

*The quarterly journal of The Wodehouse Society*

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## Join Mr. Wodehouse in Coming to Washington in October!

BY SCOTT DANIELS

I WAS SEVENTEEN years old the first time I came to Washington. I hopped the bus from National Airport to Dupont Circle. As we neared the Potomac, the Jefferson Memorial and the Lincoln Memorial stood in the foreground, and the Washington Monument and the Capitol peeked over the horizon.

The unabashed thrill I felt was not so different from that of Jimmy Stewart's character in *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*. Even today, when I do my daily commute from Virginia to the District, those same sights sometimes catch me up short. There is still a little bit of that same *frisson*, that same sense of respect and awe that I felt as a teenager. Nearly fifty years later, those sights hide just beneath my more mundane concerns of work and traffic.

I have been to three TWS conventions. Each was in a delightful city and each was a weekend of fun and high spirits. The members of Washington's Capital! Capital! chapter will do everything to make sure that this October's convention is special. Come to Washington in October and see for yourself!

Capitol Hill is at the center of the grid of numbered and lettered streets that constitute the District. Across the street from the Capitol is the Supreme Court, and on the next block is the Library of Congress. Walk another block east and you will find the Folger Shakespeare Library, including the Folger Theatre, where plays,



*One of a thousand iconic views that you can see when you come to D.C. for the 2017 TWS convention in October.*

PEN/Faulkner lectures, poetry readings, and early music concerts are presented.

Washington is full of theaters, particularly in the neighborhood of our convention venue, the Hamilton Hotel. Ford's Theatre is located on 10th Street between E and F. It maintains a full schedule of plays and, as you might expect, the Lincoln Assassination Museum. You can visit the Petersen House, where Lincoln died, and imagine John Wilkes Booth mounting his horse to make his escape. Scheduled for October's convention activities is an eight-stop, 1.6 mile walking tour, led by Detective James McDevitt, the constable on patrol on the night of the assassination.



*The Washington Monument at sunset*

Though the Washington Monument is closed to visitors at present for repairs to the elevator, it nevertheless is an impressive sight, as seen in the photo above, looking west along the Mall, with the Capitol Building just behind the photographer. The White House is about half a mile to the northwest of where the picture was taken, and the Hamilton Hotel is about half a mile to the north. The monument is almost always in view in the neighborhood, and it might be your landmark if you forget to bring your compass.

So register now for TWS's 19th biennial convention and make your room reservations at the Hamilton Hotel. Reservations can be made online, or call 877-424-2449 (the front desk number is 202-682-3801). Several attendees have reported that the electronic reservation system works smoothly, but if that system is having a bad day, you can contact me at 202-822-1100 or sdaniels@whda.com. You can also write to me at 3008 South Erin Drive, Oakton, Virginia 22124.

## Riveting Speakers in Store!

BY SCOTT DANIELS

**I**F YOU HAVE never attended a convention of The Wodehouse Society, make a point of registering for this year's fête in Washington, D.C., October 19-22. It will be a treat!

What are TWS conventions like? Based on my own experience, I can tell you that they are nothing but fun, fun, fun. Interesting speakers, great music, a silly skit, and even sillier costumes. Need I mention the browsing and sluicing? Each and every attendee is intent on having a wonderful time. And why not? Every moment is lightened by Plum's clever and gentle spirit.

I must admit, though, that my favorite part of the weekend is the program of Riveting Speakers that is

presented Saturday morning and afternoon. Here is a partial list of the 2017 speakers and their topics:

Ms. Karen Shotting: *P. G. Wodehouse and George Ade*

Dr. Constance Walker: *Plum Among the Undergraduates*

Dr. Chris W. Dueker: *Wodehouse and Time*

Mr. Bruce Montgomery: *1917, Plum's Great Year of Music*

Ms. Madelyn Shaw: *What the Well-Dressed Man Is Wearing*

Mr. Thomas Smith: *Wodehouse, Master-Spy*

Two others, Elliott Milstein and Peter Nieuwenhuizen, have also been coaxed into speaking. Anyone attending Elliott's 2015 talk in Seattle on Plum's gift for composing the opening sentences of a novel, or Peter's 2013 talk in Chicago on Wodehouse and the poet Sir Philip Sidney, would climb tall buildings, swim mighty rivers, and confront the most imperious aunts to listen to these two speak again.

The members of D.C.'s Capital! Capital! chapter are so proud of our city and so proud to host this year's convention. If there is anything that we can do to help you plan for the convention, let us know.

## Where/How to Register?

**T**HE REGISTRATION form is available online at [wodehouse.org](http://wodehouse.org/extra/RegistrationForm2017.pdf) at: <http://wodehouse.org/extra/RegistrationForm2017.pdf>



*The Hamilton Hotel in Washington, D.C. awaits your arrival. Mirth and good cheer will abound in October!*

*Mr. Wodehouse Goes to*  
**WASHINGTON**

# Happy Anniversary to the U.K. Wodehouse Society

## *The Dinner Scripts of The P G Wodehouse Society (UK)*

Created and Edited by Tony Ring

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*The U.K. Society's biennial dinners are renowned for their high-quality entertainment, and here it is all collected.*

AS YOU MAY be aware, The P G Wodehouse Society (UK) is now celebrating its twentieth anniversary, and as the society took stock of its activities over these two decades, they decided to offer members the opportunity to acquire a copy of all the scripts which have been written and used for the biennial formal dinners, and which have helped them to acquire a high reputation for memorable evenings.

The society has been very fortunate over the years to have many professional entertainers participate in these presentations, which are built around a combination of Wodehouse's words on a particular theme and with several of his most relevant lyrics interpolated in the dialogue. Apart from the complete texts of the scripts themselves, the book includes pages of information from each of the dinner programs; the menus; a list of Wodehouse songs used; a list of participants in the entertainments; and the "Society Grace," specially written for the Society when it was first established.

The book is now available and the price, including postage in the U.K., is £10. Overseas buyers will unfortunately have to bear a postage premium of £4 in Europe and £7 further afield. (Please note that the postage charge per copy for overseas customers is likely to be lower for multiple copies. Please e-mail for details.)

The book is being published privately on behalf of the Society and will not be available through Amazon or any similar distributor.

## Correction!

CATHIE GOTTSCHALK sent in the little article that we published as "Turpitude, Wodehousean Style" in the Winter 2016 issue of *Plum Lines*. Unfortunately, we listed her name as Caroline and it should be Cathie as noted above. Chalk it up to a senior editor-in-chief moment.

## The Norman Murphy Medal

THE BOARD of directors of The Wodehouse Society created the Norman Murphy Award on October 30, 2016, to recognize, honor, and memorialize the contributions that Norman (aka The Man Who Knew Almost Everything) made to the body of scholarship about P. G. Wodehouse.

At their discretion, the board may confer the award at any time to recognize anyone who contributes to furthering the body of P. G. Wodehouse scholarship or makes outstanding contributions to the society. Scholarly work or publications should be significant in scope, but can be a single groundbreaking article or publication of a book. Outstanding contributions to the society through work on committees, publications, etc., can also be recognized.

The president of the society will maintain an honor roll of all recipients of the award. The honor roll will be kept in the Tome and may also be posted on the website of The Wodehouse Society.

The award will consist of a medal and certificate. The obverse of the medal is a portrait of Norman. The reverse is a pipe and stack of books with the words "To Elucidate and Entertain." The medal is suspended from a purple drape ribbon.

# Of Pale Young Curates and Me

BY THE REV. CANON WILLIAM SCRIVENER

*Bill Scrivener spoke about curates at the 2015 TWS convention. We feel blessed to be able to reprint it here.*

IT'S MY PLEASURE to offer these reflections on the world of curates. First, let me invite you to enjoy Gilbert & Sullivan's "I Was a Pale Young Curate" from *The Sorcerer* (lyrics below).

These lyrics are those referenced by Mr. Mulliner at the beginning of "Mulliner's Buck-U-Uppo." Upon hearing audience members sing snatches of the song after a performance of said opera, Mulliner begins to sing along, and then comments that it is remarkable how fashions change, even in clergymen, and that there are very few pale young curates nowadays.

"True," agrees the narrator. "Most of them are beefy young fellows who rowed for their colleges. I don't believe I have ever seen a pale young curate."

"You never met my nephew Augustine, I think," responds Mulliner.

"Never."

"The description in the song would have fitted him perfectly. You will want to hear about my nephew Augustine."

He then proceeds to tell the tale of his nephew, Augustine Mulliner, whom he describes as "as meek and mild a young man as you could meet in a day's journey. He had flaxen hair, weak blue eyes, and the general demeanor of a saintly but timid codfish." To summarize the tale I can do no better than to quote the late Norman Murphy from his book *The P. G. Wodehouse Miscellany*:



*To set the bar for future pale young curates, here is John Alderton as Augustine Mulliner in Wodehouse Playhouse*

Under the influence of a pick-me-up, Buck-U-Uppo, concocted by his chemist uncle Wilfrid, Augustine becomes a changed man. After putting his tyrannical landlady in her place, Augustine uses a well-aimed stone to see off a fierce dog chasing his bishop; leaps through a window to reprove his bad-tempered vicar and the bishop, old schoolfellows about to come to blows; and concludes by bending the bishop's terrifying wife to his will.

Now this is a curate to be reckoned with! And indeed he doesn't remain a curate for long, being eventually employed by the bishop, who puts his newfound gifts to good use.

In my admittedly incomplete acquaintance with the Wodehousian canon, I am unaware of any other curate who comes off so well. I might go so far as to say that it would seem Plum had a generally low regard for curates, pale or otherwise.

Before I begin to place my story amid the world of Wodehousian curates, here's some important Anglican ecclesiastical terminology. For starters, "curate" was a title bestowed on newly ordained clergy who became assistants to the rectors of parishes. It was only used in one's first position; thereafter, one was simply called the assistant, or assistant rector. The origins and uses of the term are ancient and varied, but in England it came to mean (1) a member of the clergy employed to assist a rector or vicar, or (2) any ecclesiastic entrusted with the cure of souls, as a parish priest.

I was interested to note that in Ireland the term was also applied to an assistant barman. One perhaps

## I Was a Pale Young Curate (from *The Sorcerer* by Gilbert & Sullivan)

Had I a headache? sighed the maids assembled;  
Had I a cold? welled forth the silent tear;  
Did I look pale? then half a parish trembled;  
And when I coughed all thought the end was near!  
I had no care—no jealous doubts hung o'er me—  
For I was loved beyond all other men.  
Fled gilded dukes and belted earls before me—  
Ah me, ah me, I was a pale young curate then!  
A pale young curate,  
A pale young curate,  
Ah me, I was a pale young curate then!

shouldn't be surprised. I also speak of all this in the past tense because I believe that, in the U.S. at least, the term has gone out of style. Newly ordained clergy now are simply known as "assistants." More's the pity.

Then we have vicars. Vicars were what Plum's curates were always seeking to become, if only because it brought them a more substantial income. Vicars are defined as:

1. Church of England: A person acting as priest of a parish in place of the rector, or as representative of a religious community to which tithes belong, or the priest of a parish the tithes of which are impropriated and who receives only the smaller tithes or a salary.

2. Protestant Episcopal Church: A member of the clergy whose sole or chief charge is a chapel dependent on the church of a parish, or a bishop's assistant in charge of a church or mission.

As an added treat, I'll also mention canons:

1. A member of a chapter of priests serving in a cathedral or collegiate church.

2. A member of the Bishop's staff with particular areas of responsibility: Canon for Mission, Canon for Formation and Transitions, etc.

Why do I include this? Because I am one—an honorary Canon of Christ Church Cathedral in Cincinnati. Lest you think I'm developing an overinflated sense of my own importance I will quote a friend of mine—himself a canon—who referred to himself as "small-caliber, large bore."

So, having established my Anglican bona fides, and impressed you with the many titles I have had bestowed upon me, let me move on.

The picture below is yours truly on June 9, 1973, the day of my ordination to what we now call the Transitional Diaconate, meaning that I was made a



*William Scrivener, Curate, 1973*

deacon and some months later would be ordained a priest. I was 25 and fairly pale, so I connect with these stories fairly immediately. I was called to be the curate at Grace Episcopal Church in Norwalk, Connecticut—"the friendly church serving in the heart of the city," as it liked to regard itself. While the members were not particularly unfriendly, they did have a distinct aversion to making a place in the life of the parish for newcomers, and by "newcomers" I mean anyone who hadn't been coming there for at least five years.

I served there for two years; while I left there a happier man than when I arrived, that had little to do with the parish and much to do with a certain Ms. L. Susan Pace, about whom more later.

When I look back on my life as a curate, the aforementioned words of W. S. Gilbert haunt me—but no, that was not my lot. I was merely the curate. Small potatoes. To make it even more fun, I worked for a priest of the old school; the church came first and all else second. He was known to miss his daughter's birthday celebration because he had a vestry meeting. For someone like me, having come into full blossom in the late '60s and early '70s, this was, as they say, a bit much. On top of that, in a time when even businessmen were beginning to sport longish hair, this man looked like he had just stepped out of the Marine Corps. We were decidedly oil and water and were not destined for a long working relationship. Eventually, I happily moved on.

Let me move on to other curates as well. As I indicated earlier, Plum seemed to hold curates as subjects for fond teasing. It's probably also fair to say that he took a similar approach towards clergy in general. This attitude is captured well in the following exchange, also lifted from the aforementioned "Mulliner's Buck-U-Uppo." Mulliner, standing outside the vicarage, overhears the bishop and the vicar getting into a rather testy exchange.

"Is that so?" said the vicar.

"Yes, it is!" said the bishop.

"Ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha! to you, and see how you like it!" rejoined the bishop with spirit.

"Whoever told you you were an authority on chasubles?" demanded the vicar.

"That's all right who told me," rejoined the bishop.

"I don't believe you even know what a chasuble is."

"Is that so?"

"Well, what is it, then?"

“It’s a circular cloak hanging from the shoulders, elaborately embroidered with a pattern and with orphreys. And you can argue as much as you like, young Pieface, but you can’t get away from the fact that there are too many orphreys on yours. And what I’m telling you is that you’ve jolly well got to switch off a few of these orphreys or you’ll get it in the neck.”

### Orphreys on a Chasuble



They then proceed to dredge up embarrassing events from their earlier, younger lives. All in all, not an impressive display of clerical rectitude.

It has always puzzled me as to how there could be more orphreys than the one, but perhaps Father Wendell Verrill could elucidate on that. However, I think the silliness of the argument speaks more of Wodehouse’s delight in tweaking clergy than it does of his concern for appropriately adorned Eucharistic vestments.

But curates come in for some special ridicule. We can turn to the Jeeves and Wooster stories to explore this further. In *The Code of the Woosters*, we are introduced to Harold Pinker—fondly known as “Stinker”—the curate at Tottleigh-in-the-Wold. His sweetheart, Stiffy Byng, has put him up to the risky task of pinching the helmet of Constable Eustace Oates, who she believes is persecuting her because her dog bit him. When she reveals this plan to Bertie, his concerns are twofold, the first that it would be highly improper for a curate to do that: “You’ll get the poor bird unfrocked!” exclaims Bertie. His other concern is that, while Stiffy seems to think that such an activity is well within Stinker’s ability, Bertie knows better:

It was all very well for Stiffy to say that this thing would be right up old Stinker’s street. She didn’t know him as I did. I had watched Harold through the formative years of his life, and I knew him for what he was—a large, lumbering, Newfoundland puppy of a chap—full of zeal, yes—always doing his best, true; but never quite

able to make the grade; a man, in short, who if there was a chance of bungling an enterprise and landing himself in the soup, would snatch at it. At the idea of him being turned on to perform the extraordinarily delicate task of swiping Constable Oates’s helmet, the blood froze. He hadn’t a chance of getting away with it.

As we know, he actually manages the deed, but only because the constable was considerate enough to have momentarily removed his helmet and parked it on the ground just as Stinker was ambling by, so he was able to snatch it without getting caught.

Now, of course this is but a subplot in a much more complex (and thoroughly Wodehousian) narrative, involving Roderick Spode, Gussie Fink-Nottle, Uncle Watkyn, pinched cow creamers, and the like. Some of this is related to Stiffy’s determined attempts to secure Uncle Watkyn’s blessing on the engagement and, not incidentally, the bestowal of a vicarage. For, as she puts it, “You’ve got to face it. Curates are not so hot. So before anything can be done in the way of removing the veil of secrecy, we have got to sell Harold to Uncle Watkyn. If we play our cards properly, I am hoping that he will give him a vicarage which he has in his gift. Then we shall begin to get somewhere.” Needless to say, after a series of overlapping and interlocking episodes, as well as the timely incantation of “Eulalie,” all is well and we can trust that Stinker Pinker will eventually receive the vicarage Stiffy Byng has aspired to. What he will make of it is anybody’s guess. (Stinker and Stiffy remind me of certain clergy couples I have known where the larger ambitions seemed to rest with the wife.)

A briefer encounter with a well-intended but oafish curate can be found in the short story “Company for Gertrude.” Gertrude is the beloved of Beefy Bingham, a curate without any apparent prospects for advancement. Gertrude has been sent to Blandings Castle as a means of keeping her and Beefy apart. Cast into a deep gloom by this move, Gertrude has made a perfect nuisance of herself. “For two weeks Lord Emsworth’s beautiful young niece had been moving to and fro through the castle with a drawn face, doing good right and left: and his lordship, being handiest, had had to bear the brunt of it.” The plot thickens when Freddie Threepwood devises the “can’t miss” plan of sending Beefy to Blandings incognito, which will allow him to be in Gertrude’s company and win over Lord Emsworth by ingratiating himself. “Cluster round him,” counsels Freddie. “Hang on his every word. Interest yourself in his pursuits. Do him little services. Help him out of chairs.” Lord Emsworth, initially thrilled at the idea of

“company for Gertrude,” which he believes will relieve him of her mordant attentions, soon finds that he has merely exchanged one plague for another. When Beefy attentively helped him rise from chairs

day after day, night after night, every time he caught him sitting; when he offered him an arm to help him across floors; when he assisted him up stairs, along corridors, down paths, out of rooms and into raincoats; when he snatched objects from his hands to carry them himself; when he came galloping out of the house on dewy evenings laden down with rugs, mufflers, hats and, on one occasion, positively a blasted respirator . . . why, then Lord Emsworth’s spirit rebelled.

Much worse than this ensues. One might well expect that any chance at marriage, much less advancement in his clerical career, would be lost forever. Fortunately, Freddy, appearing as a kind of *deus ex machina*, not only clears the air about the relationship between Gertrude and Beefy but also informs his lordship that the vicarage in Much Matchingham has become vacant and would be a wonderful gift to bestow on the young cleric. Much Matchingham is, of course, the home of Lord Emsworth’s rival Sir Gregory Parsloe-Parsloe. The dual joy of ridding himself of the calamitous curate and inflicting him on Sir Gregory is too delicious to resist: “With this young man . . . permanently established not a hundred yards from his park gates, would Sir Gregory Parsloe-Parsloe ever draw another really carefree breath? . . . Lord Emsworth thought not.”

Having taken this stroll through the misadventures of a few of Plum’s curates, I now return to my own story. I was, from 1973 to 1975, the curate at Grace Episcopal Church. I was tending the vineyard and doing whatever it is that curates are supposed to do, which meant mainly working with the church’s youth group. In those days the Church seemed to operate on the questionable assumption that curates, being generally young, would have a natural affinity for working with young people. To which I say “Tchah!”

However, it is fair to say that, without this particular responsibility, I would not have the opportunity which would present itself to me the May following my arrival. You see, one annual event which the youth group was responsible for was a car wash. Of course, it was up to me to arrange for, and be in charge of, this event. This was not especially onerous, as the kids enjoyed doing it, and the church was well placed to attract local traffic, including a certain 1973 blue Datsun station wagon.

Late that morning I left my charges, went into my house to change into my clericals, and headed up the hill to make hospital calls. On my way back I stopped at McDonald’s to pick up lunch for the kids and, before changing back into car-washing clothes, hung around a bit just to see how things were going. A few minutes later a young woman approached, and she quickly caught my eye. She was five feet tall, with slightly exotic eye makeup and very long, dark hair.



*The young lady from the car wash  
who caught Bill’s eye: Susan Pace*

One did not normally encounter such women in Norwalk, Connecticut! She approached me, introduced herself, and said that she had recently resumed organ lessons and wondered whether it might be possible for her to use the church’s instrument to practice on. Of course my immediate thought was “wouldn’t that be cool?” as I could imagine myself just happening to stop by when she was practicing and getting to know her better. That, however, was not my call, and I told her that I would have to check with the rector. She wrote down her name and phone number, and I told her I would call her the first of the week.

Brimming with eager anticipation, I approached the rector later and passed on the request. His immediate response was, “No. We don’t let outsiders use the organ.” I need to be clear here; we were not talking about some valuable pipe organ. We were talking about an electric organ, which was all the church could afford. But, no matter. There it was. Hopes were dashed, and I began to think about how to convey this news in a way that would not foreclose further opportunities to meet again.

However, she beat me to it, catching me off guard by calling me at the church the following Monday. So instead of responding in some witty fashion—“I’m afraid the rector is a right twit and fears you will do

damage to our precious instrument”—I mumbled, “I’m told we don’t do that,” thereby meaning to say it’s not my fault, but somehow conveying a lack of warmth and appreciation of her request. The call ended awkwardly, and I chalked it all up as a missed opportunity.

Two days later, the fates intervened. As I was stopping by my house in the midst of making parish calls, I received a phone call from the parish secretary. “I’m so glad I caught you,” she said. “I just had a phone call from a Miss Susan Pace. Seems she’s been run over by a school bus and wants you to come see her.” Images of a bandage-swaddled, plaster-casted woman immediately swam into view, and I replied, “Of course! What hospital room is she in?” “Oh, she’s not in the hospital,” she replied. “She’s at home. Here’s her address.” It turned out that her home was right up the hill from the church, and so, after assuring the secretary that I would make the visit instant, I hastened to my car and made the short drive to her apartment.

Now, by this time I had allowed my curiosity to emerge, and I pondered the data: She had been “run over by a school bus,” yet she was at home, not fighting for her life in the ICU. Hmm. Further, in spite of our less than cordial recent conversation, she had called the church and asked that I visit. Hmm. So I rang the doorbell of her apartment, and the door was answered by a man who turned out to be an upstairs neighbor. I entered and, by golly, there was Susan, with her left leg wrapped in an Ace bandage and crutches nearby.



*Photographic evidence of the effect of the bus on Susan’s bicycle*

She had been run over by a school bus, or rather, her leg, lying underneath the wheel of the bicycle she was riding, had been run over by a school bus, thereby, as she put it, grinding it into the pavement. This is a story worth hearing in greater detail than time allows,

and I’m sure Susan will be glad to regale you with it for the price of a single-malt scotch.

Upon being released from the hospital and returning home, she had indeed called the church and specifically asked that the curate—not the rector!—pay a call. For, as she would tell you, if you can’t call a curate at a time like this, when can you? So after the neighbor and a friend from work departed, she offered me a glass of wine and I wound up staying for dinner—quiche Lorraine, as I recall.

Now, one might imagine that it was a short hop from here to mutual protestations of undying love, but such was not the case. Not that we had disapproving aunts and uncles to contend with, nor the need for an appointment to a vicarage, nor a requirement that I pinch a constable’s helmet. It was simply that we were both in relationships that, though they were entering their end stages, nonetheless caused us to proceed in a more orderly and companionable fashion for a while. It may be reported, though, that by the following Christmas we were engaged and the following June were happily married on what was my last day at Grace Episcopal Church.



*Bill and Susan tie the knot at the Grace Episcopal Church, and the rest is history.*

So I arrive at the end or, should I say, the end of the beginning. For many adventures were to await the fair young Susan Pace and me. But I cherish my humble beginnings as a pale young curate. Plum would perhaps not have found enough complications in my career to make a good short story, though I so wonder what he might have done with the central drama of our meeting. Nonetheless I am glad to stand alongside Augustine Mulliner, Stinker Pinker, Beefy Bingham, and the rest as well-meaning fellows who persevered and were rewarded for their labors.

Let me close by asking that if you should run into Stinker Pinker, tell him I have something for him!

# My Kid's First Time

BY HEIDI VERMETTE

IN DECEMBER 2016, I was expecting future Wodehouse Fan Number 3 to arrive any day. If past experience was anything to go by, serving his eviction notice was not expected to be unmixedly pleasant, as I am not one of those stiff-upper-lip chappies (or, indeed, any sort of chappie at all) who made Britain great. Since doctors frown upon pregnant women consuming the odd whisky and s. to take the edge off the experience, I confidently fell back on another method for managing early labor pains: Wodehouse's short stories, especially his golf stories.

Future Wodehouse Fan Number 1 took a deucedly long time to join the mixed company of her family, and I spent much of that time uncomfortably. Under such circs., I cast about for anything to distract my mind from the fact that an elephant who'd overdosed on Mulliner's Buck-U-Uppo was apparently jumping up and down on my abdomen. I have nothing against such brainy fellows as Tolstoy, but I needed something shorter and more easily digested (so to speak) than *War and Peace*. What could be sweeter than to dip into a book of short stories, each with one zinger after another that made me forget my discomfort? I had reread the Jeeves stories recently, but the golf stories had lain on my shelf untouched for too long.

Consider "The Clicking of Cuthbert," a stringent examination of Russian literature offering far more insight than most of my undergraduate courses. Practically the entire story could be reprinted here, as it offers a sage selection of witticisms well-calculated to distract from the most dire vagaries of life, but I actually laughed through a contraction at the following: "Vladimir specialized in grey studies of hopeless misery, where nothing happened till page three hundred and eighty, when the moujik decided to commit suicide." And for someone who quite enjoys a spot of Turgenev and Dostoevsky and those other fellows, that seemed absolutely the nub of the matter.

Brusiloff's thoughts on the rigors of a foreign literary tour are also too good to be missed:

But now, as he peered through the brushwood at the faces round him, and realized that eight out of ten of those present had manuscripts of some sort concealed on their persons, and were only waiting for an opportunity to whip them out and start reading, he wished that he had stayed at his quiet home in Nijni-Novgorod,



*Future Wodehouse fan James Vermette arrived in perfect form on December 19, 2016, and is reported to have an appetite like that of Empress of Blandings.*

where the worst thing that could happen to a fellow was a brace of bombs coming in through the window and mixing themselves up with his breakfast egg.

And you can send away all of the 3,000-word essays examining the question of social class in Russian literature in favor of Brusiloff's succinct judgment:

"No novelists any good except me. Sovietski—yah! Nastikoff—bah! I spit me of zem all. No novelists anywhere any good except me. P. G. Wodehouse and Tolstoi not bad. Not good, but not bad. No novelists any good except me."

This story is but one of many that can be used when you find yourself in my situation, or with some other discomfort, pain, or illness. When you find yourself hopelessly awake at 3 AM, I suggest reacquainting yourself with Wodehouse's inimitable stories. I heartily recommend a dose of his writing for upset stomachs, colds, fevers, and sundry other aches and pains. I have no doubt that many who read this will nod vigorously, recalling the soothing effect of a Mulliner misadventure as they were lying in bed with a sprained ankle. Instead of hot milk, try "Strychnine in the Soup"!

It seems a notable omission that none of the classes that suggest showers, changing positions, and bouncing on balls for relief from the symptoms of pregnancy mention the analgesic effect of Wodehouse stories. I shall be writing to my local birthing society to amend this situation immediately, and I fully expect to see Jeeves, Mulliner, and golf stories included. Thank you, Mr. Wodehouse.

# Wodehouse in Russia, and Not Only

BY MASHA LEBEDEVA

FROM NOVEMBER 1 to December 31, 2016, the adult library of the ZIL Culture Center in Moscow hosted the exhibition “Wodehouse in Russia, and Not Only,” dedicated to the 135th anniversary of P. G. Wodehouse’s birth. The exhibit consisted of the archives of Soviet movie director Leonid Trauberg and his daughter, Natalya Trauberg, the latter being one of the first and foremost translators of Wodehouse’s masterpieces in post-Soviet Russia.

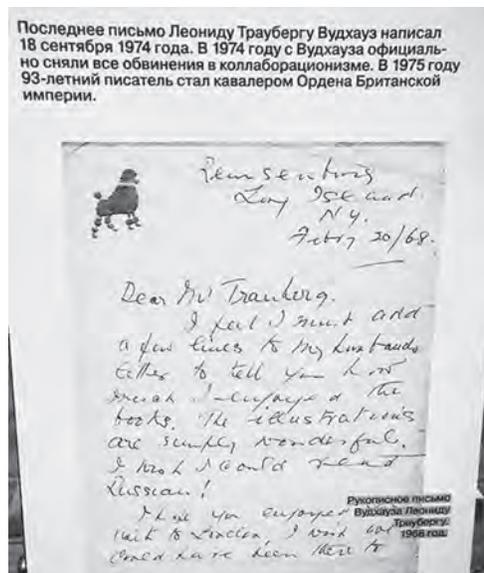
In Petrograd in 1924, Natalya’s mother, Vera, was renting a room from a ballerina (Valentina Khodasevitch) and heard two young men laughing out loud in the next room. One of the men was Leonid Trauberg, and the fellows were reading a Wodehouse book. This was the first meeting of Natalya’s parents, and likely one of the first times (but certainly not the last) that Wodehouse brought loving souls together.

Plum’s works were extremely popular in the family, and the exhibition included much of Trauberg’s collection. Many of these works were published in Russia before 1929, after which Wodehouse was banned for many years. Among the exhibited works were the cover and pages of the magazine *Mir priklyucheni* (*World of Adventures*), issue #10 (1915), in which was published “The Education of Detective Oakes”; *The Man with Two Left Feet* (1928 edition); and a cutting from an unknown edition of “The Romance of an Ugly Policeman.”



The cover of issue #10 of *Mir priklyucheni* (*World of Adventures*) from 1915

In 1966 Leonid Trauberg decided to write a letter to Wodehouse, and part of the exhibition was dedicated to his long-term (1966–1974) correspondence with Plum. The visitors had a chance to see copies of letters typed by P. G. Wodehouse and some handwritten notes from Ethel.



One of Ethel Wodehouse’s letters to Leonid Trauberg

The display also documented the role of Natalya Trauberg in the publication of the first post-Soviet editions of Wodehouse’s works. Several of her articles were on display, including the cover of the samizdat edition of “A Slice of Life” created by her son. Also available for viewing were some of the books that were the result of her collaboration with chairman Mikhail Kuzmenko of The Russian Wodehouse Society (TRWS), who also played an important role in furthering Wodehouse publications in post-Soviet Russia.

In addition to the main exhibition, there were two lectures: “Pelham Grenville Wodehouse: The Humorist in Literature and in Life” and “The Fashion of English Novel from Jane Austen to P. G. Wodehouse.” There was also a showing of the 1937 film *A Damsel in Distress*.

All in all it was a terrific event and certainly helped keep the Plummy spirit alive in Russia. The Russian Wodehouse Society gives thanks to Natalya Trauberg for her great work in Russian translations of Wodehouse.

# The Nature of P. G. Wodehouse—Let's Discuss

BY KAREN SHOTTING

*Karen offers a somewhat different take on Robert McCrum's talk at the 2015 TWS convention from that of our previous rebuttalists.*

DAVID LANDMAN, in his article “Merrythought: An Inquiry into the Nature of P. G. Wodehouse” (*Plum Lines*, Autumn 2016), has invited us to reconsider the view of Wodehouse's nature that was espoused by Robert McCrum in his recent talk at the 2015 TWS convention in Seattle, “Wodehouse in Wonderland,” (the text of which was published in *Plum Lines*, Spring 2016). The views expressed by McCrum find their foundation in, and build upon, the material in his *Wodehouse: A Life* (2004), the most recent biography of Wodehouse. The McCrum view comes across to me as a too-stereotypical variation of the “tragic clown”—the smiling humorist who hides behind his funny stories while crying in mute anguish on the inside. I would like to join Mr. Landman's ranks and suggest that we take Bertie Wooster as our role model and reject the ill-fitting Pierrot costume<sup>1</sup> that McCrum has assigned to Wodehouse.

Can it be done? Wodehouse himself might enter a resigned *nolle prosequi*. “You need dynamite to dislodge an idea that has got itself firmly rooted in the public mind” (*Wodehouse on Wodehouse*, p. 460). Should it be done? Mr. Landman answers this question in the affirmative. I concur, considering the biographer's errors that have been identified, and because PGW's biographers seem to ignore or dismiss his statements that are at variance with their views.<sup>2</sup> Or, they take a statement seriously (then write it off as a denial mechanism) when he obviously (to me, at least) meant it facetiously—like his statement in *Over Seventy* that “my childhood went like a breeze from start to finish, with everybody I met understanding me perfectly” (*Wodehouse on Wodehouse*, p. 474). Hilarious, right? How is it that they miss the joke?<sup>3</sup>

Three of our members, including the erudite Mr. Landman, have taken pen to paper (or fingers to keyboard) to take issue with some of McCrum's assertions, factual misstatements, and conclusions. Nick Townend's article “Wodehouse in Wonderland: Some Thoughts” (also in the 2016 Autumn *Plum Lines*) debunked a significant number of the assertions in “Wodehouse in Wonderland,” particularly McCrum's statements and assertions concerning Oscar Wilde's sad fate and its alleged effect on Wodehouse. The Wilde content in the article is mostly a rehash of material in

*Wodehouse: A Life*. (See p. 100, where McCrum credits the late Christopher Hitchens as the person who noted that Wodehouse, “the most allusive of writers, never refers to Oscar Wilde.”) In his Wonderland article, McCrum has omitted the credit to Hitchens, which is fair given that Mr. Hitchens had conceded his own error shortly after the publication of the biography. Ironically—to me at least—Hitchens's *mea culpa* regarding his mistake is in his review of McCrum's *Wodehouse: A Life*.<sup>4</sup>

At the 2013 TWS convention in Chicago, Chris Dueker, in his educational talk “Of Mumps and Men” (published in the Winter 2014 *Plum Lines*), exposed a misconception regarding the effect of mumps on young men in general, and Wodehouse in particular. The theory that mumps caused impotence was advanced in Barry Phelps's *P. G. Wodehouse: Man and Myth* and perpetuated by McCrum in *Wodehouse: A Life*. “Mumps,” says the learned Dr. Dueker, “does not affect potency.” He also says, quite pointedly, that “the study of diseases can be amusing, but it should be a nonfiction endeavor.”

Each of the Landman, Townend, and Dueker articles questions assertions and disproves theories that, to my mind, are major underpinnings of McCrum's opinion of Wodehouse's nature. Information about his childhood that is different from the biographies has also come to light. The late Norman Murphy presented some of this information, unearthed by John Dawson (of the Globe Reclamation Project) and researcher Patricia O'Sullivan, in an article in *Wooster Sauce* in December 2012. The article includes a timeline showing that Plum's parents were able to spend more time with their children than biographers have recorded.

Our own *Plum Lines* archive, in addition to the three articles noted above, contains a bit of information that supports this view. I've never seen it mentioned in any biography, but the Morgan Library Wodehouse Centenary Celebration Exhibit included “Drawings of P. G. Wodehouse *from birth to nine years of age* executed by his mother Eleanor Deane Wodehouse” (italics added). The author of the article, TWS member and former President Florence Cunningham, who visited the exhibit, described the drawings as “beautiful line drawings, painted in delicate watercolor.” She goes on to state that Mrs. Wodehouse labeled one drawing in fine lettering: “Baby trying to climb in chair by himself—such a pleasant baby” (*Plum Lines*, July 15, 1984). This image of Eleanor is, to me, quite at variance with the biographers' view.

Adding my own little mite to the mixture, I'd like to offer a challenge to McCrum's entire notion of "Wodehouse's Wonderland." The theme of his article comes from a proposed title for Wodehouse's never-published war memoir, now apparently lost, *Wodehouse in Wonderland*. The existence of this memoir, and its title, is not new news, of course. Wodehouse gave his draft manuscript of the memoir to Bill Townend to read, and excerpts were included in *Performing Flea* (1953).<sup>5</sup> In the correspondence that conveyed the draft (dated November 18, 1952) Wodehouse said, "I wrote it at Tost, after I had finished *Money in the Bank*, except of course for the diary stuff about my life at the Citadel of Huy, which was jotted down day by day during my stay there." Bill tells us that "Plum had given it the title of *Wodehouse in Wonderland*" (*Wodehouse on Wodehouse*, p. 417).

Neither Mr. Townend nor Mr. Landman questioned McCrum's adoption of the word "Wonderland" as representative of (a) the world that Wodehouse writes about, and (b) an imaginary place "where Wodehouse knew he was safest." I do question this assertion. McCrum, in my opinion, gets Wodehouse's Wonderland entirely wrong.

According to McCrum, the fact that PGW chose *Wodehouse in Wonderland* as the title for the lost war memoir "provides a vital clue" to understanding Wodehouse—"in code, of course." McCrum argues that he has broken the code and proceeds to give his solution, which follows along the familiar lines of the "tragic clown" stereotype—Wodehouse hiding behind the humorist mask and retreating to a fantasy land to "pacify the pain of everyday life." Wodehouse's probable reaction to this long-after-the-fact probing of his psyche is quickly disposed of with an airy nod to the fact that he would be "horrified" by McCrum's notions. This troubles McCrum not one whit, apparently, because it doesn't stop him for a moment.

According to McCrum, the memoir's title is "crucial" to understanding Wodehouse's mindset. Wodehouse "was a man with a *unique compulsion* to pacify the pain of everyday life by living in the Elysium of his imagination. Confronted by the trials of wartime, he simply stayed in character, taking *refuge in his own familiar world*." Wonderland, according to McCrum, was "a private survival mechanism" and "where Wodehouse knew he was *safest . . . his default position*" (italics added throughout). Really?

Safety and refuge were the images that, according to McCrum, were in Wodehouse's mind when "he referenced *Alice in Wonderland* [sic], a childhood favorite, to normalize a highly disturbing experience."

He embroiders this idea by telling of PGW's account of the Wodehouses' far-from-comic encounter with some German soldiers in Le Touquet. According to McCrum, Wodehouse's comic description of his dog's reaction to the soldiers was "profound, vivid, and intense unreality" and "surely the very definition of Wonderland." I agree that Wodehouse's description of Wonder (the dog) as having "the light of battle in her eyes" and "swearing in Chinese" is vivid. I do not see, however, that it is "profound," "intense," or "unreal." It is simply a brilliant description of a dog that is disturbed by the presence of strangers—a common occurrence, made uncommon by the fact that the strangers in this case are German soldiers. McCrum further states that Wodehouse's postwar books were "written about, and located in, Wonderland."

Well, I mean to say, what? Is it not common knowledge that Wodehouse's books were written about his own characters and located in the unique comic world of his own creation? What need had he of Lewis Carroll's Wonderland?

Let us examine McCrum's assertions. The Wonderland that Lewis Carroll imagined was nothing at all like the world about which Wodehouse wrote, although Carroll's Wonderland certainly fits the definition of "vivid and intense unreality." It is full of anthropomorphic animals, both mythical (the Mock Turtle, the Gryphon) and non-mythical (cats, rabbits, mice), shape-shifters (the Cheshire Cat, the baby-turned-pig), playing cards that talk, and nasty inhabitants (the Cook, the Duchess, the Queen), most of whom make no sense whatsoever. Does that sound anything like a Wodehouse story? Admittedly, Wodehouse does brilliantly share with us in a lighthearted manner the "thoughts" of the occasional dog (Wonder, the Mixer, Emily, and my own favorite, Smith the bulldog, in *The Girl on the Boat*) or parrot (Bill in *Jill the Reckless*), but these animals do not interact anthropomorphically with the Wodehouse characters. And, though he does, rarely, serve up a nasty character (April June in *Laughing Gas*, Princess von und zu Dwornitzchek in *Summer Lightning*, and the entire Three Points gang in *Psmith, Journalist*), they are not the characters that epitomize his oeuvre.

More importantly, Wonderland, while profoundly unreal, vivid, and intense, was not a place of safety and refuge. What happens to Alice there? She is abruptly wrested from her comfortable home, falls into an unrecognizable world, and spends a lot of her time being ordered about, leaving her fearful, sad, and lonely. She faces possible execution and worries that that she'll never see her cat or her home again. What happened to

Wodehouse during his wartime tribulations? McCrum supplies the following information about that: “Two months [after the disaster of Dunkirk], after a terrifying ordeal, he was interned in Poland . . . [and] he suffered Allied bombing [in Berlin] and endured the ‘global howl’ about those infamous broadcasts . . . [H]e was arrested, interrogated, and (again) imprisoned” in Paris. “In 1944 . . . he was told . . . that his beloved daughter, Leonora, had died. . . . Soon after this—under threat of the death sentence as a possible traitor—he was interrogated by MI5.”

Wodehouse’s allusion to Wonderland is apt, not for the reasons that McCrum gives, but because Wodehouse knew the story of Alice’s adventures much better than McCrum seems to.<sup>6</sup> I believe that Wodehouse’s evocation of Wonderland, aside from its alliterative attractiveness, was simply another example of *le mot juste*. He was plunged into a world of discomfort (he lost over forty pounds, and slept without a blanket in bitter cold during one ten-day period and on a plank bed at Tost) and an existence for which nothing in his prior life prepared him. It bore no relation to anything he knew, or that he imagined in his stories, just as Alice’s Wonderland was a completely foreign land to her. While interned, he had no way of knowing when he would return to his home and to Ethel, Leonora, his grandchildren, and his dog. He was ordered about—rousted from bed with a stentorian “Aus!” and paraded and counted six times a day. [Note that all references herein to his experiences while interned are from the camp book excerpts at the end of *Performing Flea (Wodehouse on Wodehouse)*, pp. 418-63].<sup>7</sup>

Let’s look at a few quotes from *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* to test my assertion that “Wonderland” cannot serve as a proxy for a place of safety and refuge, nor did its crazed, dream-induced world resemble the world of Wodehouse’s fiction. (Italics below are added.)

Alice has left a pleasant home and is ordered about:

“It was *much pleasanter at home*,” thought poor Alice, “when one wasn’t . . . *being ordered about* by mice and rabbits.”

“*I never was so ordered about in my life, never!*”

“*How the creatures order one about!*” thought Alice.

Alice is sad, frightened, and lonely, and she wonders if she will ever get out:

*There were doors all round the hall, but they were all locked; and when Alice had been all the way down one side and up the other, trying every door, she walked sadly down the middle, wondering how she was ever to get out again.*

“Oh, my dear Dinah! I wonder if I shall ever see you any more!” And here poor Alice *began to cry again*, for she felt very *lonely and low-spirited*.

There seemed to be no sort of chance of her *ever getting out*.

She was a *good deal frightened* by this very sudden change.

Poor Alice! . . . to get through [to the beautiful garden] was *more hopeless than ever*: she sat down and *began to cry again*.

There is nothing safe or comfortable about the land into which Alice has been catapulted, and the refuge she seeks (a beautiful garden) is continuously, tantalizingly, out of her reach behind a locked door. Alice spends a good deal of her time seeking the entrance.

“The next thing is, to get into that beautiful garden—how *is* that to be done, I wonder?”

She found herself at last in the beautiful garden, among the bright flower-beds and the cool fountains.

Aha! Sounds Blandings-like! But this garden is nothing like a safe English garden, and the illusion of sanctuary is fleeting. Moments after gaining admittance, Alice meets the frightened minions of the ruler of this strange world, then the ruler herself.

The Queen turned *crimson with fury*, and, after glaring at her for a moment like a wild beast, screamed “Off with her head! Off——”

No safety, no refuge. I concur with McCrum’s statement that Wodehouse likely meant that his “appalling experiences in World War II” were in the nature of “a trip to Wonderland” but not because it was “to invite his readers to suspend disbelief.” Balderdash! To what purpose? There was little chance that there would be any disbelief to suspend. Because of the “global howl” regarding the broadcasts, Wodehouse’s

internment was widely known to have happened. The excerpts from the camp book in *Performing Flea* show a man who has chosen to describe his experiences with his tongue very firmly in his cheek, but the underlying facts are entirely believable and do not belong to Wodehouse's "imaginative world." It seems more likely to me that the choice of title was to invite his readers to think of a world unlike any they or he had ever known—a world where one was never safe and never knew what would happen next. The title was, to my mind, a rueful nod to his finding himself in an unfamiliar, distressing, and uncomfortable situation.

I think, too, that Alice's thoughts immediately after her fall down the rabbit hole have a separate resonance, given Wodehouse's own (horribly mistaken) thoughts as to how he would be perceived for having weathered his trying time in internment without complaining.

"Well!" thought Alice to herself. . . . "How brave they'll all think me at home!"

McCrum's analogy fails; Wodehouse's succeeds.

Admittedly, Wodehouse spent most of his time after the war in the quiet of his home, cushioned from the outside world—an existence that was nothing like Alice's Wonderland. He gave his public what they liked best from him: fiction set in a fictional world. His fiction was grounded in fact—we know that because the late, great Norman Murphy showed us that time and again. But it is a mistake, in my opinion, to confuse his life with his fiction or to conclude that he spent his life escaping from reality or that he retreated into an imaginary world of his own, simply because he spent a considerable amount of his time writing fiction. He certainly knew that it was fiction and out of date at that, after the war. "I keep on writing, and the books have been piling up for five years or so . . . They will definitely be historical novels now, as they all deal with a life in which country houses flourish and butlers flit to and fro."<sup>8</sup>

It is a natural human urge to seek safety and refuge, and one who finds it is quite fortunate. Wodehouse seemed to have found it, and it was surely well-deserved by a hardworking man in his late sixties, after his appalling war experiences. Writing is a solitary task, and when one is capable of the prodigious output for which Wodehouse is renowned, a considerable amount of time will be spent in solitude. When one adds a naturally introverted personality and the roar of calumny from his native land and elsewhere, I don't believe one needs delve deeply into his psyche to find the motives for his living in the peace of Remsenburg, New York, near his

lifelong friend Guy Bolton. It is also a normal human reaction to feel sadness, regret, and even occasional melancholy, after a catastrophic loss, such as the death of a child, or the loss of good will and the ability to visit one's homeland. It would be a unique individual indeed who would not feel this way.

Did he have regrets? Undoubtedly. He was sorry it happened and stated that if one does a foolish thing, one must take the consequences.<sup>9</sup> And he did. Quietly. Did he mourn the loss of his daughter? Unquestionably. (See *P. G. Wodehouse: A Life in Letters*,<sup>10</sup> p. 20: When asked by his grandson to write a memoir about Leonora, he responded poignantly, in a voice close to tears, that he couldn't because he found it too painful.)

Did he spend his later years in a state of chronic regret, puzzling over his disgrace? I point you, again, to Mr. Landman's article for a view contrary to McCrum's assertions. For myself, I can see no reason why Wodehouse's clever title for his proposed memoir and his continuing to work, in his pleasant home, at the same job that he had had for over forty years—one that gave him great pleasure and a stream of earnings—should be looked upon as evidence of such lifelong regret or a unique compulsion to retreat from the harsh reality of personal loss and continued opprobrium. I have to wonder what else Mr. McCrum thinks any reasonably well-balanced person might have done in the circus.

It is a common trait of a biographer to theorize as to how his/her subject must have felt, and McCrum is no exception to this. He has stated that, in writing the PGW biography, he "studied the psychology of the individual." Well, he's no Jeeves. He came up with theories based on his findings, but let us remember that Wodehouse was long dead when McCrum began work on the biography, thus making a true study of Plum's psychology impossible. Mr. Landman points out that those who write about Wodehouse "more often than not, unwittingly end up writing about themselves." McCrum, like most biographers, makes guesses and assumptions and reaches conclusions based on his own worldview<sup>11</sup> and the facts he collected (some erroneous). I think he got it wrong. The reasoning of David Landman (who is also guessing) makes more sense to me based on Wodehouse's own writing (fictional and nonfictional) and statements in personal interviews.

I do hope that those who seek to gain insight into the life of the writer we celebrate through this society will take Mr. McCrum's speculations and opinions with a heaping portion of salt. Use Occam's Razor: Among competing hypotheses, the one with the fewest assumptions should be selected. It takes a lot of assumptions to get to McCrum's view of Wodehouse.

I suggest that these assumptions be closely examined before the Wodehouse that he sketches in his biography, his speaking engagements, and the recent *Plum Lines* article, be accepted as definitive.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Bertie considered that “going to fancy dress dances as a Pierrot . . . [is] roughly equivalent to shooting a sitting bird.” (*Joy in the Morning*, Chapter 24)

<sup>2</sup> Just one instance that comes to mind immediately is Wodehouse’s simple explanation of why there are so many aunts in his stories, which had nothing to do with parental absence (and presence of aunts) during his formative years. See, e.g., the documentary “Plum: A Portrait of P. G. Wodehouse” (BBC 1989) at 10:34. The overbearing aunt was an immediately recognizable stock character in the comedic repertoire at the turn of the twentieth century, and Wodehouse, like Oscar Wilde, used a dynamic easily appreciated by his readers. See also Nick Townend’s “Wodehouse in Wonderland: Some Thoughts” for predecessors to the aunt-nephew relationship in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, and see *P. G. Wodehouse: A Biography* by Frances Donaldson and F. Anstey’s *Voces Populi*. (Note that I do not take issue with the view that PGW used elements from his own aunts’ personalities in his fictional aunts; I simply think that more credence should be given to his own eminently reasonable response than the amateur psychoanalysis performed by his biographers.)

<sup>3</sup> Dave Barry’s solution: Humor Impairment. (See “Finally! Help for the Humor Impaired,” *Chicago Tribune*, June 11, 1989 at <http://tinyurl.com/barry-1989>.)

<sup>4</sup> See <http://tinyurl.com/hpofal7>

<sup>5</sup> *Performing Flea* is where Plum denied saying another of the quotes that has been attributed to him, viz., “I have never been able to work up a belligerent feeling. . . . Just as I am about to feel belligerent about some country, I meet some nice fellow from it and lose my belligerency.” Plum asks Bill Townend, “Have you ever heard me talk like that?” He states that “writers on daily and weekly papers always go all out for the picturesque. When they interview you, they invariably alter and embroider.” (*Wodehouse on Wodehouse*, p. 461–2)

<sup>6</sup> Perhaps Mr. McCrum should reread this classic. In another speech (recorded for WGBH Forum and available on YouTube) he attributes one of the White Rabbit’s lines to the Mad Hatter.

<sup>7</sup> I’m trying keep these blasted flyspecks to a minimum, so I haven’t footnoted each reference. (See the foreword to *Over Seventy* and Elliott Milstein’s excellent article “Wodehouse’s Extraordinary Scripture Knowledge,” *Plum Lines*, Summer 2016.)

<sup>8</sup> Letter to Compton Mackenzie, April 10, 1946. (*P. G. Wodehouse: A Life in Letters*, edited by Sophie Ratcliffe, p. 385)

<sup>9</sup> See interviews with PGW in “Plum: A Portrait of P. G. Wodehouse” (BBC 1989), available on YouTube.

<sup>10</sup> The best source of information about Wodehouse’s life, in my opinion.

<sup>11</sup> *Weltanschauung*, in German. (Sorry! I couldn’t resist. I’m done now.)

## Last Call: Degenershausen

AS PREVIOUSLY announced, a special Wodehouse event will take place at Degenershausen, Plum’s German retreat for the summers of 1941–42, after he was released from internment. The event will take place on May 20 at the Degenershausen landscape park in Saxony-Anhalt in Germany. The “Wodehouse-Linde,” a tree under which Plum often sat to relax, will be “baptized.” The event will also celebrate the centenary of the first Wodehouse publication in Germany. The program may consist of a thematic park tour, a lecture from a newly published translation, and more. For information on traveling and accommodation, contact:

Tourist-Information Ballenstedt  
Anhaltiner Platz 11, 06493 Ballenstedt  
Tel: +49 39483 263  
Fax: +49 39483 97110  
Mail: [kontakt@ballenstedt-information.de](mailto:kontakt@ballenstedt-information.de)  
Web: [www.ballenstedt.de](http://www.ballenstedt.de)

To find information about Degenershausen, visit: <http://www.landschaftspark-degenershausen.de/>

## Brave Coward

MAX POKRIVCHAK sent this in: In the World War II potboiler *Coward at the Bridge* (2009) by James Delingpole, Lt. Richard Coward repeatedly describes his testy relationship with indispensable subordinate Sergeant Price as being much like that of Wooster and Jeeves’s. All well and good, but what seals the deal, Wodehouse-wise, is that when giving his seat on a rescue boat to a wounded soldier, Coward says (in the immortal words of Sir Philip Sidney, as paraphrased by Plum), “In you go, old chap. Your need is greater than mine.” Delicately nurtured Wodehouse readers should be warned, however, that Delingpole does not shy away from showing that war is heck.

# Peter van Straaten

BY PETER NIEUWENHUIZEN



*Peter van Straaten,  
the great Dutch illustrator and cartoonist at work*

ON DECEMBER 8, the Dutch artist and cartoonist Peter van Straaten passed away in his hometown of Amsterdam at the age of 81. Van Straaten was a famous cartoonist who won various prizes for his political cartoons and received an honorary doctorate at the Leiden University in 2011. For more than fifty years he drew daily comic strips for Dutch newspapers like *Parool*, *Volkscrant*, and *NRC Handelsblad*, and he also made annual tear-off calendars. His *Vader & Zoon* cartoons (about a conservative father and left-wing son) were famous. He also wrote several books and received the Jacobus van Looy-prize for his unique talents. He drew with a sharp pen and brilliant observation.

Van Straaten was inspired by the American artist Charles Dana Gibson (1867–1944); by his brother Gerard (1924–2011), also a cartoonist; and fellow Dutch cartoonists Leo Jordaan (1885–1980) and Jo Spier (1900–1978), the latter of whom emigrated to the U.S. From 1976 to 1983, van Straaten drew the front covers for Dutch translations of the Wodehouse novels. In total he produced 23 different covers for the Spectrum publishers in Utrecht in The Netherlands.

Van Straaten was asked by James Heineman to portray a “Bayeux Tapestry” consisting of twelve Wodehouse scenes that Heineman had selected. The scenes would form one elongated representation of the Wodehouse world for the centenary Wodehouse exhibition in the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York in 1981. Van Straaten accepted the assignment and presented the results of his efforts when he met Heineman in the Amsterdam Okura hotel. Heineman subsequently invited van Straaten to be present at the

exhibition’s festive opening night. There he met Lady Ethel Wodehouse, and according to van Straaten, she was carried around by two men and enthusiastically kissed by all the men present at the gala dinner.

Dan Garrison used van Straaten illustrations for his book *Who’s Who in Wodehouse*. Before doing so, he contacted Heineman and discovered “a whole trove of further illustrations” which were reproduced in Dan’s volume with Heineman’s permission. In the second edition of Dan’s book, he published the reply he’d received from Heineman from their original correspondence:

It was one of those depressing, grey, damp, dreary and rainy days in Amsterdam when it made little difference whether or not you had fallen into a canal. In the gloom I tripped over some steps and fell through a creaky door into a basement bookstore lit by a somber bulb hanging alone on a cord. . . . As I got to my feet life changed. There before me was a large table covered by Dutch translations of P. G. Wodehouse, all with covers illustrated by Peter van Straaten, a real master of his craft. Each illustration depicted not only the theme of the book, but also captured the scenes and characters of the story in a few deceptively simple lines. It was an illustrated digest of Wodehouse, and I bought them all.

The search for the illustrator was not an easy task as van Straaten is somewhat reclusive and lives in a tiny town known but to himself, his family, the postmistress, and a couple of other natives. Outside of his hamlet van Straaten’s work is widely known in Holland. . . . He draws his Wodehouse characters as they are visualized by several generations of Wodehouse fans.

Van Straaten lived in those days in the small town of Giethoorn, also known as “the Venice of the North.” Later he moved to Amsterdam and also had a second residence in Airole in Italy.

Van Straaten’s Wodehouse illustrations can be found in *The Penguin Wodehouse Companion* (Usborne, 1988); *Who’s Who in Wodehouse* (Garrison, 1989); *P. G. Wodehouse: A Centenary Celebration 1881–1981* (Heineman and Bensen, 1981); and other publications. More information about Peter van Straaten can be found (in Dutch) at <http://www.petervanstraaten.nl/>.

[Note: In our Summer 2017 issue, we will print some van Straaten illustrations, as well as cartoons from other illustrators, when we publish items from Peter Nieuwenhuizen’s 2015 TWS convention talk.—OM]

# 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



**T**HE CHAPS of Chapter One met at the usual sllicing spot, Cavanaugh's in Head House Square, on November 13. There were eighteen attendees in all, including a guest of Herb Moskowitz—fellow Dickens and Poe enthusiast Bob Sloan.

The meeting started with the continuing saga of the Philadelphia Zoo and Chapter One's sponsored Mandarin newt, Gussie. This year there was another mix-up about who we are sponsoring. A few years ago, the zoo sent us paperwork showing that we had adopted a hippo. This time the mistaken animal was a tiger. After a good laugh and a whip-round, Gussie will be kept in the style to which he's accustomed for the coming year.

Bob Nissenbaum showed another selection from the *Wodehouse Playhouse* series with "The Rise of Minna Nordstrom." The first version of the story, without the Mulliner introduction, was published in March 1933 under the title "A Star is Born," four years before the original *A Star is Born* movie. After some discussion, it was decided that Plum wins the honor for coming up with the now-familiar phrase.

\*\*\*\*\*

On January 22, we met again at Cavanaugh's. The pub was unusually empty of people (the football game was still hours away) but we warmed it up properly.

Bob Rains (Oily Carlisle) invited us to register for the upcoming TWS convention, October 19–22, 2017, at the Hamilton Crowne Plaza in Washington, D.C. Please help The Wodehouse Society control costs for the convention by staying at the Crowne Plaza rather than at another D.C. hotel. Bob recommended phone over web reservations (877-270-1393).

Bob distributed an editorial from *Light: The Quarterly of Light Verse* and created a Pale Parabola Award for overrated poets of the bloviated style of Ralston McTodd. The first recipient was Ezra Pound.

Rebecca Reber gave an excellent presentation on *Leave It to Psmith*, including charts of the action, a graph of relations between the characters, and the cover illustrations of many editions of the book. The book, the second to feature Blandings Castle, is from a transitional period between Plum's early works of schoolboy escapades to his later more adult settings. Rebecca represented the plot by an inverted parabola, with much action in the first part and near the end, but less material action in the middle as Psmith courts Miss Halliday with long, whimsical speeches.

## Chicago Accident Syndicate

(Chicago and thereabouts)

Contact: Daniel & Tina Garrison



**T**HE SYNDICATE had a jolly November meeting at Tina Woelke's. With all our chatting and getting

acquainted with new members, we had to squeeze in various Wodehouse readings at the last minute.

We are sad to report the loss of Martha Herriott Swift. Martha was born August 24, 1934, and died November 23, 2016. She was an early and enthusiastic member of the Chicago Accident Syndicate. Her nom de Plum was Aunt Martha and she claimed that she “taught Aunt Agatha everything she knew.” She came from a long line of PGW fans, and her library of Wodehouse’s works included Tauchnitz paperback editions from the 1930s that had been purchased by her grandparents. She rejoiced in laughter and she will be greatly missed by her husband, Dean Miller; her son, John Swift, and his wife, Nancy; and her grandson Emerson—and by pretty much anyone who ever met her.

### The Clients of Adrian Mulliner

(For enthusiasts of both PGW and Sherlock Holmes)

Contact: Elaine Coppola



ON SATURDAY, January 7, 2017, a Junior Bloodstain was held in the York Suite at the Roosevelt Hotel during the Baker Street Irregulars (BSI) weekend in New York City. Aficionados of Sherlock Holmes and the stories of P. G. Wodehouse enjoyed a performance of “The Tenth Green” by Headon Hill. The story was edited by George Vanderburgh and Carol Cavalluzzi and adapted for dramatic reading by William Hyder.

### The Den(ver) of the Secret Nine

(Denver and vicinity)

Contact: Jennifer Petkus



### The Drone Rangers

(Houston and vicinity)

Contact: Carey Tynan



### The Flying Pigs

(Cincinnati area and elsewhere)

Contact: Susan Pace or Bill Scrivener



THE HOLIDAYS being over, the Flying Pigs scheduled a dinner to celebrate all things PGW on March 3.

We will report in full about the festivities in the next issue of *Plum Lines*, but we do know that the hosts were Susan Pace and Bill Scrivener. We welcome all would-be Flying Pigs in the area. We have several new members, some found by serendipity, others by invitation. We hope to have a sizeable contingent in D.C. for the Mr. Wodehouse Goes to Washington convention, knowing that a splendid time is in store for all.

### Friends of the Fifth Earl of Ickenham

(Buffalo, New York, and vicinity)

Contact: Laura Loehr



### The Melonsquashville (TN) Literary Society

(Tennessee)

Contact: Ken Clevenger



THE Melonsquashvillains met on December 10, 2016, at the Clevenger home. Your intrepid guest chronicler, Karen Shottling, traversed the flatlands and climbed the Carolina mountains to attend this auspicious event. The members of the Literary Society were greeted by the aroma of pulled pork and the sight of the festive board groaning with holiday treats of the highest order. And did I mention the wassail bowl?

After the initial what-hoing and pip-pipping, our host heralded the opening of the literary portion of the afternoon: a staged reading of “The Metropolitan Touch.” As a first-time reader, I have to say that I highly recommend this format for chapter meetings. It was jolly good fun, and the appreciative audience of twenty or so laughed in all of the right places. All of the readers did a fine job, but I think it right to single out a chapter newcomer as a particular favorite. David Holt as Bingo Little did a superb job, and this critic ranks him head and shoulders above other Bingos that I have seen—his pace and timing were just spot on.

A spring program based on the novel *Joy in the Morning* seems to be in the offing and ’squashvillains should watch their inboxes for details. Anyone else interested should contact Ken Clevenger.

### The Mottled Oyster Club / Jellied Eels

(San Antonio and South Texas)

Contact: Lynette Poss



**I**T'S ALMOST always sunny in Wodehouse's world. Cold, wet weather rarely gets a mention. However, when it occurs in south Texas, streets empty and pizza deliveries roll out en masse. The evening of December 3, on a night dark and stormy enough to make Edward Bulwer-Lytton take up a quill, we Mottled Oysters gathered for our annual Christmas bash.

Revelers included Jan Ford and Randy Anderson, Liz Davenport, Bryan and Janet Lilius, Lynette Poss, and host Craig Hardwick. We brought in potluck dishes and extra bottles of spirits to ward off a cold December night. Only Cecilia Etheridge and the Empress of Blandings Christmas ornament were missing. If you are keeping track, Cecilia took charge of the Empress at last year's Christmas party. Due to her absence this year, we will be forced to hand off the pig at the next meeting without the typical fanfare.

The party went off flawlessly. The Lili, who introduced the Empress ornament several years ago and began the custom of round-robin ornament-sitting, presented us each with a tiny pig. This 2016 porcine creation is dimpled, golf-ball-sized, and pink. It will likely slice if used on the links, as Janet thoughtfully glued ears, feet, and a corkscrew tail to the body.

For those of you reading along with us, our November selection was *Blandings Castle and Elsewhere*.

The Mottled Oysters/Jellied Eels of South Texas meet on the first Thursday of each month, around 7:30 PM at the La Cantera Barnes & Noble, second floor, history section. If you are a Wodehouse fan living in or near San Antonio, or just visiting, we'd love to see you. Food and drink not being far from our minds, we are usually at a nearby Emsworth Arms (the Cheesecake Factory) before the meeting.

**The New England Wodehouse Thingummy Society (NEWTS)**

(Boston and New England)  
Contact: John Fahey



**The Northwodes**

(St. Paul, Minneapolis, and vicinity)  
Contact: Mike Eckman



**The Orange Plums**

(Orange County, California)  
Contact: Lia Hansen



**I**T WAS THE height of the holiday season when we Orange Plums made our annual visit to the Olde Ship in Santa Ana for a Christmas party where we may have startled the quieter patrons with our whooping and cheering. The Olde Ship is a lovely English-style pub, and we made haste to get ourselves around our favorite dishes and wash them all down with pots of tea or glasses of Guinness. Many of us went home with our names etched into Guinness glasses to commemorate the occasion.

Billie Dore brought along some Christmas crackers and soon general giddiness reigned with the wearing of tissue-paper crowns and guffawing over silly riddles and ancient jokes. The highlight of the afternoon was our Boat Race Night game. The Commodore provided each of us with small boats, which we then personalized. Ms. Postlethwaite devised a game board, and Minna Nordstrom created a trophy. The trophy is so very large, so very—singular—that it was decided that the winner of the game shouldn't have to take the trophy home. A splendid time was had by all! We Orange Plums wish all of our fellow Wodehousians a very splendid 2017.



*Lia (aka Billie Dore) was second runner-up and here is holding the Boat Race Night trophy.*

**The Pale Parabolites**

(Toronto and vicinity)  
Contact: George Vanderburgh



**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



**T**HE PICKERINGS met at the home of Mike and Sherry Smith. The reading assignment was the short story “Tried in the Furnace.” Given the number of biblical references in Wodehouse, your humble scrivener, who did not win the prize for Scripture Knowledge at school, always assumed that the title came from the fiery furnace in the Book of Daniel, though I did not understand the reference. Actually, it comes from Psalms and Isaiah 48:10: “I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction.” Ancient metallurgists would refine silver by heating it to the melting point, which would burn off the impurities and leave a purer metal, much like Barmy and Pongo’s friendship was stronger and purer after their day in the furnace of affliction.

This led to a discussion of the ordeals of Barmy and Pongo and which was worse: Pongo’s misadventures at the school treat or Barmy’s trip to the seaside with the village mothers’ annual outing. Both sides of the question had their partisans. This brought on a discussion of Wodehouse’s portrayal of schoolboys. As a young writer, he wrote school stories about stalwart, virtuous boys who did what was right for the school. When he was older, the schoolboys in his stories behaved worse and caused much more trouble and embarrassment to the older characters like Pongo.

The village mothers serenade Barmy with a song called “Give Yourself a Pat on the Back.” It’s a music-hall song that you can find on YouTube (1927, Bobbie Comber). “Tried in the Furnace” was written in the 1930s, so Wodehouse was aware of the song. The village mothers seem to be the type of boisterous lower-class people that frequent the clean, bright entertainments given by virtuous Wodehouse characters in places like Bottleton East. Let off the chain once a year, they blow off a lot of steam, much to Barmy’s chagrin.

Our discussion of the jokes in Barmy and Pongo’s crosstalk act led us to a discussion of old music-hall and vaudeville jokes. There was a discussion of how tastes in comedy change and how jokes that were funny years ago may not seem funny to the modern generation.

We discussed W. C. Fields, Chris Rock, Jerry Seinfeld, Nichols and May, and others. Times and taste in humor do change—but Wodehouse’s humor is timeless.

Those of you who attended the 2011 convention may remember the Detroit bus tour. Mike Smith of the Pickerings produced an illustrated guidebook to go along with the tour. This led Mike to continue his research on Detroit’s historic buildings. The guidebook has now turned into a book: *Designing Detroit: Wirt Rowland and the Rise of Modern American Architecture* by Michael G. Smith will be published in April 2017. You may preorder it on Amazon.

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



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



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



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



**T**HE DUTCH P. G. Wodehouse Society celebrated (on November 19, 2016—a bit late!) the 125th anniversary of P. G. Wodehouse’s birth and the 25th anniversary of our society’s foundation. A special committee (Vikas Sonak, Jannes Koster, and Leonard Beuger) organized the celebration. The event took place in Utrecht, one of the oldest towns in The Netherlands. Because all Right Hon. Knights are also members of the Dutch society, they attended all festivities.

In the afternoon, we took a Wodehouse Utrecht Walk. Peter Nieuwenhuizen was our guide, and he



*The Right Honourable Knights reenact the moment that Gussie Fink-Nottle smashes the painting on Roderick Spode's head.*

took us to 35 places of interest in Utrecht, all of which had at least a tenuous connection to Wodehouse. We strolled past the Nijntje Museum (“nijntje” is Dutch for little rabbit—hence the Dream Rabbit from *Full Moon*), and gazed upon the Geertekerk (Dutch for Gertrudis Church), linked in our minds to “Company for Gertrude.” Another sight was the Nicolai-Kerk (Nicholas Church), which had a special Wodehouse treat. Peter invited us to go inside the church. The big surprise was that at that moment, organ player Ko Zwanenburg played Anne Dudley’s Jeeves & Wooster theme. As far as we know, it was the world premiere of that tune on an organ in a Dutch church!

The main celebration was held that evening at the eighth annual dinner of the Dutch PGW society in the



*Right Honourable Knight Rob Sander as Aunt Daphne Winkworth and society president Peter Nieuwenhuizen as Aunt Myrtle Deverill*

Paushuize (the Papal Palace, linked to “The Bishop’s Move”) in the center of Utrecht. The palace was built for Adrian VI, the only Dutch pope in history, but unfortunately he passed away early before he could enter his own palace. Papal Palace manager Pepijn Philipsen spoke to us about the history of the building. The dining room was originally a ballroom and was joined to the palace in 1830. In the reception room we heard talks from Bart Pepermans of the Belgian Drones Club, Vikas Sonak, Peter Nieuwenhuizen, and the renowned Tony Ring. After these terrific presentations, we went in to dinner and were welcomed by yet more clean, bright entertainment as the Belgian Drones regaled us with music and led a community singalong of “Sonny Boy.”

Chairman Peter Nieuwenhuizen read from a “private and confidential” letter written by the Duchess of Cornwall, patroness of the Dutch Society. She was unable to attend our dinner party in person. Peter proposed a toast to the duchess, to P. G. Wodehouse, to the Dutch Society, and to the Knights.

Between the courses, our own Wodehouse Players presented two Wodehouse scenes translated and directed by Leonard Beuger. One was the scene from *The Mating Season* with Bertie Wooster (disguised as Gussie Fink-Nottle) arriving late at Deverill Hall for dinner with Esmond Haddock and his five aunts. The other scene was from *The Code of the Woosters*, where Gussie Fink-Nottle smashed a fair-sized oil painting, with nice wrist action, on Roderick Spode’s head. With a silent auction and a fiendish quiz (won by Josepha Olsthoorn), the successful double-birthday party came to an end too soon.

The next regular meeting of the Knights will be on June 10, 2017. Because we are still without a permanent chapter home, we don’t yet know the exact location. It will be in Amsterdam, of course. (If you would like to attend the meeting on June 10, please contact Jelle Otten by e-mail.)

**Rugby in All Its Niceties**  
(Rugby, Tennessee region)  
Contact: Donna Heffner



**T**HE INAUGURAL meeting of the Rugby in All Its Niceties chapter was held at the Harrow Road Café in Rugby, Tennessee, on Saturday, January 21. The village of Rugby was founded in 1880 by British author Thomas Hughes (*Tom Brown’s School Days*) and has remained true to those roots ([www.historicrugby.org](http://www.historicrugby.org)), making it the perfect venue for a Wodehouse Society chapter. Twenty-three Plummies (including

some seekers who we are sure will become bona fide Plumies) attended their first meeting. This was a truly gratifying number for a village of approximately seventy full-time residents. Attendees enjoyed a splendid dinner at the café, including a special treat of gnocchi (mentioned by Wodehouse) by Wizard Cook Tanya Dillard and an excellent choice of libations. A list of all of Plum's work was distributed. We were then honored with an excellent program by Ken Clevenger of the Melonsquashville (Tennessee) Literary Society chapter, who spoke on "Was Wodehouse a Gastronomer?" The answer was a resounding "yes," and Ken's talk was thoroughly enjoyed by all.

The only definite decision made at this meeting was that whoever has the floor is required to carry a small British flag, thoughtfully provided by resident George Zepp. This rule is irrevocable. Many toasts were made but no rolls were thrown. Harrow Road is particularly known for its delicious spoon rolls and the thought of throwing them was appalling. There was talk of naming one of Rugby's upcoming Irish road-bowling teams "Duck, Duck Jeeves!"

The chapter hopes to meet at least quarterly. Readings, a possible play, and perhaps a musical tribute to Wodehouse/Kern were discussed. Those present agreed that the evening was a wonderful beginning. The next meeting is set for April 22, 2017.

### The Size 14 Hat Club

(Halifax, Nova Scotia)

Contact: Jill Robinson



### The West Texas Woosters

(West Texas)

Contact: Troy Gregory



WHAT THE well-dressed Woosters are doing: The West Texas Woosters started 2017 the right way, with renewed emphasis on all matters Wodehouse. We've taken the apostles-of-energy oath—secret stuff, I'm afraid—and have vowed to convert all vampires of indolence. Our chapter is blessed with a gifted university membership and member-friends, with students who study Wodehouse in our undergraduate classrooms and who intend to study Wodehouse at the graduate level. Yes, thesis work and all! Our first graduate course in Wodehouse at Wayland Baptist University is on the

docket for fall 2018. We already have two enthusiastic grads with the date saved. Others, we trust, will follow.

The West Texas Woosters are not above offering bonus grades on reading quizzes to freshmen who attend our meetings, and subsequently our January 21 soirée was fully two dozen strong. We discussed "Jeeves in the Spring-Time," reading the U.K. version of the 1921 short story from the *Strand*. We focused on Bertie's unreliable narration and its subsequent context for irony, and we explored in loving detail how we might receive Jeeves independent of Bertie's deranged point of view. I mean to say, it was fruitful discussion. Two hours, two pots of tea, and an entire coffee cake later, we were still hashing it out. And let me tell you, there's a general consensus that we can do for Wodehouse what Kittredge, Beryl, Robertson Jr., and Donaldson did for Chaucer: namely, restore his masterful irony and challenge the cloying notion that Wodehouse is an innocent and oblivious to the goings-on around him. (Think pilgrim and poet Chaucer in *The Canterbury Tales*: one a lovable ass duped by all; the other a king's man, civil servant, courtier, and professional fool.) We're talking hot stuff—a Wodehouse to contend with the Menippean business in Chaucer and the festive stuff in Shakespeare. A Wodehouse larger than theory, unceremoniously shifting devotees from cultural imprisonment to primal, elemental existence. A return, within his pages, to the Saturnalia, the Golden Age. I mean ditch the meds and take a Wodehouse short instead. Light literature indeed!

The West Texas Woosters also started the year with a bid to host a future Wodehouse convention. We advertised a university-hosted conference, historic downtown accommodations, a hickory-club golf tourney at the local country club, an evening of Wodehouse-Kern-Bolton-Gershwin-inspired songs performed by our School of Music, an exhibition featuring Wodehouse cover artists at the university art museum, a program exploring linkages between cultural conservatism and laughter, and a down-home Texan Saturday-night shindig to rival anything in Rabelais (who wasn't from Texas). As an added incentive, should Fortune smile on our bid, we've offered to temporarily change our chapter name to The Baptist Black Shorts.

On the light side, the West Texas Woosters maintains its weekly nine-hole schedule of best-ball hickory golf. All participants must carry and use, once per hole, an Oldest-Member-era golf stick, typically a putter, chipper, or mashie. Our group numbers vary, particularly at this time of year, as do our scores. We have yet to finish under par. Our fun, however, is as big as West Texas itself.

# Margaret Zbrozek

THE JULY 26 edition of the *Southampton Press* included the obituary of Margaret Zbrozek, age 89. Margaret was one of the individuals who looked after the Wodehouse family during their Remsenburg years. Those who attended the 2011 dedication of the Wodehouse plaque in Remsenburg may recall Margaret from that ceremony.

## Dutch Longevity

OUR MEMBERSHIP secretary, Ian Michaud, is a member of the Dutch P. G. Wodehouse Society, whose journal is called *Nothing Serious*. Ian noticed the number of the most recent issue was 100.

It seems right and proper to congratulate our Dutch friends for the longevity and quality of their Wodehousean work. So, to all our Dutch Wodehousean friends, “*Gefeliciteerd! Geweldige prestatie!*”

Ian also notes that this issue was “Jaargang 34, nummer 1.” In Ian’s inimitable fashion, he points out that this “would seem to indicate that they have published three nummers a year for the previous 33 jaargangs.”

## A Pink ’Un and a Pelican

IN THE LAST article that we published from the late Norman Murphy (“Borrowing from Brookfield,” Autumn 2016 *Plum Lines*), he said that it was when he bought a copy of *A Pink ’Un and a Pelican* (1898) by “Pitcher” Binstead and “Swears” Wells around 1970 that he became interested in researching where Wodehouse got his ideas for locations and characters.

Neil Midkiff offered a link to that very book, and we think there may be interest in seeing the book that triggered Norman’s lifelong quest. You can view *A Pink ’Un and a Pelican* at <http://tinyurl.com/pinkpel>.

“What are the chances of a cobra biting Harold, Jeeves?”

“Slight, I should imagine, sir. And in such an event, knowing the boy as intimately as I do, my anxiety would be entirely for the snake.”

“Still, unceasing vigilance, Jeeves.”

“Most certainly, sir.”

“The Purity of the Turf” (1922)

# Review: *Jeeves in Bloom*

BY KEN CLEVENGER

MARGARET RAETHER’S *Jeeves in Bloom* was presented by the NC Stage Company in Asheville, in January and February, with a well-deserved extension.

The intimate space rocked with laughter as Plum’s plots, bon mots, scenes, and characters rollicked the garden at Brinkley Court. This brilliant show, largely based on Wodehouse’s short story “Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit,” but deftly recrafted by Ms. Raether, is one part of a set of four, and is a seamless amalgam of some of Plum’s best bits. Last year this gifted company gave us *Jeeves Intervenes*. We can only hope we will get *Jeeves at Sea* and *Jeeves Takes a Bow* in 2018 and 2019.

The players were fully worthy of the script. Scott Treadway’s reprise of Bertie was again a tour de force; Callan White played Aunt Dahlia to perfection; Trinity Smith Keel was equally lovely as Madeline Bassett and never over the top; Stingley’s Anatole captured all the lunatic bombastic Frenchness Plum puts into “God’s gift to the gastric juices.” John Hall may have been too young to play old Tom Travers in one’s mind, but Ms. Raether has given the role a pep-and-go that works well in the story, and it fit Mr. Hall like a glove. Charlie Flynn-McIver’s Gussie is tongue-tied toward Madeline, but the playwright added a plot twist worthy of Wodehouse with a newt also named Madeline. Michael MacCauley reprised his masterful Jeeves from the earlier show: He was the essence of erudition and tact and the personification of a *deus ex machina*.

If I had to find a minor fault or two in the show, one would be that Ms. Raether gives Jeeves a few rather snarky lines at Bertie’s expense. Several times he emits an audible snort or a pshaw-like noise that was still much more emotional comment than Jeeves vents in the canon. Also, the early 1930s recorded pre-curtain music could have been replaced by some of the great recordings of singers doing Plum’s wonderful lyrics. An extra dose of real Wodehouse could have set the stage nicely.

But these are minor quibbles in a splendid evening of theater. The play, the players, the set and costumes, and the direction all exquisitely combined to create much laughter for all.





*John Wodehouse (1883–1941), 3rd Earl of Kimberley from 1932, had the courtesy title Lord Wodehouse from 1902 to 1932; he was PGW's third cousin twice removed. David Landman sent a biographical note from Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable saying that PGW based the character of Bertie Wooster on him. [We're sure that this is a view with which Norman Murphy would have disagreed!—OM]*

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

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