maintain a stiff upper lip no matter the outcome.

John Hazlitt

JOHN M. HAZLITT, JR., passed away on March 15, 2015, at his home in Fort Collins, Colorado. John joined The Wodehouse Society in 2011, though he had very much enjoyed the works of P. G. Wodehouse throughout his life. John wrote a weekly column in the *Estes Park News* for ten years. He was thrilled to find out a few years ago that *Plum Lines* was being composed and edited right down the street in Estes Park. On more than one occasion he mentioned that connection in his newspaper column.

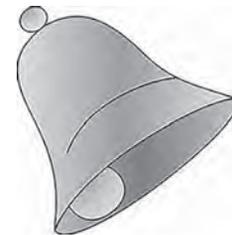
John was born in Fairfax, Oklahoma, served in the V-12 officer training program of the U.S. Navy from 1944 to 1946, and had a long career in sales and management with Northwestern Mutual Life. Upon retirement, he and his wife, Mary Josephine (“Jo”), moved to Estes Park. John was a Rotarian for 65 years, and was a member of many volunteer organizations in Estes Park.

His column in the *Estes Park News* was called “Lighten Up With Mr. Balderdash,” and he shared quips, observations, and words of wisdom with his fellow residents. He positioned himself as a curmudgeon, and those who knew him considered him a lovable one at that. He published two of his own volumes of light verse, *Tumbleweeds* and *Medium Rare*. John will be missed by his friends and family and the residents of Estes Park.

Psmith in Pseattle: Convention Rummage Sale, Raffle, and Auctions

PSMITH IN PSEATTLE is gathering up items for the convention rummage sale, raffle, and silent and live auctions. If you have anything you would like to donate (proceeds go to the convention fund, to help these conventions happen), the Anglers are ready and willing to accept. Books, sheet music, playbills, pigs, golfing items—anything Plummy in nature is welcome. Seattle and Pacific Northwest goodies, too. We have quite a few tasty goodies already lined up—autographed first editions included! There’s a price point for everyone; don’t worry that you have to be Oofy Prosser to afford a convention memento.

If you’re local, please contact Susan Collicott via the aforementioned email to arrange pick-up of your items. For those coming from out of town, we’re happy to accept items as you arrive at the convention, but you are also quite welcome to mail them ahead if you can. That will help us be more organized.



Does the Name “Glocke” Ring a Bell?

BY DAVID MCGRANN

AGENTLEMAN recently reached out to a member of The Wodehouse Society to inquire about a first-edition copy of *The Intrusion of Jimmy* that he had found in his attic. The book had suffered from a bit of cover damage but, at the end of the day, TWS came to the rescue, and the book in question will be sold at the upcoming convention in Seattle, the proceeds to benefit TWS. Details are being worked out, but for society members who can’t make it to the convention, there will be an opportunity to bid for the book. Details below.

“Ho-hum,” one might say. “A book from an attic with a bit of damage to the cover.”

Well, consider that it is a true first. In this case, the first edition was American. And it was the first Wodehouse book to be first published in America. So, it is a first first first.

Did I mention that it is autographed and inscribed by Wodehouse? It is dated May 16, 1910, to a Miss Anna Glocke. Does anyone know who Anna Glocke might be? My research finds some Anna Glockes in New York in 1910, but none seem to be a Miss.

PGW, the Yellow Peril, and the White Hope

BY BOB RAINS

WE ARE ALL products of our time and our environment, and P. G. Wodehouse was no exception to the rule. His novel *The Coming of Bill*, published in the U.K. in 1920 and in the U.S. in 1919 as *Their Mutual Child* (first published in *Munsey's Magazine* as *The White Hope*), is loaded with phrases and concepts that are today truly cringe-inducing.

The heavy of the story is Mrs. Lora Delane Porter, a germophobic author greatly concerned with eugenics. When the tale opens, Aunt Lora has persuaded her niece, our heroine Ruth Bannister, that "A woman can't do a great deal, even nowadays, but she can have a conscience and feel that she owes something to the future of the race. She can feel it is her duty to bring fine children into the world. As Aunt Lora says, she can carry the torch and not falter."

Ruth's brother, Bailey, is definitely not similarly admiring of Aunt Lora. The narrator says, "To Bailey, his strong-minded relative was a perpetual menace, a sort of perambulating yellow peril, and the fact that she often alluded to him as a worm consolidated his distaste for her."

On Aunt Lora's advice, Ruth has rejected one suitor, Basil Milbank. Then Aunt Lora successfully schemes to have Ruth marry our hero, Kirk Winfield, because of his remarkable physique. With all deliberate speed, Ruth and Kirk further Aunt Lora's plan by producing a son and heir, William (Bill) Bannister Winfield, who is affectionately known as the "White Hope." The "White Hope" theme is persistent throughout the book, which includes chapters entitled, "The White Hope is Turned Down" and "The White-Hope Link."

At the time of writing, of course, phrases such as "yellow peril" and "white hope" were not only in common usage in Europe and the U.S., but expressed perceived concerns by some real people. Sources differ as to the etymology of "yellow peril." Some attribute it, probably erroneously, to Kaiser Wilhelm II, who is said to have had a dream around 1895 in which he saw the Buddha riding a dragon threatening to invade Europe. A few years later, the world saw Russia humiliated in the Russo-Japanese War, which ended with assistance from President Theodore Roosevelt, who mediated a treaty between the combatants and thus garnered the Nobel Peace Prize. Presciently, Teddy predicted that there might be a future war in the Pacific between Japan and the United States which the United States would likely win, but "the calamity would be very great."

The idea of the "White Hope" or "Great White Hope" arose from the world of boxing. We know that Wodehouse had been a good boxer, albeit limited by his poor vision, and we know that he followed the sport avidly. Many members of mainstream America were shocked when African American Jack Johnson, aka the Galveston Giant, won the world heavyweight title in 1908. Indeed, the *New York Times* had opined beforehand that "If the black man wins, thousands and thousands of his ignorant brothers will misinterpret his victory as justifying claims to much more than mere physical equality with their white neighbors."

Johnson enraged the less-enlightened members of the white community not only by winning the title, but also by getting romantically involved with white women and eventually marrying three of them (though not at the same time). For eight years, boxing promoters sought out a "White Hope" to dethrone Johnson. Finally, in 1915, Jess Willard ended this particular white humiliation by knocking Johnson out in the 26th round of a scheduled 45-round title bout in Havana, Cuba.

There is a recurring boxing motif in *The Coming of Bill*, and Bill proves his mettle near the end of the book by besting a "bad boy" in a fight. We do not know the race of the bested bad boy, although there is no suggestion that he is non-white. Given the time period of the book's writing and its boxing theme, it is natural, if unfortunate, that Bill is labelled with his racist sobriquet.

Today's audience may have another philosophical bone to pick with this book: its attitude toward those of the female gender. Our heroine, Ruth, after seeing the error of her ways, bemoans, "What fools women are sometimes!" Having lost her inherited wealth, she tells her sister-in-law that being poor is "heaven if you're with the right man." Our narrator says of Ruth that "she had a true woman's contempt for consistency." And so on.

What can be said of *The Coming of Bill* more generally? Not much. There are some flashes of typical Wodehousean humor and wordplay. For instance, when the formidable Aunt Lora verbally attacks Mamie, the object of Kirk's friend Steve's affection, he reacts. "The sudden onslaught upon Mamie, innocent Mamie who had done nothing to anybody, scattered his embarrassment and filled him with much the same spirit which sent bantamweight knights up against heavyweight dragons in the Middle Ages. He felt inspired." But, sadly, such bons mots are few and far

between. One cannot help but wonder whether even the smartest computer, being fed the text of *The Coming of Bill*, would be able to identify its author.

It is not reasonable to expect that a man writing for his public a century ago would exhibit today's modern sensibilities. Nor is it reasonable to expect that a diligent chap who knocks off about a hundred books, numerous plays, and myriad lyrics, short stories, and poems, will produce works of uniform quality over the course of three-quarters of a century. Perhaps Robert McCrum summed it up best in his 400+ page Wodehouse biography, devoting exactly one sentence to *The Coming of Bill*, describing it as "a throwback to the bad old days of writing a Bob Davis *Munsey's* plot for hire."

In short, this is a book for only the most devoted Wodehouse devotee, and it probably is best read with one of Jeeves's restoratives close at hand.



A Few Quick Ones

Walter Isaacson reviewed Ben Macintyre's *A Spy Among Friends* in the July 27, 2014, *New York Times Book Review*. The book is about Kim Philby, "the high-level British spymaster who turned out to be a Russian mole." Mr. Isaacson said he had to keep reminding himself that the book is not a novel, adding that "it reads like a story by Graham Greene, Ian Fleming, or John le Carré . . . leavened by a dollop of P. G. Wodehouse."

Reviewer Barton Swaim professed in the September 12, 2014, *Wall Street Journal*, that, as a child, he didn't like his full name "Barton" and went by "Bart" for his first 26 years. He went on to discuss other writers who renamed themselves and mentioned that Wodehouse "went by many improbable pen names in his early life—P. Brook-Haven, J. Walker Williams, and a few others." He quoted Wodehouse, from a time after Plum started using "P. G." as his author's name, as saying that "here was I, poor misguided simp, trying to get by with a couple of contemptible initials." According to Mr. Swaim, Wodehouse tried using his full name to pitch *Something New* to the *Saturday Evening Post* but eventually changed back to initials.

In the June 2014 "Notebook" section ("Culture for Clued-In Women") on More.com, Jeeves was quoted from *Very Good, Jeeves*: "Red hair, sir, in my opinion, is dangerous." This was alongside other gems like Bette Davis's line from *The Cabin in the Cotton*: "I'd like to kiss you, but I just washed my hair."

In the Baltimore *City Paper* of November 5, 2014, Rob Breszny's "Free Will Astrology" column referenced Wodehouse. For Sagittarius, Mr. Breszny quotes Wodehouse as saying, "I have never written a novel without doing 40,000 words or more and finding they were all wrong and going back and starting again." Sagittarians are then advised that their immediate future will have them creating their version of these 40,000 words. This is not a problem, though, because "you can't get to the really good stuff without slogging through this practice run." Hopefully, by now, all of those born under that sign are onto the really good stuff.

In the August 2014 *Best of Britain*, Rebecca McWattie presents an insightful short biography of Daphne du Maurier, the author of *Rebecca*. Ms. McWattie mentions that du Maurier was "ridiculed by P. G. Wodehouse on becoming a member of the Cornish nationalist party Mebyon Kernow, which campaigned for self-rule, and was spoofed as 'Daphne Dolores Morehead.'"

An editorial in the July 2, 2014, *Country Life* ("Disorder in the Courts?") disparaged the Lord Chancellor and his recent "attacks" on the English Bar. At one point, the editor stated that "the Lord Chancellor's solution is worthy of P. G. Wodehouse: Growing numbers of barristers are to be employed as public defenders, with salaries far in excess of Legal Aid rates, and with all the benefits of employment, from pensions to offices and holidays—all features conspicuously absent from private practices at the Bar."

Lindsay Duguid reviewed *The Novel*, Michael Schmidt's ambitious new work, in the August 1, 2014, *Times Literary Supplement*. At one point in the book, Schmidt "traces the 700-year history of the [novel] form through a series of thematic groupings," and somehow gets P. G. Wodehouse beside Kazuo Ishiguro.

In a column about Paddington Bear that appeared in the January 11, 2015, *New York Times Book Review*, Pico Iyer pointed out the "Wodehousian lightness and consistency" of the Paddington stories, but then summarized the differences: "Bertie Wooster's antagonists are generally meddlesome aunts, where

Paddington's are the British Isles themselves. And where Bertie can afford to do nothing, as to the manner born, Paddington has to work quite hard to understand why a snooty headwaiter at the Porchester might take it amiss when he starts drinking from a finger bowl."

In the December 7, 2014, *Washington Post*, columnist Jonathan Yardley reflected on his retirement, which occurred in that same month. He mentioned many of the highlights of his 33 1/3 years and said that he simply aims "to revisit writers whose work gives me the kind of delight that only books can give—lots of P. G. Wodehouse and Peter Taylor first and foremost."

In the *New York Times Book Review* of December 14, 2014, Anjelica Huston was interviewed. When asked what is the best book about Hollywood, she mentioned (among others) *Laughing Gas*, calling it "a classic."

In his "Diary" in the January 8, 2015, *London Review of Books*, Alan Bennett discussed Paul Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy*, wherein Hoggart described his upbringing by his grandmother and various aunts. Bennett said we should "forget P. G. Wodehouse, [because] for a working-class boy aunts can be no bad thing."

The October 2014 *Town & Country* had an article about a very popular social trend: digital services. The article ("Download Jeeves, Please") described several such services, including HomePolish (an online interior designer), Tipsi (a free wine recommendation app), Pinch Parties (a party planner), and more.

Michael Dirda's stocking list of books (*Washington Post*, December 11, 2014) included Chris Dolley's *What Ho, Automata!*, "a collection of four 'Reeves and Worcester' steampunk mysteries."

PGW's Sheet Music Down Under

JOHAN LODER writes: I have just had printed 75 copies of a new booklet titled *P. G. Wodehouse's Colonial Editions Continued With His Australian Sheet Music*. It is numbered and signed and on sale at City Basement Books in Melbourne, Australia, and Dick Neal's Fine Books in N.S.W. Both can be found on the general

booksellers' sites on the net. I am in my eighties and getting too old to do any distribution myself.

As you may know, the Kern-Bolton-Wodehouse musicals were put on in Australia at the same time as they were showing in America and England. The scores of the Wodehouse lyrics feature the Australian members of the cast and differ substantially from the U.S. and U.K. scores. They are generally unknown in McIlvaine.

The booklet has many colored illustrations of these and other rare issues of his novels not recorded elsewhere. If you have interest, you'll find this entertaining and elucidating.

Editor's Note: Tony Ring mentioned that he has an earlier edition of this item. It has now been extended to include info about the Australian productions of the PGW musicals and, according to Tony, is probably the only single source of that detail. It's easy to find at the City Basement website by searching "Loder" in author and nothing else anywhere else. It's a bit pricey (around US\$30) and a bit short, but might be of interest to some!

A Good Place to Plug in the Jalopy

THOMAS L. R. SMITH compiles, writes, and edits *The Hybrid Vehicle and Alternative Fuel Report* for the Washington State government. If that name sounds familiar, it should. Tom (nom de Plum Colonel "Plug" Basham) is one of the prime movers of the upcoming Psmith in Pseattle convention.

In the April 30, 2015, issue of the *Fuel Report*, Tom gives the readers of that esteemed journal the following information relevant to their work—and adds a little bit of local color:

The Suffolk County Community College opened two charging stations at the college's Eastern Campus in Riverhead, New York, just north of P. G. Wodehouse's Rensenburg, Long Island, home, the *Riverhead Local* (April 22, 2015) says. The charger is part of the ChargePoint Network and is open to the public. Suffolk Community College will install chargers at the Selden and Brentwood campuses later this year.

Undoubtedly, the Wodehouses would have been intrigued by the need for electrical charging stations for their modern roadster.

Chapters Corner

WHAT IS YOUR chapter up to these days? We welcome you to use this column to tell the Wodehouse world about your chapter's activities. Chapter representatives, 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, please get in touch with the contact person listed.

Anglers' Rest

(Seattle and vicinity)
Contact: Susan Collicott



Birmingham Banjolele Band

(Birmingham, Alabama, and vicinity)
Contact: Caralyn McDaniel



Blandings Castle Chapter

(Greater San Francisco Bay area)
Contact: Neil Midkiff



The Broadway Special

(New York City and vicinity)
Contact: Amy Plofker



THE LUSTY MONTH of May arrived for the Broadway Special after the winter of our discontent. Said winter brought us only one bright and shining moment: the Annual Songfest round Luceil Carroll's grand piano on February 21. There we found Ron Roullier and Chef Luca, who provided us, respectively, with tickled ivories and luscious savories, and we settled in this most congenial spot.

There was a legal limit to the snow that day, for a car full of rugged New Englanders found a parking spot mere steps from Fifth Avenue for the second year in a row! Between trills and tessituras (if that's the word I want) the Specialists watched a gentle fall of snowflakes on Central Park, wondering what the simple folk were doing. We can attest, on the best authority, that singing always makes one's spirits rise.

In keeping with our somewhat flexible calendar, the Special usually seeks an April outing to a Wodehousian theatrical performance. Alas, this particular April did not provide the proper Plummy fare. We had expected winter to exit on the dot on March 21, but instead we were glumly still in its toils, hardly in the mood for the sweetness and light that is our springtime ambrosia.

But an opportunity to return to our home away from home arose when our Juilliard fairy godmother Molly Skardon conjured an invitation for us to attend a staged reading—and singing—of a new piece, *Edwin*, based on the life of the founder of our beloved club, Edwin Booth. Offered by Great Circle Productions, the musical played to a full house at The Players on April 8, with the plot being a reminiscence of Booth's life and the tragedy that befell the family when his younger brother John assassinated President Lincoln.

Sweetness and light were to be found at the open bar after the show, and we were pleased to introduce some newcomers to the Special and to the club itself. Co-president Philip Shreffler led a house tour, which featured a visit to the Sargent Room, the open bar, the library, the open bar, and Booth's own quarters.



Luceil Carroll and Ron Roullier

Now 'tis the month of Maying when merry lads are playing, a much more Blandings sort of month, soon to be followed by the Wodehousian June bustin' out all over. Ain't it a grand and glorious feeling when the world is fair and bright? Oh, joy!

Capital! Capital!

(Washington, D.C., and vicinity)
Contact: Scott Daniels



Chapter One

(Greater Philadelphia area)

Contact: Herb Moskowitz



THE CHAPS of Chapter One gathered as usual on the second floor of Cavanaugh's in Head House Square in Philadelphia for the May meeting. Soon the room was ringing with laughter as the Chaps watched an episode from the 1978 season of *Wodehouse Playhouse* entitled "Mulliner's Buck-U-Uppo." Afterwards Bob Nissenbaum led a lively discussion comparing the TV show with the original Plum story.

James Hawking gave a review of a new book, *Good Night, Mr. Wodehouse*, by Faith Sullivan. It is about a woman who seeks consolation by reading PGW. The tone is the opposite of Wodehouse's, but James gave it a good review.

Herb Moskowitz and Bob Rains reported that Musicals Tonight! in New York City will be doing two Guy Bolton/P. G. Wodehouse musicals: *Oh, Kay!* (music and lyrics by the Gershwins) in October, and *Oh, Boy!* (music by Jerome Kern, lyrics by Wodehouse) in late March and early April 2016. (More info on page 23.)

The next meeting will be July 12, at 1:00 PM at Cavanaugh's.

Chicago Accident Syndicate

(Chicago and thereabouts)

Contact: Daniel & Tina Garrison



The Clients of Adrian Mulliner

(For enthusiasts of both PGW and Sherlock Holmes)

Contact: Elaine Coppola



A SENIOR BLOODSTAIN will be held at the Psmith in Pseattle convention on Friday, October 30. Time and place will be in your convention schedule. Contributions to the Bloodstain program are welcome.

The Den(ver) of the Secret Nine

(Denver and vicinity)

Contact: Jennifer Petkus

THE BIG NEWS from The Den(ver) of the Secret Nine is that member Larry has returned to us after contracting a mysterious illness in the Holy Land. Apparently it was touch and go, but he's back safe now and surprised us by attending our March meeting, when we discussed *French Leave*.

Although we all liked the story (how can you not like a Wodehouse story, especially one most of us had not read before?), there was a general sense it wasn't his best stuff. That left us looking forward to our next meeting, which was at 12:30 PM on Sunday, May 10, at Pints Pub in downtown Denver, when we discussed *Something Fresh*. The full report will come in our next chapter report. Several members have not read this first installment of the Blandings Castle series, with its exploration of the below-stairs life of under-footmen and bootboys—shades of *Downton Abbey*.

The Secret Nine discussed our next cricket match outing (we need a date from the cricket league) and a possible (miniature) golf outing. Information for these will be provided at suitable dead-drops.

The Secret Nine is also hot at work on a Wodehouse Trope-ical Bingo Card generator. The web page—<http://myparticularfriend.com/Wodehouse-Bingo.html>—can generate printable bingo cards using general Wodehouse tropes and series-specific tropes. Anyone can use the web page to print the cards for group play. Instructions and tropes may be found on the site.

We'll be creating and refining our list of tropes and the algorithm that generates the cards. Right now there are 64 general tropes and 27 tropes for Jeeves and Wooster. There are twelve Blandings tropes, not quite enough to be useable.

If you'd like to comment about the tropes or suggest additional ones, visit <https://thedenverofthesecretnine.wordpress.com/2015/03/14/wodehouse-trope-ical-bingo-generator-now-online/> and leave a comment.

The Drone Rangers

(Houston and vicinity)

Contact: Carey Tynan



The Flying Pigs

(Cincinnati area and elsewhere)

Contact: Susan Brokaw



Friends of the Fifth Earl of Ickenham

(Buffalo, New York, and vicinity)

Contact: Laura Loehr

The Melonsquashville (TN) Literary Society

(Tennessee)

Contact: Ken Clevenger

THE WINTER was a chilly challenge (wasn't it Shakespeare who spoke of "blow, blow, thou winter wind"? Jeeves would know), and our February fixture was canceled. But we got together and pushed back the March gloom with a dramatic reading of "The Rise of Minna Nordstrom." We also watched the *Wodehouse Playhouse* version of that story on DVD.

On April 15, when we met to read "Monkey Business," we were so taxed with other burdens that we did not have time to watch the BBC mishmash of "The Nodder" and "Monkey Business." But Plum's hilarious Mulliner story of female fickleness, male timidity and triumph, Hollywood hijinks, and true love winning though made for a lovely evening program.

We met on May 9, and Linda and Ralph Norman arranged a dramatic reading adapted from the novel *A Damsel in Distress*. We embraced the spring with this classic 1919 Wodehouse love story!

Midsummer will find us at the Crown & Goose Gastropub in Knoxville's Old City section for our annual outing to lubricate the tonsils and plan our Plum programs for the next year.

The Mottled Oyster Club / Jellied Eels

(San Antonio and South Texas)

Contact: Lynette Poss



AFTER READING Sebastian Faulks's *Jeeves and the Wedding Bells* just for fun, the gang decided to follow the suggestion of member Liz (Ms. Postlethwaite) Davenport to include one prize winner from the Bollinger Everyman Wodehouse Prize on our reading list each year. We are not expecting to find a new Wodehouse, of course, but we thought it would be fun to explore some of the comic literature out there, in the spirit of this prize.

We would love to have any Wodehouse fans living near or visiting San Antonio, Texas, join us on the first Wednesdays of each month at the La Cantera Barnes and Noble, where we meet to discuss a Wodehouse book. We have also read and discussed a couple of

Wodehouse biographies, but the number one allure of the get-togethers is the opportunity to chat and share our love of the Wodehousian humor and talent for choosing *le mot juste*.

Two of the Mottled Oysters are planning to join the convention revels in Pseattle this year. We look forward to making new friends and seeing an old friend or two.

The New England Wodehouse Thingummy Society (NEWTS)

(Boston and New England)

Contact: John Fahey

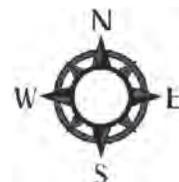


[Ed.—See page 13 for the NEWTS report.]

The Northwodes

(St. Paul, Minneapolis, and vicinity)

Contact: Kristine Fowler



The hatted half of the Northwodes on Derby Day

THE HEIGHTS THEATER, with its vintage decor and pre-movie organ entertainment, provided a capital Northwodes field trip by showing *Rosalie* in March. We were agog to see the film Brian Taves described in *P. G. Wodehouse and Hollywood* as "the most frustrating assignment Wodehouse received," with the new dialogue he wrote co-opted by the producer, who changed it just enough to take the credit. Yet, buoyed by the talents of Nelson Eddy, Eleanor Powell, Ray Bolger, and Cole Porter, it turned into "one of the 20 top box-office films of 1937." Indeed, we found it popcorn-worthy, with the over-the-top drum dance sequence and all (though period-movie maven Richard Rames wondered, "What were they thinking?"). Kris Fowler got to put in a plug

for TWS during the introductory remarks, as well as the Cazalet/McNair and Jette/Chouinard CDs containing Wodehouse lyrics from the successful stage version: “Why Must We Always Be Dreaming?” and “Oh, Gee! Oh, Joy!”

The traditional Derby Day gathering on May 2 in downtown St. Paul drew an excellent crowd. We welcomed first-time attendees John Cleveland and Jake Endres and newly-returned-to-Minnesota James Rabe. We took full advantage of the many fried appetizers on Burger Moe’s menu, and nobody looked askance when we sang along with “My Old Kentucky Home”—although we did have to explain a mint julep to the server. Holly Windle’s and Joan Rabe’s stylish hats were pressed into service for the drawing of the buck-a-horse bets, since the green feather boa and dangling My Little Ponies adorning Maria’s chapeau would have trailed through everybody’s cocktails. Debate ensued as to whether Itsaknockout or Mr. Z (as in Zizzbaum) was the more Wodehousean name, which went for naught as lucky Mike Engstrom drew the favorite, American Pharoah, and consequently raked in the oof. Speculation now turns to whether next year’s Derby Day should return to the Lexington’s clubby atmosphere once it reopens or to Burger Moe’s big-screen TVs. Mary McDonald, the courteous and efficient organizer, may be trusted to sort it all out.

The Orange Plums

(Orange County, California)

Contact: Lia Hansen



The Pale Parabolites

(Toronto and vicinity)

Contact: George Vanderburgh



The Perfecto-Zizzbaum Motion Picture Corporation

(Los Angeles and vicinity)

Contact: Karen Shotting



THE PERFECTO-ZIZZBAUM Motion Picture Corporation meets regularly both online and at various physical locations in the Los Angeles area. Our Facebook group (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/373160529399825/>) now has 38 members, including locals and folks from various locations in the U. S. as well as from Sweden, England, India, and Japan.

Don’t have a chapter in your area? Or don’t feel like leaving home for a Wodehouse discussion? Join us! Unlike PGWnet (another fun online site, which is also highly recommended for all TWS members), Facebook allows photo uploads, and our members post all sorts of interesting things related to our latest book. So, if you’re on FB, please feel free to check us out. It’s Liberty Hall.

Our regular terra firma meetings are on the second Sunday of each month at 12:30 PM, generally at Book Alley, 1252 East Colorado Blvd, Pasadena, California. Join our Facebook or Yahoo! Group (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/PZMPCo>) for meeting information, reminders, and occasional changes of venue.

In March we discussed a perennial favorite, “Pig-hoo-o-o-ey!” Our affable group exchanged lots of pig information and, of course, did a few pig calls, including Fred Patzel’s actual call—based upon the musical notation provided by the ever-helpful *Plum Lines* in an article in the Summer 2000 issue. (It was a pale imitation of the mighty Fred’s voice, and I can’t quite reach a high F these days, but I gave it the good old college try.) All good fun, as usual.

In April, Bill deviated from his usual scone contribution to the browsing and sluicing—and brought champagne, caviar, and crêpes suzette for everyone. Quite the feast! Our Orange County member, Rowan, joined us again after a bit of a hiatus, and we welcomed new member John as we made a literary visit to Valley Fields.

In May we convened at Chado Tea Room in Little Tokyo to discuss a Hollywood novel, *The Old Reliable* (serialized in *Collier’s* as *Phipps to the Rescue*). For those of us who have made the pious pilgrimage to Wodehouse’s former residence on Angelo Drive in Beverly Hills, the scenes set on Alamo Drive ring very true, even to this day.

June’s readings are “The Clicking of Cuthbert” and two Mulliner favorites, “The Story of Webster” and “Cats Will Be Cats.”

In July and August we’re planning to do some comparative reading (checking out some of the plots and plot lines that Plum recycled so effectively), with “George and Alfred” (which can be found in *Plum Pie* or *The World of Mr. Mulliner*), “The Good Angel,” “Rallying Round Old George” (a Reggie Pepper story), and *A Damsel in Distress*.

The Pickering Motor Company

(Detroit and vicinity)

Contact: Elliott Milstein



The Pittsburgh Millionaires Club
(Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania)



MEMBERS OF THE Pittsburgh Millionaires Club met on March 22 to read aloud “The Great Sermon Handicap.” This led to a spirited and ill-informed discussion on the mysteries of handicapping, ante-post betting, S.P., and betting and oddsmaking in general. Despite the shrewd deployment of several smartphones, we remained at sea on these matters and concluded that Bertie is not such a dim bulb as one might think if he can keep track of potential gains and losses of his bets in a situation in which the odds are lengthening and shortening rapidly.

We’ll gather again on Flag Day (June 14), perhaps to explore the mysteries of an Oldest Member story, though, unlike millionaires in general, none of us play golf and we wouldn’t know a mashie from a niblick if one bit us on the leg.

The Plum Crazyies

(Harrisburg, Pennsylvania and vicinity)

Contact: Betty Hooker



ON APRIL 12, 2015, the Plum Crazyies met at the home of Andrea (Sweetie Carlisle) Jacobsen and Bob (Oily Carlisle) Rains. Following a formidable brunch that included homemade corn muffins, bacon, mushroom scrambled eggs, and fruit and lemon curd, members engaged in a spirited competition testing their knowledge of Wodehouse characters. In advance of the meeting, members were asked to identify two characters and provide a series of clues in the form of statements the characters might say about themselves. Harry Booker was awarded a solar-powered owl for his winning score. Andrea took second place, followed by Tom and Betty Hooker in third. Bob discussed plans for the upcoming TWS convention and noted that chapters are invited to submit bids for the 2017 convention by July 15.

The Portland Greater Wodehouse Society (PGWs)

(Portland, Oregon and vicinity)

Contact: Carol James



The Right Honourable Knights of Sir Philip Sidney
(Amsterdam, The Netherlands)

Contact: Jelle Otten

WITH CHAMPAGNE glasses full, the Knights commemorated the fortieth anniversary of the death of P. G. Wodehouse. This year our meeting was on the day of the anniversary, February 14. Unfortunately, the meeting was rather short due to the room being double-booked with a wedding celebration.

The meeting had the usual February scheme (the cock-and-bull story contest and the reading of a favorite Wodehouse excerpt by one of our members), with the addition of the presentation of yet another postage stamp with a picture of P. G. Wodehouse on it. After that ceremony, it was Lucas Viruly’s turn to read, and he chose to read from *Pigs Have Wings*.

The cock-and-bull contest attracted several competitors. Rob Sander told a somewhat suspicious “real-life story” of the character Gussie Fink-Nottle. Peter Nieuwenhuizen told another story about two boys from Utrecht, The Netherlands, who allegedly wrote a letter to P. G. Wodehouse in the 1950s, asking PGW whether the Dutch word *hert* is the correct translation of *prawn*. (The Dutch word actually means *deer* in English.) In Peter’s version, Wodehouse wrote an answer, and the fun continued.

Jelle Caro’s story won the contest. As a real Mr. Mulliner, Jelle claimed that throwing bread rolls was not originally a Drones Club idea. It was invented in Lambert’s Café, a restaurant somewhere in the state of Missouri in the USA. Lambert’s Café is also known as the “Home of the Thrown Rolls.” On a trip through the U.S., Jelle visited another Lambert’s Café, in Foley, Alabama. Jelle said that when he visited the gents in this special restaurant, he saw graffiti carved in the wooden wall in the men’s room, saying, “Wodehouse was here!” It was a great story, and Jelle got his choice of prizes: a cigar or a coconut.

The Knights’ next meetings of 2015 are scheduled for June 6 and October 17, each at 1 PM. The meeting place is still Mulliner’s Wijnlokaal, Lijnbaansgracht 266-267 in Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

The Size 14 Hat Club

(Halifax, Nova Scotia)

Contact: Jill Robinson



Oh, Kay! and Oh, Boy! by Musicals Tonight!

THE BROADWAY SPECIAL will enjoy to the hilt the 18th and last season for the Musicals Tonight! theatre company, which has given us so many wonderful renditions of Wodehouse musicals in the last eleven years. Mel Miller, the man behind Musicals Tonight!, is giving us two PGW shows in the 2015–2016 final season: *Oh, Kay!* and *Oh, Boy!* The Broadway Special plans to attend a Saturday matinee of each show: *Oh, Kay!* on October 17, 2015, and *Oh, Boy!* on April 2, 2016. Tickets go on sale after Labor Day; buy as quickly as possible thereafter as the theatre is tiny and fills up quickly.



Oh, Kay! (October 13–25, 2015) has music by George Gershwin, lyrics by Ira Gershwin, and a book by Guy Bolton and P. G. Wodehouse. The plot involves the adventures of the Duke of Durham, an English bootlegger, and his sister, Lady Kay. *Oh, Kay!* was named for Kay Swift, and the leading male character is named Jimmy after her husband, Jimmy Warburg. It opened on Broadway in 1926, starring Gertrude Lawrence and Victor Moore, and ran for 256 performances. Songs include “Clap Yo’ Hands,” “Someone to Watch Over Me,” “Do, Do, Do,” and “Fidgety Feet.”



Oh, Boy! (March 22–April 3, 2016) has music by Jerome Kern with book and lyrics by Guy Bolton and P. G. Wodehouse. After opening in 1917, it was the third-longest running musical of its day. George and Lou Ellen return home after eloping. She goes to get her family’s approval, and he lets Jackie climb in his window to avoid arrest. Confusion abounds.



More Pseattle Tours!



AN ADDITIONAL guided tour has been added for Psmith in Pseattle. A new Anglers' Rest member has been a vendor at Pike Place Market for many years, and she has stepped forward to give an insider tour. The Pike Place Market is Seattle's #1 tourist destination, and is one of the oldest continuously operated public farmers' markets in the United States. From produce to antiques, with a rich and varied history, Pike Place Market can take years to explore—but our trusty guide will get you in and out in a short time and will cover origins, ghosts, and Market secrets. And yes, she'll show you the original Starbucks! Get ready for Rachel the Pig, tasty mini-donuts, flying fish, fresh jams and honey, apple chips, gorgeous flowers, artisans and buskers, and so much more.

The current tour schedule (which may be adjusted if the need arises) is:

Thursday, 10 AM: your choice of a ferry trip, Pike Place Market, or Seattle Center

Thursday, 1:30 PM: your choice of Seattle Center or Pike Place Market

Friday, 10 AM: your choice of a ferry trip, Pike Place Market, or Seattle Center

No tours are scheduled Friday afternoon unless cricket is cancelled.

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Proofing Editor: Elin Woodger

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We appreciate your articles, research, Quick Ones, tales of My First Time, and other observations. Send them to Gary Hall via e-mail or snail mail at the addresses above. Deadlines are February 1, May 1, August 1, November 1. If you have something that might miss the deadline, let me know and we'll work something out.

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