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## Lieutenant Colonel Norman T. P. Murphy May 20, 1933–October 18, 2016

BY DAVID LANDMAN

IT IS DISTRESSING to report that one of the mainstays of The Wodehouse Society, Norman Murphy, died on October 18 of complications following a stroke. I stare at this dismal sentence and find it hard to digest. And then it occurs to me—as I sense his scrupulous presence—that I don't really know what a mainstay is. He would have, though—as well as every other mast, sail, and item of tackle on an eighteenth-century ship of the line. So change the metaphor: Norman Murphy, the *dean* of The Wodehouse Society, has died. More accurate, perhaps, but no less dismal.

Even the bare facts of his life as they are recounted in the splendid obituaries published in the October 20 *London Times* and *Daily Telegraph* (<http://tinyurl.com/ntpm-times> and <http://tinyurl.com/ntpm-teleg>) evoke the sense of an extraordinary man. I recommend readers view these touching portraits; in this article I shall just note a few highlights of his life and relate some anecdotes—many from personal experience—that I hope will convey the spirited dash of his personality and what it was like to be in the presence of a man of such intense energy and unquenchable curiosity about everything in the world.

Born in London in 1933 to physician Thomas Murphy and his wife, Norah, Irish emigrants from County Cork, Norman told me that one of his earliest memories was being wakened by his mother to watch in the distance the flames consuming the Crystal Palace (then located in southeast London). Somehow, to me, Norman's recollection of this moment has always served to connect him with earlier, more gracious times, and in many ways he maintained their decencies. For example, he taught me that it was the custom to doff one's hat in respect when passing the Cenotaph, dedicated originally to the fallen in World War I and now Britain's national war memorial commemorating all the fallen. Crowded as Whitehall always was, I noticed we were the only men to do so.

Norman was educated at Wimbledon College by Jesuits, from whom he undoubtedly acquired his scholarly bent and proficiency in Latin. An anecdote is related in the *Times* obituary that, when walking in Whitehall one



*Norman explains the Wodehouse regalia tea bell  
at one of the biennial conventions of The Wodehouse Society*

day, Norman came upon a group of Asian gentleman who were obviously lost. They did not speak English, but having ascertained that they were priests, Norman shepherded them on an impromptu tour of London, speaking the only language they had in common: Latin! For a brief time he actually taught Latin (and history) at the private Dragon School in Oxford. He also sampled life as a typewriter salesman for IBM, but, having no vocation for either occupation, soon realized that his destined niche in life was to be found in the military.

He had done his national service with the Green Howards, a line-infantry regiment, and in 1959 he rejoined the army and served in Aden, Germany, Northern Ireland, and Egypt. Later, when assigned by the Ministry of Defense to conduct a one-man study of logistics for NATO, he wrote the first NATO logistics handbook. Much of this work involved the creation of scenarios in the event of nuclear war with Russia, and so nightmarishly draining was this work that he sought relief in visiting the former residences of P. G. Wodehouse, his favorite writer, and interviewing the current residents.

Thus began the obsession that was to occupy Norman for the rest of his life. He set out to refute critics, such as Evelyn Waugh and George Orwell, who claimed the settings and characters of Wodehouse's novels were woven purely out of the author's romantic imagination. Norman sought to confute those opinions by demonstrating the actuality of those very settings and characters. Diligently, he spent untold hours visiting sites likely to have been the models for the novels' locations and poring over contemporary newspapers, Somerset House records, *Burke's Peerage*, and *Kelly's* county directories. Among his many discoveries was Robinson, a "walking *Encyclopædia Britannica*" in

the person of a butler whom Wodehouse had at one time employed. Another triumph, after visiting and weighing the pros and cons of many of England's castles and stately homes, was to establish Sudeley Castle in Gloucestershire as the original of Blandings Castle itself, while Lord Emsworth's cherished estate was based on that of Weston Park in Staffordshire, just over the county boundary from Shropshire.

Perhaps Norman's greatest bit of sleuthing found the pig that had resided in less-than-bijou accommodations at Hunstanton Hall and was the inspiration for Plum's Empress of Blandings. Not only did he identify the very pig Wodehouse had seen, but he managed to obtain her photograph from her one-time keeper.



*The Hunstanton Hall pig who was the model for the Empress*

Of his many books on Wodehouse, Norman's crowning achievement was the two-volume *A Wodehouse Handbook* (2006), which explains just about everything anybody could ever wish to know about Wodehouse and his works. Beyond its Wodehousian context, the book stands as a social history of the first order about Edwardian life and manners.

Many members of TWS will have known Norman in his role as the grand marshal of his famous Wodehouse Walks, during which his fellow Plummiess also received instruction on his other great passion—London. Smartly turned out in tweed jacket and soft fedora, this agile, wiry man would quick-march his flock through London traffic using his tightly wound umbrella—the Edwardian version of today's laser pointer—to indicate features of interest. Bounding up the front steps of private homes and staid businesses that had the momentary misfortune of being historic, he would deliver a rapid-fire monologue on their significance. This one had rooms paneled from an oak beam stored since the time of the Conqueror; that one retained, affixed alongside its door, the brackets for the flambeau used before the streets were lit by gas. And then, double-time all to the next point of interest!



*One of Norman's Wodehouse walks, with Tamaki Morimura and friends*

Walking alone with him through the streets of London was a similar experience, except for his occasional forays into construction dumpsters that promised shards of the past. I remember one instance at Temple Bar when he seemed to disappear. I thought I had lost him forever, but he eventually resurfaced holding a bit of plaster that he triumphantly proclaimed as Tudor. It was on that particular walk (of over six hours) that he demonstrated his theory that every monument in London contained some flaw—from the statue of Boadicea at the northern end of Westminster Bridge who holds no reins to control her ramping team of horses, to the sphinxes facing *toward* the obelisk on Victoria Embankment instead of *outward* as guardians like Sir Edwin Landseer’s lions at the fountain in Trafalgar Square. And, speaking of Trafalgar Square, the next time you are there note that the roof lines of the buildings that enclose the square are of more or less the same height. Credit Lt. Col. Murphy as one of those instrumental in convincing the city fathers not to destroy this visual unity by permitting the erection of a multistory building on the square.

I have before me as I write a shard of brownish masonry contained in an old matchbox. Norman gave it to me with the following note that I include in full as it gives a sense of the clipped flavor of Norman’s speech, as well as the vast erudition he carried in memory.

Dear David, First London Bridge, wooden on brick/tile foundations built by Romans prob about 130 A.D. Post-Roman versions didn’t do so well and Olaf & Ethelred burnt it down in 1014 (hence “London Bdge is falling down”). Then in 1176 they started to build the famous one, with houses on it. That lasted till Rennie built his in 1823–31. That’s the one sold to USA (Lake Havasu City) in 1967/8. I just “happened” to go along at lunchtime, watching them dismantling the balustrades and found they weren’t solid but full of fill-in rubble. And much of the rubble was just like this, Roman/Saxon tiles, bricks, recycled (why bother to tow new rubble up-river when you’ve got the old Roman foundations you’ve just pulled out?). Not a particularly good piece of firing, I’m afraid, but who was going to notice underwater? Love to Elizabeth, Norman.

In his grief following the death of his wife Charlotte in 1999, Norman found solace in the many letters that passed between him and Elin Woodger, at that time president of TWS. In 2001, at the Philadelphia



*In 2008, Norman won third place in the Novice Pig Handlers competition at the Royal County of Berkshire Show*

convention, Norman and Elin announced that they were married, and the spontaneous upwelling of joy at the news was a tribute to two people held dear by all assembled. In fact, despite Norman’s death, he and Elin will remain united forever in the hearts and memories of their friends. *Requiescat in pace.*



*Norman adds his grace and style to the dance floor at the 2007 TWS convention in Providence.*

# Visit the Wodehouse-Linde

BY MARTIN BREIT

THE YEAR 2017 is the centenary of Wodehouse publications in Germany and there will be a unique event there that may be of interest to Wodehouseans.

As you read in the Autumn 2015 issue of *Plum Lines*, there's a tree of special interest in the park of Degenershausen, that rural refuge where Plum spent two summers after he was released from internment as a German POW. He was the guest of the Bodenhausen family and was able to reunite with Ethel, his work, and his dog. He often used to sit underneath a little-leaf linden, situated by itself on the meadow facing the manor house, perhaps pondering his plots.



*The Wodehouse linden tree*

Now, more than seventy years later, this tree is to be officially named “Wodehouse-Linde” in a celebration that will include the unveiling of an information board about Plum’s time at this special place. It will also be possible to obtain original cuttings from that tree, so that anyone can plant their own genuine Wodehouse-Linde at their home.

As Degenershausen is only a stone’s throw away from many remarkable places, a visit to the event is worth considering. There’s Quedlinburg, one of Europe’s most remarkable medieval cities, with more than 1300 timber-framed buildings; there’s Burg Falkenstein just round the corner, the magnificent medieval castle that Plum also visited; and the Harz mountains. And, of course, the beautiful park with the Wodehouse-Linde tree, now run by volunteers, is a wonderful spot to remember our favorite author.

The event will most likely take place in the second half of May 2017, at Degenershausen 8, 06543 Falkenstein/Harz, Germany. More details will be available soon (and we’ll share those in the Spring *Plum Lines*).

You can find Degenershausen online at <http://www.landschaftspark-degenershausen.de>.

# Honus à la Wodehouse

IN THE Summer 2016 *Plum Lines*, there was an item about Wodehouse cigarette cards titled “I’ll Trade You My 1909 Honus Wagner Card!” This prompted Karen Shotting and Neil Midkiff to tell us that Plum referred to Honus Wagner (as “Hans Wagner”) in the short story “The Pitcher and the Plutocrat.”

Honus Wagner (1874–1955) was the star of the 1909 World Series for the Pittsburgh Pirates, outbating Ty Cobb of the Detroit Tigers by .333 to .231, and stealing six bases, a Series record. He was christened Johannes Peter Wagner by his German-born parents, and his family nickname of Hans was sometimes used during his professional career.

“Honus” should be pronounced “honn-us” not “hone-us”; it’s just an Americanized spelling of the last two syllables in the German name “Johannes.”

You can read the Wodehouse story on the Madame Eulalie website at <http://tinyurl.com/zb3rxhf>.

# Turpitude, Wodehousean Style

CAROLINE GOTTSCHALK was reading the September 25, 2016, issue of the *New York Times Book Review* and came across an interesting reference to P. G. Wodehouse in Terrence Rafferty’s review of Carl Hiaasen’s new book, *Razor Girl*:

Hiaasen’s dry, air-conditioned style is so understated and precise that it seems, at times, practically British. Consider, for instance, this elegant sentence: “Most of the night log was routine Key West turpitude—drunken fist fights, inept dope deals, a handful of auto burglaries, one halfhearted domestic assault (the husband was struck with a bag of frozen snapper chum), and seven unsolved cases of public urination.” You laugh first at the use of the old-fashioned, churchy-sounding word “turpitude” in this grubby context, then at the cunningly deployed adjectives “inept” and “halfhearted,” and finally at the brilliant “unsolved,” which opens up wide vistas of law-enforcement futility. This is a sentence that might have been written by Kingsley Amis, Michael Frayn, or even P. G. Wodehouse—except, of course, for the actual content, which is as American as a bag of frozen snapper chum.

# It Wasn't a Dark and Stormy Night: A Study of the Openings of the Novels of P. G. Wodehouse

BY ELLIOTT MILSTEIN

*Elliott is one of the most popular and entertaining speakers at our conventions. He presented this talk at the recent TWS gathering in Seattle in 2015.*

THE IDEA of doing this particular talk in Seattle began, if I remember rightly, over breakfast with Tom Smith at the Union League of Chicago as we were discussing what the Saturday program would look like for the 2015 convention, and it began to dawn on me, as I pronged a jovial forkful of eggs and b., that the devious major had earmarked a half-hour segment of the riveting talks for yours truly and, while I do enjoy reading, writing, and speaking about Wodehouse, the amount of time involved in doing a convention talk properly is a tad daunting when one contemplates reviewing the works of a man whose total lifetime output includes seventy novels, some 200 short stories, and over forty plays and musicals, not to mention extraneous song lyrics, essays, articles, and other *morceaux* generated in between and, given the exigencies of my busy life, whatever topic I chose would have to require very little research. I could, of course, choose some minor topic like, say, “The Accuracy of the Characterization of Swans in ‘Jeeves and the Impending Doom’” or “Ukridge and the Theory of Supply Side Economics,” either of which would, naturally, make all the research necessary for such a paper but a single-evening affair, but would, I fear, be a shade narrow and pedantic and, besides, from the very beginning of my interest in Wodehouse criticism, I have rather eschewed that branch of study which combs an author’s works for minutiae of limited interest and have chosen rather to look upon the oeuvre as a whole, trying to divine patterns, developments, and motifs common throughout, so, in composing this current effort, I was not about to abandon the habit of a lifetime: a habit, I may add, which bagged me an A+ on my thesis at the University of Toronto, a little effort some of you may know called “The Growth of Sweetness and Light—a Study of the Novels of P. G. Wodehouse,” an accomplishment of, admittedly, some forty years ago, but on which I have, nonetheless, successfully dined out ever since.

All of this, as I say, whizzed through my febrile brain in an instant and even before I sliced a second piece of sausage I remembered that I had been in this situation some time before: some 25 years ago (a time when I was

leading an even more frenetic life than I do today), flush from my popular first talk at Kalamazoo College, I had rashly put my name forward as a speaker at the New York convention. In that instance I found the solution to my time problem by deciding to do an analysis of the openings of Wodehouse novels. While it might be a tad time-consuming, I reasoned at the time, to read the opening sentences of every Wodehouse book, it certainly involved much less labor than rereading the entire canon. A quarter-century older and wiser, this time I realized I could significantly improve upon this efficiency by simply doing the same talk again. After all, the number of people who were in New York in 1991 that would also be in Seattle in 2015 must be so tiny in number as to be statistically irrelevant and those that do show up so long in the tooth as to have completely forgotten it. Besides, who among the few steady and returning conventioners could not benefit from a rehash of such scholarly research, especially as it added rather significantly to my original thesis, a work of such immense erudition that the imagination boggles in contemplating that it has faded into obscurity in a mere four decades?

Those of you “privileged” to have read my ground-breaking thesis will remember that I divided Wodehouse’s writing career into three periods, which I quite cleverly called Early, Middle, and Late. The Early Period, from 1900 to 1923, is marked first by what Richard Osborne calls “the apprenticeship years” using the boys’ school stories to learn his craft and, in the second half, what I call his “years of search,” breaking into the adult market as he cast about for a style or form or voice, as it were, all his own. I think he found his style in *Leave It to Psmith*. From the completion of this work through the composition of the first third of *Full Moon*, I call the Middle Period. Some call this period his vintage years because the plots of the novels he wrote at this time are so complex and his prose so rich and full-bodied. In the 1920s and 1930s Wodehouse was clearly writing at the height of his powers. His narrative voice is very much like Psmith’s: fruity, loquacious, and tinged with a bemused insouciance. After *Full Moon*, in the Late Period, the style becomes leaner, less complex, a little more jargonistic. I think of the Late Period narrative voice as Bertie Wooster’s. Also, the Late Period is marked with an interest in breaking the

rules he set up in the Middle Period, an exploration of new patterns; a period of experimentation and change. Could one, for example, imagine even Bertie Wooster joining a club like Bachelors Anonymous in 1932? And only in the postwar Wodehouse world could we meet a Mortimer Bayliss or Howard Saxby.

As I pursued my admittedly truncated research, I found that the opening lines of each Wodehouse novel tended to follow the same pattern that his plot structure, characters, imagery, and narrative voice did: Early Period—search and growth; Middle Period—standard rich Wodehouse style with a Psmithian voice; Late Period—change and experimentation, crisper style with a Wooster voice.

Besides, it is quite proper to submit the openings of the works of a popular author to such scrutiny. Let us never forget that, while a master craftsman dedicated to his art, Wodehouse was invariably concerned about his sales figures. I always thought he wrote from the heart when, in *Uncle Fred in the Springtime*, he says:

Shakespeare describes the poet's eye as rolling in a fine frenzy from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven, and giving to airy nothingness a local habitation and a name, but in practice you will find that one corner of that eye is generally glued on the royalty returns.

None knew better than good ol' Plum that when a member of the general public goes to the store to purchase a book, he generally looks at the flyleaf and then reads the first sentence or so before deciding to buy or not to buy. This was especially the case in the Middle Period when so many of his books were initially serialized and it was so important to grab the reader as she flipped through her *Saturday Evening Post* or *Collier's*, competing as he was not just with other writers but with the advertisements as well.

So in writing, rewriting, and polishing his works, Wodehouse certainly gave especial care to that opening, hoping to have something to grab his prospective customer and persuade the honest fellow to part with some hard-earned cash for the latest Bertie or Blandings story, thereby keeping our favorite author in those two basic necessities of life: tobacco and golf-balls.

Bill Townend makes this point in *Performing Flea*: "I had always thought that if there was one thing he excelled in more than another it was the way he began his stories. As a reader I felt that my attention and interest were captured from the very first sentences."

Townend then quotes the opening page of *The Luck of the Bodkins*, which others (Richard Osborne among

them, I believe) have said is Wodehouse's very best opening sentence. While certainly a finely constructed sentence and effective in keeping one's attention and making him want to read further, I personally think it was his second best, but it is still a good place to begin:

Into the face of the young man who sat on the terrace of the Hotel Magnifique at Cannes there had crept a look of furtive shame, the shifty, hangdog look which announces that an Englishman is about to talk French.

*The Luck of the Bodkins* is, of course, a vintage Wodehouse, written in 1935, the heart of the Middle Period, and I think we know right from this opening that we are in for a treat.

But I also think the sentence misses something in that there is a natural pause after "furtive shame" that breaks the flow. Other than that, however, it is quite delightful. Notice how the first half of the sentence is so like a camera reverse zoom: It begins with a tight close-up of a face and pulls out so we see that it is the face of a young man, then we see that he is sitting, then pulling out more we see that he is on a terrace; further, the Hotel Splendide, and now the camera is all the way back and we see the coastline of France and realize we are in Cannes; suddenly now we are back at the face and recognize the look of furtive shame. That's quite a good expression, "furtive shame." Not the open shame of a man who has already done something wrong, but the furtive shame of someone who is about to do so. It, along with hangdog look, is also a nice description of how just about every male in this story looks from beginning to end, from Monty Bodkin, here about to talk French and later trying to convince both Ambrose Tennyson and Gertrude Butterwick that he isn't involved with Lottie Blossom; to Ikey Llewellyn, the most incompetent smuggler on earth; to Reggie Tennyson, about to start work in Montreal but about as suited for labor as Bertie Wooster is for matrimony; and finally to Ambrose Tennyson who, through no fault of his own, is not Alfred, Lord Tennyson.

So here we have a nice complex sentence that sets the scene, amuses us, and gives us a good central image for all the male characters of the novel. Truly the work of a mature Wodehouse. Notice too how the sentence flows in a nice rhythm and then hits a spondee foot as the joke comes at the end.

Parenthetically, there is another thing about this sentence that I find especially appealing. We know that Wodehouse himself spent much time on the French coast and was certainly called upon to "parlez-vous" a

bit. So we are aware that he himself has been tortured by the exact emotion that is wringing the soul of Monty Bodkin in this opening sentence.

Of course, such delightful bons mots as this did not flow easily from the pen of young Wodehouse. I know that Wodehouse expressed dismay at critics or scholars casting too close an eye at his early works; he wrote to Bill Townsend complaining about George Orwell:

He is apt to take some book I wrote in 1907 and draw all sorts of portentous conclusions from it. Dash it all, in 1907 I was practically in swaddling clothes and it was extremely creditable to me that I was able to write at all.

Be that as it may, it is still a worthwhile experience glancing back if only briefly at those early years. However, out of deference to Wodehouse's feelings, I will keep it short.

During his apprenticeship, Wodehouse was clearly more interested in getting his pre-adolescent readers into the story as quickly as possible, as this opening from *The Head of Kay's* shows: "When we get licked tomorrow by half-a-dozen wickets," said Jimmy Silver, tilting his chair until the back touched the wall, 'don't say I didn't warn you.'"

Wodehouse said it best: swaddling clothes. Only later in *Mike* does he bother to try to set the stage at all and even then it is done without much panache:

It was a morning in the middle of April, and the Jackson family were consequently breakfasting in comparative silence. The cricket season had not begun, and except during the cricket season they were in the habit of devoting their powerful minds at breakfast almost exclusively to the task of victualling against the labours of the day.

In fact, for the remainder of the Early Period, Wodehouse seems to be torn between getting the reader into the story as quickly as possible and setting the stage properly. He expresses this concern at the opening of his 1919 novel *A Damsel in Distress*. Although Wodehouse was by then an author of stature and experience—having written 17 novels, several of which had been serialized in the *Saturday Evening Post*—he was clearly still having difficulty resolving this dilemma. But at least he feels comfortable enough to let his readers in on it:

Inasmuch as the scene of this story is that historic pile, Belpher Castle, in the county of

Hampshire, it would be an agreeable task to open it with a leisurely description of the place, followed by some notes on the history of the Earls of Marshmoreton, who have owned it since the fifteenth century. Unfortunately, in these days of rush and hurry, a novelist works at a disadvantage. He must leap into the middle of his tale with as little delay as he would employ in boarding a moving tramcar. He must get off the mark with the smooth swiftness of a jack-rabbit surprised while lunching. Otherwise people throw him aside and go out to picture palaces.

As with so many of Wodehouse's stylistic signatures, the answer to this dilemma comes in the composition of *Leave It to Psmith*. While written in the third person, the narrative voice of this novel is very much Psmith's own, and this voice continues to narrate all but the Bertie and Jeeves stories for the next 20 years. Psmith's way out of any dilemma is to mix story or description with humor. I think the beginning of *Leave It to Psmith* can be considered the first truly humorous opening:

At the open window of the great library of Blandings Castle, drooping like a wet sock, as was his habit when he had nothing to prop his spine against, the Earl of Emsworth, that amiable and bone-headed peer, stood gazing out over his domain.

Here we have the stage being set while, but moments away from the story's opening, we are thoroughly entertained by a humorous description of Lord Emsworth. I particularly like that "drooping like a wet sock" image. According to Frances Donaldson, it was Evelyn Waugh who, when challenged to defend his statement that Wodehouse was the Master of English literature, declared, "One has to regard a man as a Master who can produce on average three uniquely brilliant and entirely original similes to every page." With *Leave It to Psmith* we have a beautiful example of such mastery with the opening line.

We have also clearly abandoned any pretension to plausible characterizations, another sign of the Middle Period. Lord Emsworth was, you may remember, in *Something Fresh*, described as "dreamy" and "absent-minded." In this second Blandings story, right from the get-go Wodehouse drops all pretense of Emsworth being realistically senile and has downgraded him to absurdly "bone-headed." And that is significant, for his boneheadedness becomes the key to several plot twists

later on. Wodehouse is now using his openings not just to entertain or set the scene or mood but also to foreshadow.

If complex sentences with a lot of humor can be considered the hallmark of the Middle Period, then Wodehouse gives us this in spades in his first full Middle Period novel, *Sam the Sudden*. Here are the first four sentences. Sit back. This will take a while.

All day long, New York, stewing in the rays of a late August sun, had been growing warmer and warmer; until now, at three o'clock in the afternoon, its inhabitants, with the exception of a little group gathered together on the tenth floor of the Wilmot Building on Upper Broadway, had divided themselves by a sort of natural cleavage into two main bodies—the one crawling about and asking those they met if this was hot enough for them, the other maintaining that what they minded was not so much the heat as the humidity.

The reason for the activity prevailing on the tenth floor of the Wilmot was that a sporting event of the first magnitude was being pulled off there—Spike Murphy, of the John B. Pynsent Export and Import Company, being in the act of contesting the final of the Office Boys' High Kicking Championship against a willowy youth from the Consolidated Eyebrow Tweezer and Nail File Corporation.

The affair was taking place on the premises of the former firm, before a small but select audience consisting of a few stenographers, chewing gum; some male wage slaves in shirt sleeves; and Mr. John B. Pynsent's nephew, Samuel Shotter, a young man of agreeable features, who was acting as referee.

In addition to being referee, Sam Shotter was also the patron and promoter of the tourney; the man but for whose vision and enterprise a wealth of young talent would have lain undeveloped, thereby jeopardizing America's chances should an event of this kind ever be added to the programme of the Olympic Games.

Well. If it weren't for the humor we might think we were deep into something by Henry James. Perhaps he overdid it a little here—certainly no other opening is quite this prolix—but I think that penning sentences of this complexity with a lot of humor is very much the work of a master.

There is, of course, a lot of subjectivity in this deciding what is a good opening and what is less than good, and you may notice a prejudice on my part for complex sentences with humorous squibs or nifties buried within—and I may say that I think such structure is the most compelling opening—but an opening sentence need not be terribly complex nor riotously funny to be considered in my opinion a great opening.

One of my very favorite openings is that of *Summer Lightning*. In fact, it was while contemplating *Summer Lightning* that I realized that there is a bit of a problem defining exactly how many sentences comprise an opening. I tried to make the distinction objective by limiting this review to the opening sentence only, but *Summer Lightning*—and most of the Bertie Wooster books—made that impossible. I don't think the first sentence by itself is always a complete thought and I tried whenever possible to keep the opening short, but intelligible. With *Summer Lightning*, as with others, it is the first paragraph. This novel has a singularly simplistic opening sentence and paragraph, but is no less beautiful for all that:

Blandings Castle slept in the sunshine. Dancing little ripples of heat-mist played across its smooth lawns and stone-flagged terraces. The air was full of the lulling drone of insects. It was that gracious hour of a summer afternoon, midway between luncheon and tea, when Nature seems to unbutton its waistcoat and put its feet up.

Isn't that nice? Once again we have a beautiful metaphor in the fourth sentence with Nature unbuttoning its waistcoat, but otherwise the first paragraph consists of four simple declarative sentences that do nothing but say "summer at Blandings." But can anyone here dream of any other way to say it as perfectly as this?

Here too we have the most common Wodehouse opening image: sunshine. It is interesting to note that of the 70 Wodehouse novels, 11 (or about one out of six) begin with an image of sunlight. Nearly half of the Blandings Castle books begin with sunlight. It is, of course, a fitting image for the master of sweetness and light, and he uses it extensively throughout his writing. So it is not surprising that it is his most common opening image. No "dark and stormy nights" for Wodehouse.

As one would suspect, this image began in the latter half of the Early Period, was used extensively in the Middle Period, and was used less extensively in the Late Period. The first time we see it is in the first Blandings

novel, *Something Fresh*, in 1915, the first novel with an opening that not only sets the stage with the sunshine in London but that utilizes a string of independent clauses to do so. Again, a complex sentence with a little humor:

The sunshine of a fair Spring morning fell graciously upon London town. Out in Piccadilly its heartening warmth seemed to infuse into traffic and pedestrians alike a novel jauntiness, so that 'bus-drivers jested and even the lips of chauffeurs uncurled into not unkindly smiles. Policemen whistled at their posts, clerks on their way to work, beggars approached the task of trying to persuade perfect strangers to bear the burden of their maintenance with that optimistic vim which makes all the difference. It was one of those happy mornings.

There's that nice little joke about the beggars but otherwise nothing terribly exciting here, and the last sentence, rather than capping it off, is really rather weak. All in all, typical of an Early Period piece. Let us compare this with a Middle Period opening of *Heavy Weather*, which also gives us a view of London sun.

Sunshine pierced the haze that enveloped London. It came down Fleet Street, turned to the right, stopped at the premises of the Mammoth Publishing Company, and, entering through an upper window, beamed pleasantly upon Lord Tilbury, founder and proprietor of that vast factory of popular literature, as he sat reading the batch of weekly papers which his secretary had placed on the desk for his inspection.

While perhaps less humorous, I think this is far superior craftsmanship. The sun does not just beam on the town, it takes on a character of its own, taking us into the offices of Lord Tilbury and thereby introducing us to one of the main characters of the novel, amusing us, and dropping us right into the beginning action of the story, the review of periodicals which will ultimately lead us to reading Monty Bodkin's magnum opus, "Uncle Woggly to His Chicks."

This opening can be contrasted with the opening to *Bill the Conqueror*, which, though published after 1923, was written almost entirely before the publication of *Leave It to Psmith* and, for all intents and purposes, is an Early Period piece. Here too we have an introduction to the main action in the very same office with the very same character but much less cleverly done:

With a sudden sharp snort which, violent though it was, expressed only feebly the disgust and indignation seething within him, Sir George Pyke laid down the current number of *Society Spice* and took up the desk-telephone.

Typical of the Early Period, it achieves only one objective—it gets us into the story. Late enough to be written with a strong ear for sound and cadence (again, that spondee beat at the beginning of the sentence), but lacking the cleverness of having the sun introduce the character to us.

Perhaps Wodehouse himself noticed how often he used the image of sunlight and consciously chose to open a new era of writing by switching to moonlight for his central image in *Full Moon*. But . . . probably not.

Still it is a pleasant irony that the first novel of the Late Period, that period of experimentation and change, is the only novel to begin after nightfall and it is the reflected rather than the direct rays of the sun which introduce us to the characters.

The refined moon which served Blandings Castle and district was nearly at its full, and the ancestral home of Clarence, ninth earl of Emsworth, had for some hours now been flooded by its silver rays. They shone on turret and battlement; peeped respectfully in upon Lord Emsworth's sister, Lady Hermione Wedge, as she creamed her face in the Blue Room; and stole through the open window of the Red Room next door, where there was something really worth looking at—Veronica Wedge, to wit, Lady Hermione's outstandingly beautiful daughter, who was lying in bed staring at the ceiling and wishing she had some decent jewellery to wear at the forthcoming County Ball. A lovely girl needs, of course, no jewels but her youth and health and charm, but anybody who had wanted to make Veronica understand that would have had to work like a beaver.

Later on, Wodehouse returns to the sun to introduce his characters, in *Service with a Smile*, and, rather than insinuating a roll-call as he does in *Full Moon*, he deliberately calls our attention to it.

The morning sun shone down on Blandings Castle, and the various inmates of the ancestral home of Clarence, ninth Earl of Emsworth, their breakfasts digested, were occupying themselves in their various ways. One may as

well run through the roster just to keep the record straight.

And this he proceeds to do, over the next two paragraphs, introducing us to each of the characters in turn.

But by and large in the Late Period, Wodehouse is less concerned with a clever or finely crafted opening. Once again, he is ready to get down to the story and not waste any time grabbing the reader. Perhaps he knows that whatever he does he is going to get his 25,000 or so sales from libraries and faithful fans and not much else. Or perhaps it is because, after the war, his novels were rarely serialized and went straight to publication. But clearly, his novels were getting shorter and his openings less stylistic, as these examples show:

***Barmy in Wonderland, 1952:***

J. G. Anderson took up the telephone.  
“Give me the desk,” he said.  
They gave him the desk.

***Ice in the Bedroom, 1961:***

Feeding his rabbits in the garden of his residence, The Nook, his humane practice at the start of each new day, Mr. Cornelius, the house agent of Valley Fields, seemed to sense a presence.

***Company for Henry, 1967:***

Fork in hand and crouched over the stove in the kitchen of his large and inconvenient house, Ashby Hall in the county of Sussex, Henry Paradene had begun to scramble eggs in a frying pan.

I do not mean to denigrate nor disparage these books, in fact I happen to like all of them very much. It is just that in the Late Period, Wodehouse no longer cared how compelling his opening lines were—he just wanted to get on with the story at hand.

So we see that in the main Wodehouse’s novels begin by either dropping us directly into the action, setting the stage, providing atmosphere, or telling us how difficult it is to start a novel (see also *Laughing Gas*). But you will notice that I have omitted any mention of the Bertie Wooster/Jeeves novels.

First of all, Bertie made his debut in the Early Period, but initially he and Jeeves were consigned exclusively to short stories. Now, I have chosen in this review not to deal at all with the short stories, not that they do not have any exciting opening sentences, but because there is a considerably different dynamic at play in a short story.

The author is constrained by space. (Not to mention the fact that this author was constrained by time.) As an example, most Jeeves stories take place in the country at one or another country estates. Typically in a short story we arrive at the location within two pages, while in a novel we’re lucky if we pull up the main drive by the beginning of Chapter 4. In *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit*, for example, the old two-seater doesn’t make it through the gates of Brinkley Court until Chapter 9. So if one is studying how the Master goes about introducing us to a story, it is only fair to concentrate on that genre which really allows him full rein. Hence, as I say, no short stories.

But it is important to realize that all this while he is writing short stories like nobody’s business, and it is in the medium of the short story that Wodehouse hones Bertie’s narrative voice.

Secondly, Bertie, as narrator, does not exactly follow the patterns established in the other novels, and this is also true for the patterns we have discovered in the novel openings. By and large, Bertie begins his stories by telling us about his feelings. The very first Bertie/Jeeves novel—*Thank You, Jeeves*—is typical: “I was a shade perturbed. Nothing to signify, really, but still just a spot concerned.”

Clearly, here we have no complex sentences, no introduction to the narrative. We cannot tell if Bertie is in London or Brinkley Court, having breakfast, smoking a cigarette, or in the bath. All we know is his mood.

*Stiff Upper Lip, Jeeves* achieves the same objective with greater style and panache, as is typical of the Late Period, but still we are centered entirely on Bertie’s mood:

I marmaladed a slice of toast with something of a flourish, and I don’t suppose I have ever come much closer to saying “Tra-la-la” as I did the lathering, for I was feeling in mid-season form this morning.

And this is true, by and large, of all the Bertie novels. The two main exceptions are *Right Ho, Jeeves*, where Bertie begins by going “off the rails” (in Bertie’s words), and *The Code of the Woosters*, which the eminent Wodehouse scholar Curtis Armstrong credits with the biggest laugh right off the bat:

I reached out a hand from under the blankets and rang the bell for Jeeves.  
“Good evening, Jeeves.”  
“Good morning, sir.”

But there is one other Bertie novel which begins with what I consider his most finely constructed opening sentence. And it is fitting, I think, that *Joy in the Morning* have that honor. Usborne described it as Wodehouse's finest novel and it is certainly his most finely crafted novel. We all know the sad circumstances that allowed Wodehouse to polish this particular gem to its purest ray. Well, the glow begins right from the first sentence:

After the thing was all over, when peril had ceased to loom and happy endings had been distributed in heaping handfuls and we were driving home with our hats on the side of our heads, having shaken the dust of Steeple Bumbleigh from our tyres, I confessed to Jeeves that there had been moments during the recent proceedings when Bertram Wooster, though no weakling, had come very near to despair.

Yes, I do like this sentence. I like the fact that it begins with five—count 'em, five—prepositional or independent clauses before we even get to the subject and predicate. I also like that touch of bravado, "Bertram Wooster, though no weakling." I like how he sets the tone by telling us that all is well, but ends the sentence with a note of despair, so we know we have another roller-coaster ride before us. I like how the rhythm is uninterrupted—in fact the first two phrases are almost in meter: "After the thing was all over, when peril had ceased to loom."

And it is only after reading it several times that I noticed that for the first and only time in the entire canon Wodehouse begins his novel at the end of the story and proceeds to flash back.

Now if this were a thesis and not just a paper to be read before the audience pelts one with rotten vegetables, this would be a good time to begin an examination of Wodehouse's endings. I will spare you that. Besides, endings are not nearly as important as beginnings. For one thing, endings don't sell books. And the endings of Wodehouse novels are, I think, a little sad, because, after all, when beginning a Wodehouse, one has so much to look forward to, but when finishing a Wodehouse we are conscious of the fact that the joy is drawing to a close.

So I will leave our study of Wodehouse openings here and let some other soul examine his endings, if anyone should so wish.

I have shown Wodehouse's different approaches to opening his novels. I have compared and contrasted a number of examples of his use of imagery, setting the



*Elliott at the TWS convention in Seattle, 2015*

scene, introducing characters. I have shown how the style of each novel's opening, like so many other aspects of his writing, is affected by the period in which he was writing. And I have shown how Bertie's approach to opening a story, as his approach to just about everything else, differs significantly from the third-person novels.

I have also given you my criteria for an excellent opening. Now I leave you to make your own interpretations and determinations. To that end I have compiled the openings to all seventy novels in a pdf file which is available to each one of you by simply emailing me (please put "Wodehouse Openings" in the subject line). And, if this rather long but hopefully entertaining and informative dissertation is not enough to earn your applause, I would hope that this unexpected and generous offer will.

Empress of Blandings stirred in her sleep and opened an eye. She thought she had heard the rustle of a cabbage-leaf, and she was always ready for cabbage-leaves, no matter how advanced the hour. Something came bowling across the straw, driven by the night breeze.

It was not a cabbage-leaf, only a sheet of paper with writing on it, but she ate it with no sense of disappointment. She was a philosopher and could take things as they came. Tomorrow was another day, and there would be cabbage-leaves in the morning.

The Empress turned on her side and closed her eyes with a contented little sigh. The moon beamed down upon her noble form. It looked like a silver medal.

*Heavy Weather (1933)*

# Reggie Pepper and Bertie Wooster: A Comparison of Two Stories

BY MARK REBER

*Mark's talk to Chapter One might be of interest to all.*

I'D LIKE to highlight some of the ways in which Wodehouse's writing became more masterful over time. I will do this by comparing a Reggie Pepper story from 1913 ("Doing Clarence a Bit of Good" [U.K.] or "Rallying Round Clarence" [U.S.]) with the 1958 Wooster story, "Jeeves Makes an Omelette." These stories have essentially the same plot and share some nearly identical dialogue, but are quite different in their exhibition of PGW's skills.

Wodehouse wrote seven stories about Reggie Pepper, all published from 1911 to 1915 in both British and American magazines in slightly different forms, with an American Reggie in the U.S. texts having some changes to his backstory. All are available online at Madame Eulalie's Rare Plums; links to each story are at <http://tinyurl.com/reg-pep>. All are narrated by Reggie, who in the British versions is a graduate of Oxford, has never worked, lives off family wealth, belongs to a London club and, in two stories, has a valet. Reggie is well-meaning and endeavors to help his friends in their love life for various reasons—to win a girl's affection, to escape an unsuitable engagement, or to preserve a marriage. His narrative voice is chatty. And he has some limitations that he acknowledges. In "Helping Freddie," he writes: "I'm not a flier at literary style, and all that, but I'll get some writer chappie to give the thing a wash and brush up when I'm finished, so that'll be all right."

Without a doubt, Reggie is the predecessor of Bertie. The last year a Reggie Pepper story appeared was 1915, the same year that the first Jeeves and Bertie story was published. In *Who's Who in Wodehouse*, Daniel Garrison calls Reggie "a Bertie Wooster prototype." In his Wodehouse biography, David A. Jasen says that in 1915 "Bertie Wooster made his debut, overran Reggie, and finally took him over."

That Wodehouse actively replaced Reggie with Bertie is most clear from the publication history of two early collections of Jeeves stories. In 1919's *My Man Jeeves*, there were four early Bertie/Jeeves stories and four Reggie Pepper stories. In a 1925 collection, *Carry On, Jeeves!*, six of these stories reappeared in revised form: the four Bertie/Jeeves stories and two that had been told by Reggie. But now these were changed into Bertie/Jeeves stories.

This brings us to the two stories that we will be discussing today. As I indicated, these were written 45 years apart. I will compare them in terms of plot, scenes, narrative voice, and characters.

The two stories have nearly identical plots. In "Doing Clarence a Bit of Good," Reggie receives a letter of invitation to a country house from Elizabeth Yardsley, née Shoolbred, a girl to whom he was once engaged for a week. She lures him down with tall tales about a wonderful billiard table and golf course and tells him that his Oxford pal, her brother Bill, is also visiting. When Reggie arrives, he has some brief foreboding and then is told why he has been summoned. Elizabeth wants him to steal and burn a painting ("Venus") which hangs in the dining room and is oppressive to her sensitive husband, Clarence, a professional artist.

The painting was done by Clarence's father, Matthew Yardsley, an inferior amateur artist, who had given it to the couple as a wedding present. The elder Mr. Yardsley is also staying at the country house. Poor Clarence is losing his grip: he has hallucinations of a "mewing cat." Elizabeth is desperate, and Reggie agrees to do the deed for "Auld Lang Syne, and all that sort of thing."

Venus hangs on the wall next to a painting by Clarence. Reggie does not appreciate the difference between the two paintings' artistic merit. Elizabeth lectures him. She also tells him that the news of a recent theft of a Romney painting from a nearby house should provide a good cover story. All Reggie has to do is leave a window open so that it will appear that the same thieves have taken Venus.

Night comes and Reggie acts. He steals the painting—the wrong one, of course. Bill becomes his collaborator after he briefly knocks Reggie unconscious in a misunderstanding. After they burn the painting in Reggie's room, they hear what sounds like a burglar downstairs. When they investigate, they discover the elder Mr. Yardsley in the act of stealing his own painting. He considers it his masterpiece and deeply regrets ever having parted with it.

When they realize that they have burned Clarence's painting and will have to explain this to Elizabeth, Reggie and Bill avail themselves of a frequent Wodehouse escape route: they hop the 3 AM milk train to London.

"Jeeves Makes an Omelette" has a remarkably similar plot. In this story, Bertie is summoned by phone

to a country house by his Aunt Dahlia, who is a guest of Cornelia Fothergill, a romance novelist, married to Everard Fothergill, an accomplished artist. Aunt Dahlia wants to persuade Cornelia to let her serialize her latest novel in Dahlia's magazine, *Milady's Boudoir*. But she needs to negotiate the right price. Aunt Dahlia suggests to Bertie, "Oh, by the way, when you get here, I've a little something I want you to do for me."

Bertie is full of foreboding as he and Jeeves drive to Hampshire. The situation in the country house is the same as in the Reggie Pepper story: There are the Fothergill artists—amateur father Edward and professional son Everard. Edward's "Venus" hangs in the dining room next to one of Everard's paintings, and Everard suffers from constant exposure to this awful work. He hears mewling cats. And there have been recent thefts of English masterworks from country houses in the neighborhood.

Aunt Dahlia has promised Cornelia that Bertie will steal Venus. In return, Cornelia will give her novel to Dahlia for £500. Bertie initially refuses, but Aunt Dahlia has the power to deny him access to her dinner table and the cuisine of her French chef Anatole.

That night, Jeeves assists Bertie by breaking a dining room window (which he does silently, using brown paper and treacle). Bertie steals the wrong painting. Jeeves helps him burn it and discovers that the signature on the last, flaming fragment is that of Everard Fothergill, the son. Bertie returns to the dining room to complete his mission and steal the Venus, but he collides with the elder Fothergill, who has already cut it from the frame, stealing back his wedding present. He confesses all to Bertie.

After the father departs, Jeeves and Aunt Dahlia come downstairs. Aunt Dahlia is furious. But Jeeves has a solution. If Bertie were to be knocked unconscious in the room with two missing paintings and a broken window, Cornelia Fothergill could be persuaded that he had made a brave attempt to stop the thieves from stealing Everard's painting. Asked by Aunt Dahlia what she should use for this purpose, Jeeves says, "The gong stick suggests itself, madam."

Bertie protests, turns to leave the room, and is knocked out by a blow to the back of his head. When he wakes up in his bed, Aunt Dahlia reports that all is well with Cornelia and quotes Jeeves: "You can't make an omelette without breaking eggs."

Given the similarities of these two plots, what are their differences and what do they suggest about Wodehouse's mature craft?

The first difference of note is how the story is set in motion. Reggie receives a written invitation from

Elizabeth and heads off expecting a weekend of billiards and golf with an old friend. Bertie, however, has an extended telephone conversation with Aunt Dahlia. He immediately knows that something is up—that she has another one of her schemes, something that will surely get him into difficulty. He is full of foreboding, and the reader has a heightened curiosity about what's going to happen. There is an element of mystery, which makes the story more compelling.

Second, though in both stories the narrator is knocked unconscious, in Reggie's tale this is due to a misunderstanding between Reggie and Bill, both asked by Elizabeth to steal the "Venus," and occurs before the painting is stolen. In contrast, in "Jeeves Makes an Omelette," this act is deliberate, takes place after the theft and burning of the painting, and thereby provides a comic ending and resolves the problem of how to convincingly explain to Cornelia why Everard Fothergill's painting has also disappeared, not just his father's. For Reggie, this problem is never really addressed, and he has no choice but to escape on the milk train to London. The ending of the Jeeves story is much more satisfying and fulfills the expectation that poor Bertie was going to suffer somehow. It also provides a delightful (if somewhat sadistic) picture of Jeeves and Aunt Dahlia conspiring together.

We find that there are five distinct scenes in "Doing Clarence a Bit of Good" and ten in "Jeeves Makes an Omelette." Moreover, the dialogue is impressively more complex, livelier, funnier, and more revealing of the characters in the Jeeves story.

For example, take the two scenes in which our narrator comes upon the elder artist stealing his own painting. See how much livelier the scene is in the later story, even though Clarence's father and Everard's father speak some of the same words. (Note how Wodehouse takes Matthew Yeardsley's long monologue from the earlier story and breaks it up into an exchange between Bertie and Edward Fothergill in the later one.) First, from "Doing Clarence a Bit of Good":

"Clarence?" he said, hesitatingly.

"He's in bed," I said.

"In bed! Then he doesn't know? Even now—Young men, I throw myself on your mercy. Don't be hard on me. Listen." He grabbed at Bill, who side-stepped. "I can explain everything—everything."

He gave a gulp.

"You are not artists, you two young men, but I will try to make you understand, make you realize what this picture means to me. I was

two years painting it. It is my child. I watched it grow. I loved it. It was part of my life. Nothing would have induced me to sell it. And then Clarence married, and in a mad moment I gave my treasure to him. You cannot understand, you two young men, what agonies I suffered. The thing was done. It was irrevocable. I saw how Clarence valued the picture. I knew that I could never bring myself to ask him for it back. And yet I was lost without it. What could I do? Till this evening I could see no hope. Then came this story of the theft of the Romney from a house quite close to this, and I saw my way. Clarence would never suspect. He would put the robbery down to the same band of criminals who stole the Romney. Once the idea had come, I could not drive it out. I fought against it, but to no avail. At last I yielded, and crept down here to carry out my plan. You found me.” He grabbed again, at me this time, and got me by the arm. He had a grip like a lobster. “Young man,” he said, “you would not betray me? You would not tell Clarence?”

I was feeling most frightfully sorry for the poor old chap by this time, don’t you know, but I thought it would be kindest to give it him straight instead of breaking it by degrees.

“I won’t say a word to Clarence, Mr. Yeadsley,” I said.

Now, here’s the comparable passage from “Jeeves Makes an Omelette.” By dismantling the long monologue, the scene sparkles:

“Mr. Wooster!” he . . . quavered is, I think, the word. “Thank God you are not Everard!”

Well, I was pretty pleased about that, too, of course. The last thing I would have wanted to be was a small, thin artist with a beard.

“No doubt,” he proceeded, still quavering, “you are surprised to find me removing my Venus by stealth in this way, but I can explain everything.”

“Well, that’s fine, isn’t it?”

“You are not an artist—”

“No, more a literary man. I once wrote an article on ‘What the Well-Dressed Man Is Wearing’ for *Milady’s Boudoir*.”

“Nevertheless, I think I can make you understand what this picture means to me. It was my child. I watched it grow. I loved it. It was part of my life.”

Here he paused, seeming touched in the wind, and I threw in a “very creditable” to keep the conversation going.

“And then Everard married, and in a mad moment I gave it to him as a wedding present. How bitterly I regretted it! But the thing was done. It was irrevocable. I saw how he valued the picture. His eyes at meal times were always riveted on it. I could not bring myself to ask him for it back. And yet I was lost without it.”

“Bit of a mix-up,” I agreed. “Difficult to find a formula.”

“For a while it seemed impossible. And then there was this outbreak of picture robberies in the neighborhood. You heard about those?”

“Yes, Aunt Dahlia mentioned them.”

“Several valuable paintings have been stolen from houses near here, and it suddenly occurred to me that if I were to—er—remove my Venus, Everard would assume that it was the work of the same gang and never suspect. I wrestled with temptation . . . I beg your pardon?”

“I only said ‘At-a-boy!’”

“Oh? Well, as I say, I did my utmost to resist the temptation, but tonight I yielded. Mr. Wooster, you have a kind face.”

For an instant I thought he had said “kind of face” and drew myself up, a little piqued. Then I got him.

“Nice of you to say so.”

“Yes, I am sure you are kind and would not betray me. You will not tell Everard?”

“Of course not, if you don’t want me to. Sealed lips, you suggest?”

“Precisely.”

“Right ho.”

I won’t minimize the humorous features of Reggie’s speech: its chatty tone, exaggeration, and acknowledging of his own intellectual limitations. Some examples are:

“To make you understand the full what-d’you-call-it of the situation, I shall explain just how matters stood with Mrs. Yeadsley and me.”

“By the time I got her letter, the wound [of the broken engagement] had pretty well healed, and I was to a certain extent sitting up and taking nourishment.”

“I’m no Bombardier Wells myself, but in front of Clarence I felt quite a nut.” [*Bombardier Wells was a British heavyweight boxing champion.*]

But as funny, appealing, and distinctive as Reggie's voice is, it pales when compared to Bertie's. In this story we get several wonderful features of Wooster's beloved style and tone. These include:

1) His uncertain use and misuse of words:

"At the time of its inception, if inception is the word I want"

"He is as rich as creosote, as I believe the phrase is"

"What's the word I'm trying to think of? Begins with a 'c.'" Chaotic, that's the one"

2) His cute inclusion of contemporary references:

"Everard put the 64,000-dollar question squarely up to her"

"After a brief pause for station identification, she introduced me to the gang"

3) His sprinkling in of foreign and Latin words:

"I was lying on the *chez* Wooster sofa"

"What Jeeves would call a *nolle prosequi*"

4) His use of literary quotations, often with mention that Jeeves is his source:

"A single glance at the personnel was enough to tell me that I had struck one of those joints where every prospect pleases and only man is vile." (cf. Reginald Heber, "From Greenland's Icy Mountains")

"I looked at her with a wild surmise, silent upon a peak in Darien. Not my own. One of Jeeves's things." (cf. Keats, "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer")

Related to this is Bertie's not realizing it when Jeeves is using a literary quotation:

"No, sir. If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well it were done quickly,' he said, and I remember thinking how neatly he puts these things." (cf. *Macbeth*)

5) Phrases that can only be Bertie's:

"Three human souls were present when I made my entry, each as outstanding a piece of cheese as Hampshire could provide."

"The brow was furrowed and the spirits low."

"To say that aunt and nephew did not take this pretty big would be paltering with the truth."

6) His gratuitous abbreviations:

"The brown p." (paper)

"Whiskey and s."

Finally, we can compare the characters in these two stories. The pairs of father/son artists are virtually identical in both stories. Elizabeth becomes two people: Cornelia Fothergill, who is almost absent from the story, and Aunt Dahlia. Bertie is a stand-in for and improvement on Reggie. Bill is replaced by Jeeves.

And with these changes, what we also get is all the wonderful history, familiar characterizations, and rich, distinct, and inimitable language of the three main players: Bertie, Jeeves, and Aunt Dahlia. And, best of all, we get Wodehouse, the master.



## When Left Is Right

**S**WANKING WITH the glory of his Citizen's Eagle Eye Award, Murray Hedgcock spotted yet another error and added a bar to the medal he collected for previous corrections. His latest claim, said Murray, "stems from Todd Morning's fascinating study of American reaction to the Berlin Broadcasts." (*Plum Lines*, Summer 2016)

Murray went on to say: "The reference to William Connor writing 'under the pen name Cassandra in the *Daily Mail*' gets it wrong. The *Mail* was (and is) a right-wing morning daily, which in the mid-1930s thought this chap Hitler rather impressive; Connor wrote prewar and postwar for the distinctly left-leaning *Daily Mirror* (which still leans that way)."

Murray told us that he looks forward to receiving his awards in due course and then made a kind comment about *Plum Lines* which we're too modest to print here.

## Mr. Wodehouse Goes to WASHINGTON

NEXT YEAR'S TWS convention in Washington, D.C. (October 19–22, 2017) is not as far off as you might think. The Wiser Heads among us are already sending in their registration forms and making their reservations at the Hotel Hamilton. Speaking of hotels, our Hotel Hamilton reservation link is suitably named “The Wodehouse Society” and the code is “WSC,” all caps.

## A Few Quick Newts

FOR THOSE of you who have more than a passing interest in all things newt, there have been several salamandrine references sent to us in recent times. Some of the newtish comments follow:

From **Beth Carroll**: The Spring 2016 U.K. magazine *LandScape* had two small articles on newts. One article was titled “Newts Move to Mating Sites” and another had a photo of the great crested newt, *Triturus cristatus*.

From **John Baesch** and **Evelyn Herzog**: *Country Life* of September 2, 2015, in an article titled “Builders 1, Newts 1,” explained how an organization called Natural England is finding high-tech ways to determine the location of the great crested newt populations before building commences, in order to avoid running into habitat conservation issues halfway through projects. John and Evy also sent along Simon Lester’s “As Sober As a Newt” in the July 15, 2015, *Country Life*, which is an educational article—especially when Lester quotes Gussie’s description of the mating ritual of the newt.

## A Few Quick Ones

Author Jonathan Kellerman (*Breakdown*) was interviewed in the March 6 *New York Times Book Review* and said that the author (living or dead) that he’d most like to meet was “Wodehouse or Mark Twain.” His best-case scenario was to have “both at the same dinner table. I’d shut up, listen, and laugh away.”

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*Washington Post* columnist Michael Dirda continues to be a great advocate for Wodehouse. In the December 18, 2015, *Times Literary Supplement*, Michael suggested that “the most versatile book gifts . . . remain the Sherlock Holmes mysteries, the ghost stories of M. R. James, and just about anything by P. G. Wodehouse.”

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In the November 7, 2015, issue of the *Spectator*, editor Philip Hensher’s two-volume collection of British short stories was reviewed. At one point, Hensher’s views on literary competitions were discussed. According to Hensher, such competitions “produce solipsistic drivel” and the prizes are humiliating: “No one . . . ever invited or required Conan Doyle or V. S. Pritchett or Kipling or P. G. Wodehouse to put on a dinner jacket and shake the hand of a retired academic before they could receive a cheque for a short story.” The reviewer then went on to point out that a *Strand* magazine short story in 1914 could command as much as £350, which was “not far off the annual income of a family doctor.” One hundred years later, short stories don’t command such wealth.

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Essayist Sloane Crosley is now writing fiction (*The Clasp*) and has apparently turned to good sources for guidance, as she quoted Wodehouse (“Your job as a novelist is not just to reflect but to entertain”) in the October 9, 2015, *Entertainment Weekly*.

## Plea for the Pig

IN AN ARTICLE published in the August 12, 2015, *Country Life*, writer Kate Green discussed the importance of preserving the traditional breeds. She set the stage by quoting from Winston Churchill: “Dogs look up to you, cats look down on you, but a pig will look you in the eye and treat you as an equal.” She mentioned, of course, Wodehouse, Blandings, and the Empress, though stating that even the “cuddly black Berkshire . . . is listed as ‘vulnerable’” by the Rare Breeds Survival Trust.

The article made mention of the visit by The P G Wodehouse Society (UK) to the Royal Berkshire Show and one of its past crowned champions, Truffle. The Berkshire is praised as “the ladies’ pig for its sweet nature and manageable size,” and Queen Victoria and Beatrix Potter were listed as enthusiasts in their times.

All in all, it was an inspiring bit of pig advocacy, and we certainly hope the Berkshire and other species snuffle on despite the challenges they face.

# Chapters Corner

**W**HAT IS YOUR chapter up to these days? Tell the Wodehouse world about your chapter's activities! Chapter representatives, please send all info to the editor, Gary Hall (see back page).

Please note that our webmaster, Noel Merrill, tries to keep chapter activities posted on the society website. So, it's a good idea to send information about upcoming events to Noel on a timely basis. His contact information is on the last page of this issue.

## 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



## Capital! Capital!

(Washington, D.C., and vicinity)

Contact: Scott Daniels



## Chapter One

(Greater Philadelphia area)

Contact: Herb Moskowitz



**P**HILADELPHIA WAS enjoying a break from a long heat wave. Historic Head House Square was teeming with activity. The Farmer's Market in the Shambles was in full gear and the sports bar next door was celebrating

a win by the Eagles in the first football game of the season. And seventeen Wodehousians were snug inside Cavanaugh's Pickwick Room, surrounded by prints of Dickens characters, which were left over from the time when the old tavern was known as the Dickens Inn.

President Herb Moskowitz (Vladimir Brusiloff) opened the meeting by showing a photo of Gussie, Chapter One's newt in the Philadelphia Zoo. The picture was taken a week before and showed Gussie happily swimming by a sign announcing that the newt exhibit is sponsored by the Chaps. We are, of course, chuffed and delighted that another chapter of TWS, which shall remain nameless, has seen fit to copy our original idea of newt sponsorship. We hope that more chapters will follow our lead.

Bob Rains (Oily Carlisle) reported that the movie *Those Three French Girls*, which had some dialogue by Wodehouse and had recently aired on TCM, turned out to be beyond stupid and he gave up watching it after about twenty minutes.

Hope Gaines (Annabelle Sprockett-Sprockett, Smattering Hall, near Matcham Scratchings, Lower Smattering-on-the-Wissel) then led a reading and a discussion of "The Fiery Wooing of Mordred." This Mulliner story first appeared in the USA in *Cosmopolitan* (December 1934) and in the U.K. in *Strand* (February 1935). It was then published in *Young Men in Spats* in 1936.

The story revolves around a fire accidentally set in a "stately home of England," and what happens to the young man who sets it. Hope pondered, "Would there be any Brit crimes, or indeed a British mystery literature genre, if there were no stately homes of England?"

The lively discussion that followed referenced Jane Austen, Sherlock Holmes, Agatha Christie, Inspector Bucket of *Bleak House*, and even Inspector Montalbano, whose author (Andrea Camilleri) set the detective series in Sicily because Italo Calvino had opined that it was impossible to set a detective novel there.

Hope even brought in a recording of Noel Coward singing his own song "The Stately Homes of England," which includes the lyric:

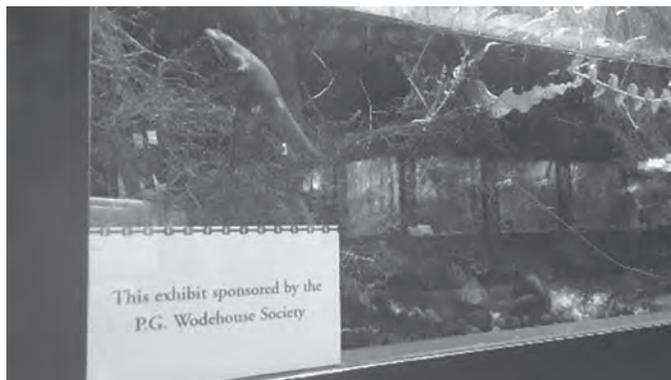
But still if they ever catch on fire  
Which, with any luck, they might  
We'll fight for the stately homes of England.

You can listen to Noel Coward singing his song at <http://tinyurl.com/znpdazg>.

Hope then discussed the history and meaning of the name "Mordred." It has a long and convoluted history, much of it dealing with the Arthurian legend.

The general consensus is that Wodehouse chose the name because it is funny.

Hope had assigned many of the parts for the reading ahead of the meeting. Naturally she cast herself as Annabelle Sprockett-Sprockett, since that is her nom de Plum. The rest of the parts were quickly assigned and the reading itself went off without a hitch. The sound of laughter from the reading of Plum's story rivaled the enthusiastic cheers of the Eagles fans next door.



*Gussie, our sponsored Newt*

**O**N SUNDAY, November 13, the chaps of Chapter One gathered on the second floor of Cavanaugh's. We'll have a full report in the next issue, but the plan was to show a Wodehouse Playhouse video of "The Rise of Minna Nordstrom."

Plans were also in place to collect funds for Gussie, our sponsored newt (see photograph above), who costs us \$65 a year—a bargain! If your chapter doesn't yet have a pet newt, get with it!



*The Chaps home away from home*

**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** JUNIOR BLOODSTAIN will be held on Saturday morning, January 7, 2017, during the Baker Street Irregulars weekend in New York City. Exact time, location, and program to be announced. Contact Elaine Coppola at the email address above for details.

**The Den(ver) of the Secret Nine**  
(Denver and vicinity)  
Contact: Jennifer Petkus



**A**LTHOUGH WE'RE known for our fanatical devotion to P. G. Wodehouse, no one expects the Den(ver) of the Secret Nine to pay much attention to the calendar. Thus we were eight days late (on October 23) with our celebration of our favorite author's birthday. Nevertheless, seven (if Lee becomes a member) of the Nine met at member Jennifer's home to stuff themselves with little finger sandwiches, tiramisu, and apple pie, and to drink tea from delicate porcelain.

We entertained ourselves with pointed commentary about the elections currently afflicting the American public and also listened to an item from another tough time for the civilized world: the first of Wodehouse's wartime broadcasts. Although we didn't have an actual recording of the broadcast, we used a synthesized British voice to read back the transcript, which you can find on the U.K. Wodehouse society's website. (There's allegedly a CD called *The Spoken Word—Writers*, compiled by Richard Fairman in 2003, that includes a recording of one of the wartime broadcasts, but I've never been able to find it.) This might sound a little gloomy for a birthday party, but you had to be there.

We also decided as a group that we will annotate Wodehouse's *If I Were You*. This reporter will tackle the first chapter shortly.

Our next meeting was November 13, held as usual at Pints Pub at 12:30 PM. Full report to come!

**The Drone Rangers**  
(Houston and vicinity)  
Contact: Carey Tynan



**The Flying Pigs**  
(Cincinnati area and elsewhere)  
Contact: Susan Pace or Bill Scrivener



**W**E ARE HAPPY to report that, though the Flying Pigs have lain dormant for a while, they are flying again. Several new members have joined and others returned to the area, bringing fresh energy to our gatherings. Flying Pigs come from as far away as Columbus, Ohio; Lexington, Kentucky; and the eastern climes of Adams County, Ohio. We know that a key feature of Wodehousian gatherings is browsing and sluicing, so we have met twice over Anatole-worthy meals. The first dinner on April 10 was hosted by Bill Scrivener and Susan Pace and included *noix de Chinois*, *consommé brunoise*, *poulet à la Lyonnaise*—you get the idea. We welcomed new and old members, enjoyed a fine meal, and celebrated Plum by reading “Uncle Fred Flits By” aloud.

A second feast on June 19 was hosted by Rick and Nancy Arnest, and solidified the resurrection of the Flying Pigs. An erudite version of the Dictionary Game devised by Nancy was daunting to us and Bertie would probably have been in the soup, but it would have been child’s play for Jeeves.

We hope to have a sizeable contingent in D.C. for a capital convention and are luring new members with the promise that a splendid time is guaranteed.

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



**The Melonsquashville (TN) Literary Society**  
(Tennessee)  
Contact: Ken Clevenger



**T**HE MELONQUASHVILLE (Tennessee) Literary Society met in Knoxville on October 1. Sixteen lucky souls enjoyed a spirited reading of “Death at the Excelsior.” Audrey Duncan, Fran Dotterweich, Linda Norman, Charles Ovenshine, Joan Clevenger, Ralph Norman, Dr. K. Lasater, Harry Hall, and Bill Watts were our readers. Ken Clevenger provided some introductory notes on Wodehouse and detective fiction, and he almost made the mistake of saying that “Death at the Excelsior” was the only murder mystery story Plum ever wrote. At the last moment he recalled “The Murglow Manor Mystery,” a very short story that frames “Strychnine in the Soup,” as being the essence of a completed murder mystery.

Our next event will be on Saturday, December 10, at the Clevengers’ home in Alcoa, Tennessee, with a BBQ luncheon and a dramatic reading, as yet unidentified. The fare will be pigs and chickens. Vegetarians will be accommodated at S.P. odds. Anyone in the greater Knoxville or eastern Tennessee or western North Carolina area should make plans to join in.

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



**The New England Wodehouse Thingummy Society (NEWTS)**  
(Boston and New England)  
Contact: John Fahey



**The North Star Society**  
(St. Paul, Minneapolis, and vicinity)  
Contact: Mike Eckman



**The Orange Plums**  
(Orange County, California)  
Contact: Lia Hansen



**The Pale Parabolites**  
(Toronto and vicinity)  
Contact: George Vanderburgh



*Parabolites* George Vanderburgh, Suparna Ghosh (*The Poet Hostess*), Paul Denman (visitor from Columbia, South Carolina), John Robert Colombo C.M., and Imad Ali

**T**HE PALE PARABOLITES met on October 21 at the Arts and Letters Club on Elm Street in Toronto to celebrate the launch of a book and CD of poetry and ghazals (Persian poetic expressions of both the pain of loss of love and the beauty of love in spite of the pain) titled *Occasionally*, by Suparna Ghosh. Suparna's presentation was very well received by the audience.

In addition to that main event, Paul conducted an irregular quiz on Wodehouse character Gussie, Imad presented some insightful commentary about Virginia Woolf, John provided insights into the origin and derivation of Hitler's swastika, and George suggested the meeting adjourn to the third-floor long bar at the Royal Canadian Military Institute.

Drinks in hand, the group then toured the fifth-floor library of the RCMI. With fondness, Plum's writings were discussed throughout. A murder mystery titled "The Tenth Green," an adventure of Radford Shone by Headon Hill, was discussed as a suitable story to adapt into a dramatic reading for the January Junior Bloodstain Meeting of the Clients of Adrian Mulliner in New York City. Tentative arrangements for the next meeting were discussed for a Saturday afternoon in February 2017 at Massey College in the Puffy Lounge at 3 Devonshire Place. No business was discussed, no minutes were adopted, and no minutes were recorded.

**The PeliKans**  
(Kansas City and vicinity)  
Contact: Bob Clark



**The Perfecto-Zizzbaum Motion Picture Corporation**  
(Los Angeles and vicinity)  
Contact: Doug Kendrick



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



**The Pittsburgh Millionaires Club**  
(Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania)



**The Plum Crazyes**  
(Harrisburg, Pennsylvania and vicinity)  
Contact: Betty Hooker



**The Plum Street Plummiess**  
(Olympia, Washington and vicinity)  
Contact: Thomas L. R. Smith



**A**T THE October 21 meeting of the PSPs, we decided that, due to the vagaries of the calendar, we would not meet in November, but would meet next on December 10 at the Smithery (aka my house). Our plan was to read "Jeeves and the Yuletide Spirit." We will also try to find other Christmas-related stories. The gathering will be a potluck.

**The Right Honourable Knights of Sir Philip Sidney**  
(Amsterdam, The Netherlands)  
Contact: Jelle Otten



*Suzanna Ubbink and Francis van der Knaap  
prepare for another night of the Knights*

**O**N SEPTEMBER 1, 2016, Mulliner's Wijnlokaal in Amsterdam closed its doors for the last time. For 35 years, Mulliner's was the hot spot for the Dutch P. G. Wodehouse Society and for the Amsterdam Chapter of The Wodehouse Society. Francis van der Knaap, our own "Ernest Biggs" and the innkeeper at Mulliner's, let us have a final, final meeting on August 13 before the ultimate closure.

Francis and his cohort Suzanna Ubbink—our Miss Postlethwaite—were honored with flowers, dinner vouchers, and boxes of memoirs from the Wodehousians. Peter Nieuwenhuizen, the president of

the Dutch P. G. Wodehouse Society, reminisced about the good old days, and Jelle Otten recalled the many Wodehousians who visited from abroad over the years.



*Suzanna and Francis received gifts from the Right Honourable Knights for their noble service.*

The copper plaque commemorating our presence, which had been attached to the outside wall for 35 years, was properly removed. Also placed in secure storage were letters from the late Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother and one from P. G. Wodehouse himself, in which he had written that he welcomed the founding of a P. G. Wodehouse Society in The Netherlands.

A committee with Josepha Olsthoorn, Rob Sander, and Peter Uges have taken on the task of finding a new meeting place to replace Mulliner's.



*The Dutch P. G. Wodehouse Society says farewell to Mulliner's Wijnlokaal after 35 years.*

\*\*\*\*\*

ON OCTOBER 15, the 135th anniversary of the birth of P. G. Wodehouse, the Knights assembled for their first post-Mulliner's meeting in Brasserie Schiller on Rembrandt Square in Amsterdam. Jannes Koster, Leonard Beuger, and Vikas Sonak presented plans

for the special international Wodehouse dinner on November 19 in the former Papal Palace in Utrecht. We expected guests from Belgium and the United Kingdom and likely from other countries. Music, games, and theatrical performances were part of the festivities between the Anatole-level dishes.

The "Mulliner's replacement" committee suggested a trial meeting at the restaurant Szmulewicz. This seemed to be a Polish name but actually is more likely a "polandization" of the Dutch word Smullers. The Dutch word "smullers" means something like "big eats" in English. The Knights agreed that Szmulewicz might be promising.

Ronald Duk read his favorite excerpt from *Right Ho, Jeeves*. It was the rapid-fire exchange of telegrams between Aunt Dahlia and Bertie Wooster, near the beginning of the book, that created the greatest amusement for the audience. Rob Sander noted that this great novel was one of only five Wodehouse novels which are translated into the Catalan language.

After the Anatole Dinner Special Quiz, and after a competition called "How to Set the Dinner Table Correctly," Herman van Riel and Peter Nieuwenhuizen presented a remarkable discovery. It was about Wodehouse's story "In Alcalá," which was published in English for the first time in December 1911 in *London Magazine*. Herman and Peter discovered a Dutch translation of this short story that had been published as a serial in 1911 in the Dutch daily newspaper *De Telegraaf*. All present Wodehousians got copies of the four installments of this story.

The next meeting of the Knights will be on February 18, 2017, at 1 PM, in Restaurant Szmulewicz, Bakkerstraat 12 (off Rembrandtplein) in Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

**Rugby In All Its Niceties**  
(Rugby, Tennessee Region)



**The Size 14 Hat Club**  
(Halifax, Nova Scotia)  
Contact: Jill Robinson



**The West Texas Wooster**  
(West Texas)  
Contact: Troy Gregory



# The Coming of 高爾夫

BY DAVID LANDMAN



WHEN IN 1949 I first learned that Chairman Mao had banned golf as a sport for millionaires and a symbol of Western decadence, I felt much as I did when, reaching for my ball after a sizzling quintuple bogey on the notorious eighth at Purgatory C.C., I found the hole swarming with vampire bats. So aggrieved was I at Mao's proscription that I resolved from that day forward to wear nothing but black. That my wardrobe contained only black clobber had nothing do with it; there is, after all, the white burial-at-sea shroud that I take along on Carnival Cruises.

This (what?) being so, one would think that I would dance for joy and break out the polychrome porous-knits when I learned that the Chinese Communist Party had lifted its ban and proclaimed golf "only a sport and neither right nor wrong." But far from being overjoyed, I chafed under this new and forkéd insult. "Only a sport!" "Neither right nor wrong!" Forsooth! And maybe even "Caveat Emptor!" if it means what I think it does.

Sticking a card reading "Press" in my hat band, I went abroad to get the public's reaction.

The first person I encountered was a well-known golf hustler speaking on condition of anonymity. His comment: "Mao is a bad, bad person, but I will build in China the greatest golf course in the world because I know how to build things. Believe me, it will be very, very beautiful. It will be greater than the Great Wall, believe me, and I'll get Mao to pay for it."

Next to happen along was famous golf pro Stoots McDiarmid. His comment: "Scots wha hae ye at th' worldis schame; think ye not this ane felloun deid? How can ye be of your luif content quhan forein bairnis ha deprysit the croun of gamis all and callit it but ane mere sport? Aye, quhat garris Mao to mak sic dreirie cheir?"

I next accosted a gentleman in lounge jacket and velvet plus fours. He introduced himself as Rodney Spelvin, golfer and avant-garde poet. In response to my question, he recited a poem he had written on the subject.

O once the Chinese commies  
Dressed in their silk pajamies,  
The ones with Doctor Denton feet,  
Proclaimed to their vast armies  
Of gymnosophist swamis  
Golf's but a game for the elite.

But now the Party has relented,  
Its ban on golf is sore repented,  
The game no more is deemed effete.  
The PGA's\* contented,  
(The next line should be shorter and  
indented)  
A rose by any other name would smell as  
sweet.

\*Peking's Golfing Ancestor

Seeking refreshment, I stepped into a nearby pub, The Whiff and Divot, where I found, nursing a hot Scotch and lemon, a genial chap clad in heather-mixture tweeds. I told him of China's changed policy and asked his opinion. "If you will kindly get the tapstress to refill my glass," he said, "I shall recount the time my nephew Genghis Mulliner . . ."

But there is always a fly in the ointment, a caterpillar in the salad. The local golf club, an institution to which Mrs. Smethurst strongly objected, had also tripled its membership; and the division of the community into two rival camps, the Golfers and the Cultured, had become more marked than ever. This division, always acute, had attained now to the dimensions of a Schism. The rival sects treated one another with a cold hostility. . . . And not long before this story opens a sliced ball, whizzing in at the open window, had come within an ace of incapacitating Raymond Parsloe Devine, the rising young novelist (who rose at that moment a clear foot and a half), from any further exercise of his art. Two inches, indeed, to the right and Raymond must inevitably have handed in his dinner-pail.

"The Clicking of Cuthbert" (1922)



## Yet More Quick Ones



On the *Entertainment Weekly* website (ew.com) of January 22, 2016, 41-year-old actor Josh Radnor (*How I Met Your Mother*) said that the books that he's reread the most are the P. G. Wodehouse Jeeves books. Radnor says that these books are "literary antidepressants" and goes on to say that "there's something amazing about a guy writing fifty books with the same thing going on—Bertie gets into hot water and Jeeves saves the day—but each one feels fresh and exciting."

\*\*\*\*\*

In the January 23, 2016, issue of the *Spectator*, Lucy Vickery's column reported on a competition wherein readers were invited to submit a psychiatric report on a well-known figure in literature. Naturally one reader (Adrian Fry) chose to send in a "psychiatric" study of some of our favorite author's characters:

J has managed not merely to suppress the id but to extinguish it altogether, his ego taking full control of the self. This has become essential in order to maintain his role in a codependent relationship with his employer, B, the rampancy of whose id necessitates this compensatory response. J scores exceptionally in all IQ tests, going so far as to suggest ingenious improvements to them with a politeness typical in the passive/aggressive.

\*\*\*\*\*

Michael Dirda reviewed *Farnsworth's Classical English Metaphor* in the April 21, 2016, *Washington Post*. According to Michael, this collection by Ward Farnsworth "collects hundreds of short passages from English prose to demonstrate how figurative analogies bring excitement, richness, and increased clarity to a writer's thought." Most of the examples are prior to the twentieth century, and so Melville, Dickens, Chesterton, and P. G. Wodehouse are included, "but no authors more modern."

\*\*\*\*\*

Richard Taylor came across a bit of Wodehouseana in Marco Malvaldi's Italian mystery novel *La briscola in cinque*, translated to English by Howard Curtis in 2007. From page 44: "To hear him tell it, he seems to live in a novel by Wodehouse, full of characters who don't do a stroke of work from morning to night and keep their brains under wraps for fear that they might get damaged, seeing that they don't have a lot there in the first place."

## 1915: Joyce Kilmer's Interview with Wodehouse

RUSTY MYERS found an article written by Joyce Kilmer ("Trees") about P. G. Wodehouse in the November 7, 1915, *New York Times*. Mr. Kilmer stated that "it has been said that to get a joke into an Englishmen's head a surgical operation is necessary." He then quoted P. G. Wodehouse who had recently told him that the war would result in "the restoration of England's long-lost sense of humor."

Other excerpts are of interest. In regard to English humorists, Wodehouse told Kilmer that, since W. S. Gilbert, "England has had no humorist of first rank. Gilbert was an originator; he got a new angle on things."

Of contemporary American humorists, Wodehouse said that "there is nobody in England today to compare with George Ade, for example. What a delight his work is!" Wodehouse went on to list other American humorists who he felt were superior to the current crop of English writers of humor, including "Franklin P. Adams, Bert Leston Taylor, Booth Tarkington, . . . Ring W. Lardner, Harry Leon Wilson, Sinclair Lewis, George Horace Lorimer, Irvin Cobb—there are so many of them that I cannot name them all."

Having said that, Wodehouse did praise certain English humorists, though he said that "their appeal has been special and limited." He mentioned that W. W. Jacobs is "unique, he is in a class by himself," and said that Edward V. Lucas is the "most genuine humorist in England. . . . There is something delicate and restrained about his work, . . . tinged with melancholy." Wodehouse also spoke highly of Gilbert K. Chesterton and James Milne, but felt that their general appeal was lacking compared to the American humorists.

The article has much more to recommend it, as Wodehouse went on to explain why English humor at the time was less than universal. He claimed that the peculiar character of English magazines ("class publications") was part of the cause. Other reasons included the "sheltered life" of English humorists versus the knockabout lives of many American humorists who lived as newspapermen, leading to their spontaneity.

Wodehouse did give hope: "English humor has gradually been growing more alert. The English humorist has been adopting a less patronizing attitude toward his readers; he has not considered it necessary to explain his jokes in detail as he used to explain them."

If you'd like a copy of the article, we'll be happy to send it along. Just email [wodehouse@beyondbb.com](mailto:wodehouse@beyondbb.com)—or go to <http://tinyurl.com/pgw-kilmer>.

# Rugby, Tennessee: Utopia at Last

RUGBY, TENNESSEE, is the site of a Victorian English village founded in 1880 by Thomas Hughes, author of *Tom Brown's School Days*. His utopian idea was to create an agricultural community without class distinctions. Hughes thought that the younger sons of the landed upper class (think Freddie Threepwood) would thrive in this world. Well, utopia is about to arrive in Rugby, Tennessee! On January 21, 2017, 137 years late, a chapter of The Wodehouse Society will be proclaimed, at last ushering in the long-awaited utopia. They take their chapter moniker from a Wodehouse quote and will be known as "Rugby In All Its Niceties." Henceforth, for sweetness and light, joy, and general Plum fun, this new TWS chapter is the place to be. For more information, ask Donna

For more information on Rugby, visit [www.historicrugby.org](http://www.historicrugby.org). As you study your globe, or perform some geographical triangulation, it may help to know that Rugby is approximately equidistant from Nashville, Knoxville, and Lexington (Kentucky).



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Quick Ones (unless otherwise credited) courtesy of  
John Baesch and Evelyn Herzog.

*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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