



# Plum Lines

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## Jeeves among the Hipsters

BY CONSTANCE WALKER, PHD

*Dr. Walker is a Professor of English and Liberal Arts at Carleton College in Minnesota. She entertained us at the 2017 TWS convention when she spoke of the popularity of Wodehouse with her millennial students.*

I'M DELIGHTED to be at my first Wodehouse convention; thank you kindly for inviting me to speak. But I should straightaway confess that despite my undying devotion to Plum, I do feel like something of an interloper here, as my field is really nineteenth- rather than twentieth-century British literature. I regularly offer undergraduate courses on English Romantic poetry and on Jane Austen. When students sign up for "The Art of Jane Austen," they already have some notion of what awaits, as her modern popularity has been nothing less than a cultural phenomenon. There is a steady stream of film adaptations, video blogs, online games, and action figures, as well as her appearance on the new £10 note.

But I'm happy to report that students still genuinely enjoy reading her novels. In fact, they often ask me for recommendations for other writers to read who are as funny as Austen. My standard reply over the years has been, "Have you heard of an English writer by the name of P. G. Wodehouse?" The standard response has been blank stares. Now, it was by no means certain to me that my millennial students would in fact enjoy Wodehouse. It crossed my mind that they might write him off as old-fashioned, or frivolous, or devoid of serious social issues and therefore not worth reading. But their appreciation for Austen persuaded me that I should at least try to make the introduction.

My first thought on how to introduce students to Wodehouse was an entire course devoted to his work, but my second thought was that without students



*In addition to fanning the Wodehouse flames at Carleton College, Dr. Walker will also teach Yeats, Heaney, Jane Austen, and Irish Literature in the next year.*

knowing who he was, they might stay away in droves. And how to bring him into an academic setting at all without ruining the sheer joy of reading him? One doesn't analyze Wodehouse; it would be "like taking a spade to a soufflé" (*Punch*, quoted by Stephen Fry). But then I began to think about the real pleasures of studying as well as reading Austen, and how I had always wanted to offer a course looking at her borrowings from Shakespeare, how the quarreling Elizabeth and Darcy seem direct descendants of Beatrice and Benedick, and how Emma's laughing at the quotation from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* that "the course of true love never did run smooth" shows her to be as befuddled as the Shakespearean lovers in the forest. And then I began to think about how other British writers of comedy borrowed from one another: how Sheridan surely modeled the wonderful Mrs. Malaprop of *The Rivals* on Dogberry from *Much Ado about Nothing*, and how the perfect logic of the insular bubble world of *The Importance of Being Earnest* surely has roots in

Wonderland and in W. S. Gilbert's topsy-turvydom. I imagined a version of Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent" retrofitted with comic writers. And so a course was born: I named it "Introduction to British Comedy." (I'm happy to report that it's now offered yearly and that it's always fully enrolled; if nothing else, there are worse ways of getting through a Minnesota winter.)

My syllabus begins with Shakespeare, although properly we should start with Roman New Comedy. We progress through the centuries (rather more quickly than I would ideally like, but at Carleton we have nine-and-a-half-week terms to contend with) all the way up to the Pythons and *The Office* and beyond. By the time we get to Wodehouse, though, the students have read Shakespeare, Sheridan, Fielding, Austen, Peacock, Carroll, Gilbert and Sullivan, Wilde, and Jerome K. Jerome among others, and thus are in a position to have some sense of how Wodehouse fits into the wider British comic tradition.

In her collection of his letters, Sophie Ratcliffe notes that "Wodehouse read his way through Shakespeare each year—and he adored the works of W. S. Gilbert." So my students were able to see similarities between the tone, character, and plots of the Wodehouse stories and earlier romantic comedy and farce. The sunniness of the Wodehousian tone, which has been described as a comic universe without evil, has parallels in Carroll and Gilbert and Wilde. And the character types that figure in much of British comedy—the juveniles, the blocking characters who hinder said juveniles from their bliss, the fools who help them unwittingly, and the clever servants who help them wittingly—are very much present in the Jeeves and Wooster stories as well in the guise of Bertie, aunts, friends, and of course Jeeves himself. Even more importantly, it's by situating Wodehouse's work within the context of British comedy that one can see and appreciate his originality. While the typical comic plot ends with wedding bells, Wodehouse's enormously clever twists make the happy endings those in which Bertie avoids holy matrimony to a series of unsuitable fiancées. The more happily-ever-after comedies you know, the funnier that comic twist becomes, and the more apparent his comic genius.

Thanks to some judiciously applied literary analysis, Wodehouse has won the respect and even the admiration of my students, but has he won their undying devotion? Would "Jeeves Takes Charge" and "Sir Roderick Comes to Lunch" be cast aside with other unwanted textbooks at the end of the term, or would they prove to be a gateway drug leading to a lifetime of Wodehouse addiction?

I bring glad tidings of joy: my students adore him. I always ask on the end-of-term evaluations whether they've discovered any writers they'd like to read more of, and Wodehouse's name appears more times than all the other writers on the syllabus combined, along with comments like "unbelievably funny" and "I'm buying a copy to give to my parents." And thinking about it, I believe that as millennials, there are reasons why they are actually advantageously poised to be able to appreciate Plum. Let me count the ways.

The first reason has to do with irony. Irony, in which the hidden meaning is exactly the opposite of the ostensible meaning, used to be the purview of literature classrooms, where it was taught as a literary term (as distinguished from sarcasm and satire). But irony has spilled over spectacularly from the classroom into contemporary cultural life. In a piece for the *New York Times*, Christy Warpole went so far as to opine that "irony is [now] the primary mode with which daily life is dealt."

Irony is not only tolerated but actively embraced in social interactions, on social media, in the arts, and even in fashion. Virgil Abloh, Kanye West's creative director and the designer of the witty Off-White clothing brand, spoke in a lecture at Columbia of how "irony is a tool for modern creativity." In an essay for *Salon*, Matt Ashby described irony in contemporary television, noting how "shows like *30 Rock* deliver a kind of meta-television-irony irony; the protagonist is a writer for a show that satirizes television, and the character is played by a woman who actually used to write for a show that satirizes television. Each scene comes with an all-inclusive tongue-in-cheek. And, of course, reality television as a concept is irony incarnate."

## Millennial Survives Another Day of Nonstop Irony

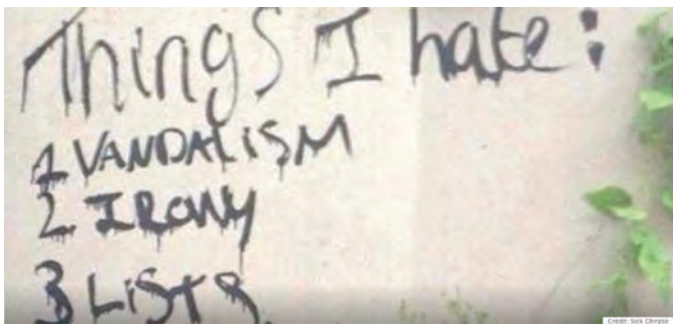
Irony flourishes on Twitter as well as on television. Juxtaposing the covers of *What They Teach You at Harvard Business School* and *What They Don't Teach You at Harvard Business School*, James Kirkpatrick wryly posts, "These two books contain the sum total of all human knowledge." Of course, embracing irony means that one needs to be ironic about doing so, and thus we see a fair amount of ironic millennial humor directed at millennials themselves, including a photo of the horn-rimmed glasses throw at the Hipster Olympics, held in Berlin in 2012. And so I would argue

that the millennials' appreciation for, engagement with, and creation of irony stands them in very good stead for appreciating the multiple types of irony in Wodehouse.

As I'm sure you'll remember from your years spent in English classrooms, irony comes in many flavors. For example, there's situational irony—situations that include contradictions or sharp contrasts. A lord whose favorite pastimes are pig and garden, and an independent young man about town totally dominated by his valet and his aunts, are the very essence of situational irony. (My students particularly enjoy the vast intellectual superiority of Jeeves to the Eton- and Oxford-educated Bertie.) And we've already pointed to the situational irony of endings that are happy precisely because they consist of *not* getting married.

Wodehouse is also an expert practitioner of structural irony, which frequently involves a naïve narrator “of invincible simplicity or obtuseness” (as M. H. Abrams puts it) who misses clues that the reader easily latches onto. Thus, the narration from Bertie's point of view is often ingeniously constructed to let the reader see what Bertie does not.

There's also dramatic irony, which has to do with plot and again is based upon our having knowledge that the character does not. Whenever Bertie comes up with a scheme independently from Jeeves, we have a pretty fair notion of what will ensue. One of the pleasures of irony is that it bestows a delicious sense of superiority in our own discernment. When I ask my students what they like about Wodehouse, they almost always mention the structural contradictions and incongruities, and again I would suggest that they're primed to notice and enjoy them given their culture of irony.



When does graffiti become a lesson in irony?

The second criterion I would cite that makes Wodehouse particularly attractive to millennials, at least to the ones I know, has to do with style. Now, you may think that people who laugh at Bertie's fashion mistakes—the crimson cummerbund, the check suit, the unfortunate moustache—while sporting sleeve tattoos, oversize plaid shirts, and man buns are on somewhat less than solid ground. However, to risk an

overgeneralization, millennials care deeply about their image. Hipsters carefully cultivate their urban bohemian look, which is meant as a critique of mainstream taste and consumer norms. Thus, items of clothing worn unironically by those in the mainstream are ironized as cultural commentary and accessorized in a way that deliberately subverts conventional gender-normed fashion. Those millennials who aren't hipsters care just as much about style and just as much about their image as well. Their concern is less with subversion than with presentation, on Facebook and Snapchat and Instagram, with flattering clothes to wear in the curated versions of themselves they present to their peers online. Many of them, I suspect, not-so-secretly long for a Jeeves, someone who will ensure that they are perfectly dressed at all times. There are fashion services that cater to such deep desires, such as Bombfell and Stitchfix, that will now select and mail out entire coordinated wardrobes for you. So if Jeeves can't be there choosing your clothes and setting them out, at least they can arrive via UPS. After all, who doesn't want the impeccable taste of a Jeeves? (Or Jeeves himself, for that matter.)

The third and most important reason that predisposes my students to love Wodehouse is his inventiveness with language. British humor is renowned for its wit and verbal dexterity, but even in that tradition Wodehouse is *sui generis*. His similes, slang, abbreviations, and mixtures of high and low diction (which I was afraid my students would find archaic) turned out to be one of the things that charmed them the most.

I shouldn't have worried, given the rich linguistic culture that they've been growing up in and helping to create. The millennials are enormously innovative in terms of continuously creating new vocabulary, and in terms of making and making use of social media platforms with memes, emojis, acronyms, and Snapchat and Instagram stories. Anyone who doubts this only needs to click on the Urban Dictionary. Bertie's breezy abbreviations—“that's the posish,” “those are the circs,” “back to the good old metrop”—clearly have modern counterparts in slang like “preesh” for appreciate and “croosh” for crucial, as well as in the abbreviations and acronyms in texts. One of the more ubiquitous modern abbreviations is “bro,” which has given rise to countless related neologisms, including but by no means limited to “bromance,” “broTOCOL,” and “broLLOQUALISMS,” all of which have become part of the modern brocabulary. A modern equivalent of “Tinkerty-tonk! And I meant it to sting” might be the brush-off “cool story, bro” (irony rears its head once more). Wodehouse's wonderful juxtapositions of high and low, old and new, and classical

quotations and modern slang are uniquely his own, but internet memes often find humor in unexpected incongruity too: there's a whole subgenre of memes dedicated to translating rap lyrics and catchphrases into archaic language.

Some of the most distinctive features of Wodehouse's style are his playful similes and metaphors. When Jeeves is forced to confront the offensive purple socks, "he lugged them out of the drawer as if he were a vegetarian fishing a caterpillar out of the salad." And possibly my favorite simile of them all is "Aunt calling to Aunt like mastodons bellowing across primeval swamps." These perhaps have some sort of modern visual equivalent in the playfulness of those extraordinarily popular internet memes that take stock photos and add unexpected metaphorical descriptions. The distracted boyfriend meme, for instance, has become so famous and appeared in so many variations that it's even spawned a meta-meme.



*Memes and meta-memes*

One final noteworthy characteristic of Wodehouse's comic style is his intermingling of literary quotations and colloquial speech and slang, as in "The view I took of it was that the curse had come upon me," and "Claude and Eustace looked at each other, like those chappies in the poem, with a wild surmise" (extra points to my students who recognize those sources). This Wodehousian admixture perhaps finds something of a contemporary echo in the fusion of old-style Broadway

musical and rap in the innovative lyrics of *Hamilton*, a show beloved of my students, and one that may well have interested Wodehouse as a lyricist himself.

So once again I would argue that such verbal playfulness and creativity online and off makes the millennial generation attentive to and appreciative of the deliberately clashing registers of Wodehousian prose.

I'm glad to be able to provide a happy ending to my story. Once again, Jeeves has saved the day. Gratifyingly, Plum's popularity continues unabated among the young, at least those of my acquaintance. Although Wodehouse wasn't able to attend college himself, I'm delighted to have offered him a place in the Carleton curriculum. Thank you for your kind attention.

## *A Plum Assignment,* by Armstrong and Milstein



**I**N THE MULLINER story "Strychnine in the Soup," P. G. Wodehouse tells us that "there is no surer foundation for a beautiful friendship than a mutual taste in literature." Curtis Armstrong and Elliott Milstein might add that no mutual taste in literature is a surer foundation for friendship than a mutual love of the works of P. G. Wodehouse, and their forty-seven years of friendship, sparked by the Master when they were barely out of short pants and spots, proves it. Across those decades, the authors expressed their love of Wodehouse through deep dives into his oeuvre in papers and presentations delivered at TWS conventions and published in *Plum Lines* and elsewhere.

*A Plum Assignment: Discourses on P. G. Wodehouse and His World* collects all these pieces together along with new articles that reflect on both the original papers and the friendship and collaboration that helped create them. Included are articles examining the nature of Bertie Wooster's friendships, the viability of Ukridge's penny-ante stratagems, the satiric depredations of Mulliner's Hollywood, and, published for the very first time, the university thesis that started it all. Each piece appears with its own meta-commentary by the authors, and the book includes a foreword by our own Elin Woodger Murphy.

To procure your copy, simply go to Amazon.com (also available on Amazon in Canada and the U.K.), barnesandnoble.com, or order directly from Elliott Milstein. Then pour yourself a w. and s. and join two great pals for a journey through the world of P. G. Wodehouse!

# Rivals of P. G. Wodehouse: A Girl Like Anita Loos

BY BOB RAINS

“So this gentleman said a girl with brains ought to do something else with them besides think.”

*Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*

WHEN ANITA LOOS died in 1981, newspapers ran lengthy obituaries covering her incredible life and accomplishments. They variously reported her age as anywhere between 79 and 93; ladies of those times tended to be coy on the subject. Sadly, today Loos is remembered, if at all, only for her masterpiece *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*. And her surname appears as a useful four-letter word in crossword puzzles.

The consensus is that Corinne Anita Loos was born on April 26, 1888, in Sisson (now Mount Shasta), California, the middle of three children. Her older brother Clifford graduated from the Stanford Medical School and later cofounded the Ross-Loos Medical Group, the first HMO in the United States. Her sister Gladys, a child actress, died of peritonitis at age eight during one of their father’s absences; he was often accompanied by some admiring female.

Anita adored her roué of a father. R. Beers Loos was an editor, author, theater manager, and general entrepreneur. As fast as he earned or borrowed money, he spent it and more. One result of his spendthrift ways was that the family moved frequently to various locations in California. He put both Anita and Gladys on the stage from their early years. Anita first appeared in David Belasco’s play *May Blossom*. Later she played the lead role of Little Lord Fauntleroy. Often her acting was the chief source of the family’s income. But Anita’s future lay in creating roles, not performing them.

The word “prodigy” is thrown around quite a bit, but if ever there was a writing prodigy, it was Anita Loos. She became a professional writer at about age eight, winning a contest in the magazine *St. Nicholas* to create an advertisement for a floor polish known as F. P. C. Wax. Without being familiar with the actual product, Loos submitted the winning entry:

The best thing I’ve seen,  
said the Man from Mars,  
Since I left my abode among the stars  
Is something my own world sadly lacks  
The earth’s greatest boon F. P. C. Wax.

For her effort she earned \$5, which her father promptly “borrowed.”



Writing prodigy Anita Loos, a tiny powerhouse of movie scripts

At age thirteen, Loos began to submit pieces to the New York paper *The Morning Telegraph*. The *Telegraph* had a column called “The Town in Telegraph,” which ran a contest for humorous anecdotes about life in New York. Loos won the contest. A California girl, she had never set foot in New York. She continued to write short paragraphs about life in New York for the *Telegraph*, which paid her by the word.

Loos was still acting in her father’s San Diego stock company, which ran a theater with both live acts and short movies. Rehearsals were held in the afternoon so that Loos could attend high school in the mornings. Loos became intrigued with the movies, especially the Biograph movies directed by D. W. Griffith. She tried her hand at writing a script, found Biograph’s address on a movie canister, and mailed the script off to New York City, signing it “A. Loos.” Within two weeks she received a letter from Biograph, addressed to “Mr. Loos,” accepting her scenario and indicating that on receipt of a signed assignment, Biograph would pay \$25. One of her very first scripts became the movie *The New York Hat*, directed by Griffith and starring Mary Pickford, Lionel Barrymore, and Lillian and Dorothy Gish. Not bad for a beginner! *The New York Hat* can still be seen on YouTube, but here one must add a note of caution. The movie was made in 1912, when Loos would have been 23 or 24 years old, so the suggestion in her autobiography that she was a mere high-school girl at the time is difficult to accept. Like Wodehouse, Loos did not believe in letting a strict adherence to fact get in the way of spinning a good yarn in any of her three autobiographies: *A Girl Like I*, *Kiss Hollywood Good-by*, and *Cast of Thousands*.

In any event, Loos did manage to graduate from high school at some point, squeaking by with the lowest possible passing mark in English. That was the end of her formal education.

*The New York Hat* was the start of Loos's long and very successful career as a scriptwriter. Between 1912 and 1915, she submitted 105 scripts to Biograph, which accepted all but four of them. The rest were produced by other studios, such as Vitagraph. In 1914, Griffith's scenario editor, Thomas Dougherty, wrote to Loos (who had by now started signing herself as Anita Loos), informing her that Biograph was moving its business office to Hollywood and asking her to be interviewed there. Anita, who stood 4'11" tall and weighed 92 lbs., arrived at the studio with her mother. Understandably Dougherty assumed that the mother was his gifted screenwriter, but that was soon corrected. Entering the room later, the great D. W. Griffith made the same mistake. He offered her a part in a film he was directing, but she demurred; she knew where her strengths lay.

Loos married an unprepossessing gentleman named Frank Pallma Jr. in 1915. By her account, she sent him out to buy hair pins shortly after the wedding, and while he was running this little errand, she packed up her bags and went home to mother. After their divorce in 1919, Loos married actor/director/screenwriter John Emerson. Although the marriage lasted, in the legal sense, until Emerson's death in 1956, it was not exactly made in heaven. An inveterate philanderer, he loved to take credit for her work and spend her money. Sam Goldwyn once said that "Emerson is one of them guys that lives by the sweat of his frau." Loos wrote, "Instead of living happily ever after, John and I set about wrecking each other's lives." After an incident in 1937 in which Emerson tried to strangle her, she took him to the Las Encinas Sanitarium. Loos found that he had stolen all of her money, often spending it lavishly on other women. He was diagnosed as a schizophrenic and remained in the sanitarium most of the rest of his life.

Despite her marital woes, Loos went from success to success as a screenwriter. Her first screen credit

specifically mentioning her name appeared in 1916 in the film *Macbeth*, in which her billing came immediately following Shakespeare's. She wrote the subtitles for Griffith's *Intolerance* (1916) and traveled for the first time to New York for the premiere. In high demand, she wrote movies that helped make stars of matinée idols like Norma and Constance Talmadge, Marion Davies, and Douglas Fairbanks. She also began to write Broadway plays, starting with *The Whole Town's Talking* (1923), ostensibly co-authored by John Emerson.

By this time, Loos had become bicoastal. She also became a great favorite, not only of those in the arts but also of the intelligentsia. She knew everyone. She wasn't impressed with the Algonquin Round Table gang—she "found their exhibitionism pretty naïve." She was more intrigued by baseball star, spy, polyglot, and all-around genius Moe Berg. The astronomer Edwin Hubble became a great friend. The poet Vachel Lindsay wrote her love letters, which are now housed in Harvard's Houghton Library collection. Aldous Huxley became a fan and bosom companion. The list goes on and on.

But the real love of Loos's life was H. L. Mencken, the "Sage of Baltimore," of whom she wrote, "I found an idol to adore for a lifetime." Although she clearly wanted more, they remained only close friends. Mencken by his own account had a predilection for blondes of a certain, well-known type. According to his biographer, Mencken declared that "his ideal was a buxom German waitress, apple-cheeked, amiable, and eager to attend to his wants." Obviously, the diminutive brunette Anita Loos did not fill the bill.

In order to amuse herself during a long train ride in 1924 from New York back to California, Loos wrote a sketch, in the form of diary entries, of a not-so-dumb "dumb blonde," a golddigger named Lorelei Lee, who is pursued by many older "gentlemen." The next year, she sent her sketch to Mencken, who announced, "Young lady, you have committed the great sin. You are the first American who ever made fun of sex." With Mencken's help, Loos placed it in *Harper's Bazar* (later *Harper's Bazaar*) where it created an immediate sensation. *Harper's* encouraged Loos to write further adventures of Ms. Lee, and Loos obliged, ultimately producing six installments, March to August 1925.

In November 1925, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* appeared in book form. It was an instant sensation, going through sixteen printings by August 1926. It catapulted Anita Loos to international fame. It has been translated into many languages, and, almost a century later, it remains in print.

If all you know of *GPB* is the hopelessly corny movie with Marilyn Monroe and Jane Russell (which



No dumb blonde here (with John Emerson)—Anita's precocious writing caught Hollywood's attention early and often.

Loos was not involved in writing), you owe yourself the treat of reading the original book. Reviewers correctly noted that it was “side-splittingly funny,” “sly and sophisticated,” “civilized, human, ironic and never crude.” The philosopher George Santayana, possibly with tongue in cheek, called it “the best book of philosophy written by an American.” It was greatly admired by such diverse figures as Churchill and Mussolini.

Lorelei Lee may remind you of *Full Moon*’s Veronica Wedge, of whom Wodehouse said: “A lovely girl needs, of course, no jewels but her youth and health and charm, but anybody who had wanted to make Veronica understand that would have had to work like a beaver.”

On her trip to Paris, Lorelei writes, “So I really think that American gentlemen are the best after all, because kissing your hand may make you feel very, very good, but a diamond and safire bracelet lasts forever.” (Lorelei’s spelling, grammar, and punctuation are often rather haphazard.)

The sex in *GPB* is never explicit. Perhaps the closest it gets to the surface is when Lorelei reports on her visit to the “Foley Bergere”:

It was very artistic because it had girls in it that were in the nude. So one of the girls was a friend of Louie and he said that she was a very very nice girl, and that she was only 18 years of age. So Dorothy said, “She is slipping it over on you, Louis, because how could a girl get such dirty knees in only 18 years?”

*GPB* took on a life of its own. It became a Broadway stage play in 1926, running for six months. Then it was made into a (mostly) silent movie starring Ruth Taylor, who, according to Loos, “took the role seriously, married a millionaire as soon as the picture was completed, and has never acted again.” In 1949, it became a hit Broadway musical starring a hitherto little-known actress named Carol Channing, with songs by Jule Styne and Leo Robin. The Monroe-Russell movie followed in 1953. In 1974, yet another version opened on Broadway under the name *Lorelei*, again starring Carol Channing and with additional songs by Styne, Betty Comden, and Adolph Green.

Not one to rest on her laurels, Anita Loos continued to write and write and write. With F. Scott Fitzgerald, she wrote the screenplay for *Red-Headed Woman* (1932), which made Jean Harlow a star and won *Vanity Fair*’s best movie of the year award. With Robert Hopwood, she wrote *San Francisco* (1936), starring Clark Gable, Jeanette MacDonald, and Spencer Tracy. She adapted Clare Boothe Luce’s play *The Women* to the screen in

Anita Loos in middle age:  
*Much of her work  
 is worth revisiting,  
 though she is now  
 remembered mostly  
 for Gentlemen Prefer  
 Blondes.*



1939, with an all-female cast, including Norma Shearer, Joan Fontaine, Joan Crawford, Rosalind Russell, and Paulette Goddard. In 1951, she adapted Colette’s *Gigi* to the stage, featuring an unknown ingenue named Audrey Hepburn.

All told, Anita Loos has over 100 film credits and ten Broadway shows to her name. Her published nonfiction works span 1920 to 1978 and include *Twice Over Lightly: New York Then and Now* (1972), written with her friend Helen Hayes. Her published works of fiction, including the sequel *But Gentlemen Marry Brunettes* (1928), span 1925 to 1984. Loos’s biographer Gary Carey noted that “In terms of creative longevity, she is in a class with Bernard Shaw, P. G. Wodehouse, and only a few others.” That her star has faded is most unfortunate. As far as your reviewer can ascertain, no society exists to keep her memory and works alive, and that is a matter that surely deserves to be rectified.



“I think the trouble with Freddie,” said the Crumpet, “is that he always gets off to a flying start. He’s a good-looking sort of chap who dances well and can wiggle his ears, and the girl is dazzled for the moment, and this encourages him.”

“Good-bye to All Cats” (1934)

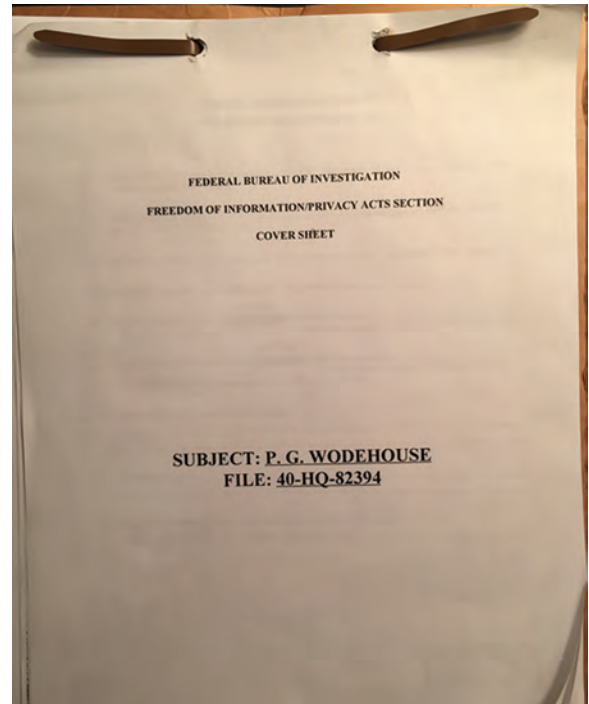
# P. G. Wodehouse: Master Spy? A Tale of Espionage, Plum, and American Intelligence

BY THOMAS L. R. SMITH

*A version of this article appeared in the Summer 2002 Plum Lines. TWS President Thomas L. R. Smith continues to study the issue and gave us a worthy update at the 2017 convention. While some mysteries may never be solved, given the passage of time and passing of all of the participants, they're certainly interesting to discuss.*

**M**OST OF US familiar with the Master's life know about his extended tour of European fortresses at the invitation of the German army during World War II. Scooped up by the Germans during their invasion of France in 1940, Plum was given an all-expense-paid vacation that included the sites of Liege, Huy, and Tost. Most of us are also familiar with the controversial broadcasts about this extended holiday vacation that Plum made in the summer of 1941. If you are familiar with these events, then you are also familiar with the investigations into Wodehouse's activities conducted by British Intelligence Services. What many of us are not familiar with, though, is that Wodehouse was the subject of several investigations conducted by the American Federal Bureau of Investigation and was under the watchful eye of American intelligence agencies during his time under German supervision in Berlin and while in Paris at the end of the War. At one point, J. Edgar Hoover even believed that one of Wodehouse's books may have been used by the Soviets as a codebook.

Plum's first encounter with the FBI is related to us in Paul Reynolds's autobiography, *The Middle Man: The Adventures of a Literary Agent*. Reynolds was Wodehouse's American literary agent and, in addition to finding book and magazine publishers for Wodehouse's output, took care of a wide array of personal business for the author. One morning, early in World War II, two G-Men arrived on Reynolds's doorstep full of questions about the Master. Reynolds does not go into detail about these intrepid G-Men. He does not tell us if they had bulges under their trench coats or whether they had trench coats at all. Nor does he tell us what methods the G-Men used to pry information out of him. What Reynolds does tell us is that the FBI had been reading his mail and that they were particularly interested in a letter from Wodehouse. In a postscript to a letter dated November 27, 1941, from the Adlon Hotel in Berlin, Plum asked Reynolds to "send to the Reilly and Lee Co., 325 West Huron Street, Chicago, the sum of One Thousand dollars and chalk it up to me



*P. G. Wodehouse, master spy,  
at least in J. Edgar Hoover's eye*

on the slate. Tell them to hold it for Edward Delaney. Important." This was not a small sum of money. Today it would be the equivalent of almost \$15,000. Since Reynolds handled quite a few transactions for Wodehouse and other authors, this particular request was not immediately recalled, so Reynolds asked the G-Men if he might check his files. The G-Men, wanting to get to the bottom of this, probably responded with "Certainly" or "Please do" or some other indication of their approval. It was but the work of a moment for Reynolds to produce the letter in question along with notes about the transaction. It turns out that Reynolds failed to carry through on Plum's request. Scrawled in pencil at the bottom of the letter, Reynolds noted that Mr. Delaney was a "Prisoner of War Enemy. Did not pay."

But who was this Delaney? Among some circles, he worked under the name E. D. Ward. Delaney was an unsavory character. He had been an unsuccessful silent-movie actor and also had had an unsuccessful career as a Hollywood producer. That alone may qualify him for the title "unsavory character," but there is more. He worked for MGM at the same time that Wodehouse was employed there. While Wodehouse was toiling away on movie scripts, Delaney was traveling around



the United States chaperoning the Little Rascals on publicity tours. In his spare time, when not inflicting the Little Rascals on an unsuspecting public, Delaney wrote detective novels—and not very good detective novels at that. Being a failure at acting, producing, writing, and publicity tours, Delaney thought he would try his hand at journalism. He traveled to Hitler's Germany in the years before the war and began broadcasting to America about the virtues of the Reich. As an "American Radio Broadcaster," Delaney worked under the supervision of Werner Plack, the same Werner Plack who would befriend Wodehouse on his release from the Tost internment camp. Yet when America entered the war, it became important for Plack to portray Delaney as an independent journalist. Plack needed to find a way to pay Delaney without it appearing that he was in Germany's employ. Plack decided to launder money through Wodehouse and asked him to write to Reynolds to transfer the funds. Yet Reynolds' failure to make the payment foiled Plack's scheme.

Plum's second encounter with the FBI was over the release of the novels *Joy in the Morning* and *Money in the Bank*, the short stories "Excelsior" and "Tangled Hearts," and some private correspondence. In May 1942, Wodehouse arranged for these materials to be delivered to Paul Reynolds. Apparently, the novels, stories, and letters were given to Plack, who sent the material to the American Embassy in Berlin. The embassy was in the process of being shut down, since America had now entered the war, and the embassy personnel and the papers were sent on to Lisbon. In Lisbon, they were handed to George F. Kennan, an American Foreign Service officer assigned to the Berlin Embassy on his way back to the United States. Kennan would later gain fame as the author of "The Long Telegram" and "Mr. X" articles which appeared in *Foreign Affairs* magazine, outlining American cold-war strategy from 1948 until the fall of the Berlin Wall. He was also the architect of the Marshall Plan. While these are significant accomplishments, our interest is not with Kennan, Diplomat, but with Kennan, Courier. While Mr. Kennan recalled handling a packet of papers, he claimed he never opened it to see what was inside. On arrival in New York, he transferred the package to the FBI. The FBI went through the stories carefully. They sent them down to the laboratory where the boys in the white coats examined the stuff "for the presence of secret ink by those methods which would not alter



*Strange and unsavory bedfellow Leo Delaney*

the appearance of the specimens." They were sent on to the codebreakers to see if the stories contained secret codes.

What did the spy guys discover? Nothing. No codes. No secret inks. Oh, they did discover one thing: that before sending the material on to the American Embassy, the Germans had sent the papers down to the lab to have their guys in white coats look 'em over for secret inks and codes. The papers were sent on to Paul Reynolds and a report was made to an agent in "Division Five." Who the agent or what Division Five was must remain a mystery. The FBI redacted the name of the agent.

Wodehouse would come to the FBI's attention again in 1945, which we will go into later. But from the time of his release from internment and during his stay in Paris, American intelligence agents kept an eye on him. The FBI files have a number of newspaper clippings that report Wodehouse's comings and goings, and an American agent operating in Paris under the supervision of the Intelligence Section of the American Embassy in Madrid reported on Plum from time to time. The earliest American report on Wodehouse came from the Berlin Embassy.

Perhaps at this point I need to digress a little bit. At the beginning of World War II, U.S. intelligence and espionage was divided between two agencies. Foreign intelligence was the domain of the State Department, while the Federal Bureau of Investigations handled domestic counterintelligence. The Office of Strategic Services and the Central Intelligence Agency had yet to be created.

So, back to our story: In a six-page memorandum to the Secretary of State, the Second Secretary of the Embassy gave a complete report on the broadcasts Plum made for the Germans after his release from internment. The Second Secretary actually met with Wodehouse in the Adlon Hotel and, after a lengthy discussion, concluded that Wodehouse found dealing with the Germans distasteful. The Americans at the Embassy also concluded that the affair was innocent.

After the Germans transferred Wodehouse from Berlin to Paris, the Americans were still able to monitor Wodehouse's activities in Paris through the aforementioned agent working for the American Embassy in Madrid. The American's spy, who went under the code name "PEP," travelled freely between

Madrid and Paris. When in Paris, he stayed at the Bristol Hotel, which was the same hotel that Wodehouse was using. In addition to being the home of high-value enemy nationals, including the Mufti of Jerusalem and John Amery of the pro-German British Brigade, the Bristol was also the center of international money laundering and black-market activity.

It was through engaging in these affairs that PEP was able to bring back information to the Americans. He also ran into the Wodehouses at the Bristol. His reports to the Americans were not good. In fact, they are the closest thing to a smoking gun that one might find against Plum. PEP's first mention of the Wodehouses is that when they first arrived, Plum and Ethel were dressed in shabby clothes, looking like war refugees. It was in a matter of a couple of days that the Wodehouses were able to significantly upgrade their wardrobe and looked quite elegant, according to PEP. His next report was even more damning, claiming that Plum could be seen padding the halls of the Bristol in slippers and bathrobe, listening in at keyholes for fellow residents who might be listening to anti-German propaganda broadcasts. PEP claimed that Plum would report the offenders to the Germans.

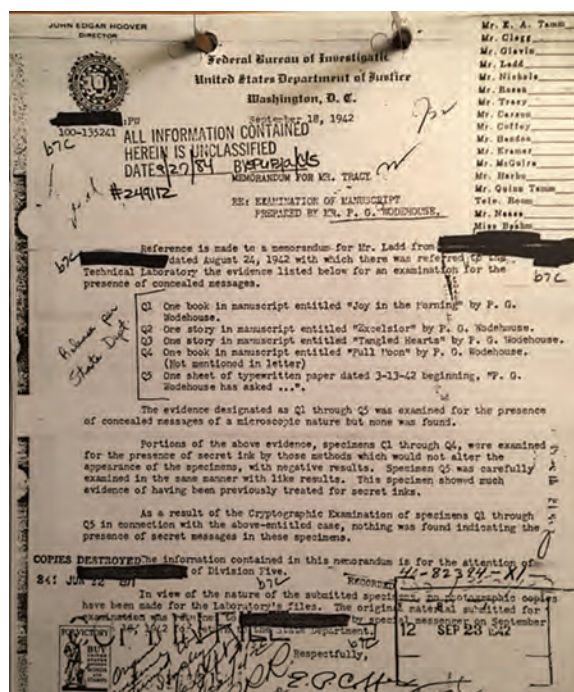
The American intelligence section of the Madrid Embassy chose not to share PEP's information with the British. In fact, not only did PEP provide information that may have implicated Wodehouse in something much more serious than the Berlin broadcasts, he made serious allegations on several other individuals of different nationalities, all of which could have been used to support charges of espionage, collaboration, or treason. But the Americans chose to pass none of PEP's information or allegations on to other nations. Why? For several reasons. For one, the Americans did not trust PEP. He was, it turned out, a triple agent. While he was in the employ of the American Embassy, they also knew he was working for the Japanese Embassy and the Germans. He often sold information to the highest bidder. He also had a reputation for dishing dirt on people he did not like. And he also gave his employers the information he thought they wanted to hear. In the end, the Americans decided his information was not trustworthy and that passing the information on to British intelligence might do more harm than good.

The FBI conducted its final investigation of Wodehouse at the end of the war. While it is not explained in the FBI files on Wodehouse, J. Edgar Hoover had a notion that Wodehouse's novel *Piccadilly Jim* was a secret codebook being used by Soviet agents. A letter signed by Hoover contains a list of sixteen books he suspected as possible codebooks. The Tauchnitz

edition of *Piccadilly Jim* was number six on the list. Apparently, agents all over the world scoured libraries and bookstores for the novel. One G-Man decided to check at the Library of Congress. The two copies in the Library of Congress, the Dodd, Mead and Company edition of 1917, and the Herbert Jenkins fourteenth printing of 1928, were missing with no record of being checked out. The agent went back six times before he concluded that the books were "possibly lost." J. Edgar called on his men in London and Paris to find the books.

Agents searched for months. Finally, in January 1946, a used copy of the Tauchnitz edition was found by a State Department employee in a bookstore in Paris and sent on to the boys in white coats. The book was given the name "Q646" by the fellows of the lab. They examined and decoded it. While the lab report doesn't go into details about the types of test used, nor do the decoders comment on the quality or humor of the book, the author of the report tells us that *Piccadilly Jim*, or Q646, was not a codebook. They did, however, keep it for their library.

But I'm sure you are wondering how the FBI and J. Edgar Hoover came to think that *Piccadilly Jim*, a book written by an apolitical Englishman in 1917, might be a Soviet codebook? As, I said earlier, the answer is not in the file on Wodehouse. To find the answer, one has to look at the FBI's counterintelligence efforts against spying by the Soviet Union in the United States and the FBI investigation into Leon Trotsky's assassination



Documentation of Wodehouse's alleged codebook

in Mexico City. While investigating Trotsky's murder, the FBI uncovered a Soviet network that included mail drops in Mexico City and New York City. The Soviet agent operating the mail drop in New York was one Lydia Altschuler, known by the FBI as "Alto." Ms. Altschuler was a naturalized American citizen of German origin who had worked for a Soviet film distributor.

At the time of the FBI investigation, she was the education director for the Consumers Union, which was listed as a Communist front organization by the House Committee on Un-American Activities. It appears she received coded messages from Soviet agents in Mexico and transferred them to Soviet agents in New York. The FBI had infiltrated the spy network to the extent that it was intercepting the coded messages. However, they could not decode them because they did not have the codebook.

It would be useful now to present an aside on espionage methods. Book ciphers, also known as Ottendorf and Arnold ciphers, have been in use by spies since the American Revolution. Benedict Arnold and Baron Ottendorf, both noted turncoats to the American cause, are credited with inventing them. They are a fairly simple way to send a coded message, but they are also very difficult to break. To break the code, one needs to have the same edition of the book that the sender of the message used to encode the message. If there is any variance in page numbers, words on a page, or number of words in a line, the code becomes difficult if not impossible to break. The way a book code works is that the writer of the message finds the word he wants to use in his copy of the codebook and gives the word a numerical code based on the page, line, and sequence in the line the word is found. For example, using the Everyman edition of *Piccadilly Jim*, the word "red" would have a code of 37-12-3. The book cipher can be made more complicated by using four numbers to identify a letter in the word.

Now back to Ms. Altschuler. The FBI apparently went snooping in Ms. Altschuler's apartment, as the FBI was known to do. She had several books on her shelves, including the Tauchnitz edition of *Piccadilly Jim*. It seems that on her way from her native Charlottenberg, Germany, she spent time in Leipzig, the home of Tauchnitz Publishers. Tauchnitz published English-language books in Germany. And one of those was *Piccadilly Jim*, which found its way onto Ms. Altschuler's bookcase. As I mentioned before, it turns out that *Piccadilly Jim* was not the book the FBI was looking for. While Ms. Altschuler never spilled the beans, pleading the Fifth before the House Un-American Activities Committee, one of her co-

conspirators provided the authorities with the name of the codebook. Unfortunately for us, the name of that codebook is still classified, should the Russians continue to send messages to agents in the United States.

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*The Adlon Hotel in Berlin*

## Be a Mover and a Shaker: The Convention Committee



HAVE YOU EVER been to a TWS convention and thought to yourself, “Golly, I sure would like to work on one of these, but I don’t have a chapter who would host one!” Well, now is your chance! The convention committee is looking for volunteers. Our job is to work with local chapters in planning, organizing, recruiting for, and running our biennial conventions. But unlike the hosting chapters that change every two years, the committee members stay on, lending their experience and expertise to convention after convention.

Your role could be significant or tiny, as you choose. Do you have experience working with hotels on large-scale functions? You could be our official hotel coordinator. Are you an accountant or have experience in an accounting department? You could be the financial coordinator and do the budget.

Does that sound like a little too much work? No problem. Maybe you are good at social media and could run the convention website, Facebook page, Twitter account, etc. Maybe you’re good at PR and can help get the word out to drum up more attendees and new members. Or perhaps you just like to do flower arranging and could serve in a limited capacity on the decorations subcommittee. Whatever skill, experience, or interest you have, whether you want to do a little or a lot, we want *you*!

Join now and get your feet wet working with the fine folks at the Flying Pigs chapter in Cincinnati on the 2019 convention. Then you can really roll your sleeves up and be a major mover and shaker for the 2021 convention, adding new life, new ideas, and a new vision for our conventions.

If you have any interest at all, contact Elliott Milstein  
Don’t be shy. An email  
isn’t necessarily a commitment—just a show of interest.  
Hope to hear from you soon!

## *Jeeves Takes a Bow* at the NC Stage Company

BY KEN CLEVINGER

ONCE AGAIN, in January and February of 2018, the NC Stage Company in Asheville, North Carolina, has sparked in a Margaret Raether adaptation of Wodehouse. *Jeeves Takes a Bow* is their third production in three years, and we hope for *Jeeves at Sea* in 2019!

Scott Treadway’s Bertie and Michael MacCauley’s Jeeves are now, after three encounters, joyfully becoming fixed visual images of Wodehouse’s immortal Bertie and Jeeves. They are, in turn, dim and omniscient, sprightly and dignified, both physically and facially adept on stage, well-costumed (purple socks play a key role in this production), and brilliantly scripted.

Ms. Raether’s blending of Plum’s plots, scenes, and characters with her own twists and invented roles, along with the dialogue and aptly inserted Plum nifties, all make for rollicking good humor in the theater. A real treat for serious Wodehousians is the play’s deft setup of, and thus the anticipation of, a classic Wodehouse line or joke.

The cast also included Charlie Flynn-McIver as the diplomat/actor Nigel Bingham-Binkersteth, in the Knut-pal role again, and again superbly played. Gratefully, John Hall also reappeared, this time as “Knuckles” McCann, a tough American bootlegger, father of the comedic canary (Ruby LeRoy), and love interest to Vivienne Duckworth, a classic Bertiean fiancée. These two fairer-sex players were both ideal. Ruby (enacted by Maria Buchanan) was a delightful blend of ingénue and moll, and her musical number was a great closer. Laura Fontuna revived a Wodehouse heroine role she did so well in *Jeeves Intervenes* in 2016. Her transformation of Vivienne from staid to without stays was seamless as Bertie again escaped a wedding.

The play, the players, the intimate theater, the mild February night on the town in Asheville in the company of North Carolina’s preeminent Wodehousian, Karen Shotting, and also the great selection of Wodehouse books at the Captain’s Bookshelf on Page Avenue, all made for a wonderful Wodehousian weekend. Look for the as-yet-only-hoped-for 2019 production of *Jeeves at Sea* by the NC Stage Company!



# Jeeves's Pick-Me-Up Recipe?

BY KAREN SHOTTING

WODEHOUSE IS always worth rereading. We all know that. My recent choice for such re-perusal was *Bill the Conqueror, His Invasion of England in the Springtime*. It's not one of my favorites, but, like all of Wodehouse, there's plenty of good stuff in it, particularly the interactions between Sinclair Hammond and Flick Sheridan—think Wodehouse and Leonora.

One of the things that I had forgotten since my original examination of the lives of Bill West, Sir George Alexander Pyke (later Lord Tilbury), Francie Hammond, et al., was that this book contains a recipe for a hangover cure. Bill's friend Judson Coker advises Bill to take a couple of "Never-Say-Dies" (guaranteed to make a week-old corpse spring from its bier and enter for the Six-Day Bicycle Race)—one raw egg in half a wine-glassful of Worcester Sauce, sprinkle liberally with red pepper, add four aspirins, and stir.

These ingredients bear a marked resemblance to the basic ingredients of Jeeves's legendary pick-me-up. I began to ponder anew what precisely was in Jeeves's much-more-famous pick-me-up/hangover cure. The pick-me-up is a constant in the Jeeves and Wooster saga, as constant as Jeeves himself. The Wooster biographical record is rich in pick-me-up lore, including the story "Jeeves Takes Charge," (*Saturday Evening Post*, November 18, 1916). It was Jeeves's proffer of his healing elixir that clinched the deal for the formation of the inimitable Jeeves-Wooster partnership. The pick-me-up then made regular appearances in later stories.

Jeeves never gives us a recipe. He vanishes offstage to concoct the healing brew and then reappears to administer it to the invalid, merely telling Bertie some of the ingredients and their effects on the mixture. The "dark meat sauce gives it its color. The raw egg makes it nutritious. The red pepper gives it its bite." (Note that "dark meat sauce" was changed to "Worcester Sauce" when this story was included in *Carry On, Jeeves* [1925], shortly after *Bill the Conqueror* was written in 1924). In *Right Ho, Jeeves*, Bertie states that Jeeves has told him that the pick-me-up consists of "some kind of sauce, the yolk of a raw egg, and a dash of red pepper." He continues: "But nothing will convince me that the thing doesn't go much deeper." I'm much inclined to agree with Bertie's conclusion.

The inimitable Norman Murphy was one who delved more deeply to determine at least one potential secret of Jeeves's concoction. He told us, in *A Wodehouse Handbook*, that ammonia may have been another of



the ingredients. In his researches into hangover cures, he was particularly interested in the ingredient that would cause one's eyes to pop out. (In *The Code of the Woosters*, for instance, Bertie tells us that when you drink one of Jeeves's patent revivers, you undergo the passing discomfort of "having the top of the skull fly up to the ceiling and the eyes shoot out of their sockets and rebound from the opposite wall like racquet balls.") Norman's investigations led him to Harris's, the chemist in St James's Street, where he learned that it was the ammonia in their "Pick Me Up" hangover cure that would make a person's eyes pop out. Hmmm. Ammonia? Curiouser and curiouser.

We know that Jeeves found all of the ingredients for his "little preparation of my own invention" in Bertie's kitchen: "Then he seemed to flicker and wasn't there any longer. I heard him moving about in the kitchen, and presently he came back with a glass in his hand." Would he have added a bit of household cleaning fluid to the egg, pepper, and meat sauce? Well, I mean to say, what? Sounds lethal. Let's look into this a bit further.

I find the ammonia ingredient very intriguing because it smacks of an anodyne that is featured in many novels set in the nineteenth century, namely hartshorn and water. Hartshorn gets its name from the fact that it is made from the horn of a red deer. Spirit of hartshorn is an aqueous solution of ammonia which was, at one time, used for medicinal purposes, including the treatment of fever, heartburn, nausea,<sup>1</sup> lowness of spirits, fainting, hysteric fits,<sup>2</sup> and . . . hangovers. An 1833 medical treatise states that "spirit of hartshorn has lately been recommended by an Italian physician, in the dose of a large teaspoonful to a dessert spoonful in a glass of water, to counteract the intoxicating effect of vinous liquors during the drunken fit."<sup>3</sup> This same treatise recommends that spirit of hartshorn be included in the domestic medicine chest.

Hartshorn, aka baker's ammonia, was also to be found in the kitchen because it was used as a leavening ingredient (before baking powder and baking soda, which are now more common) for making cookies or crackers (biscuits). A nineteenth-century cookbook, likewise, lists hartshorn shavings as an ingredient in "a great Restorative for the sick."<sup>4</sup> Harris's was still using ammonia, in some form, in its pick-me-up well into the twentieth century.

Returning to Jeeves and his foray into Bertie's kitchen: Let us assume that one of Bertie's previous valets had stocked the kitchen pantry with this important baking ingredient and/or stocked the kitchen medicine chest with spirit of hartshorn. (We have to assume that Bertie would have left this sort of thing to his gentleman's personal gentleman.) Jeeves would have been able to incorporate hartshorn into the mixture.

It seems likely that the Wooster medicine chest would also have aspirin. It would not surprise me if that was also included (per the "Never-say-die").

So, here is my recipe for Jeeves's pick-me-up:

**In a tall glass add:**

- 1 raw egg
- ½ wine-glassful Worcester sauce
- 1 large tsp. spirit of hartshorn or ½  
tsp. baker's ammonia (DO NOT  
SUBSTITUTE household ammonia!)
- 4 aspirins
- Liberal sprinkling of red pepper
- Water

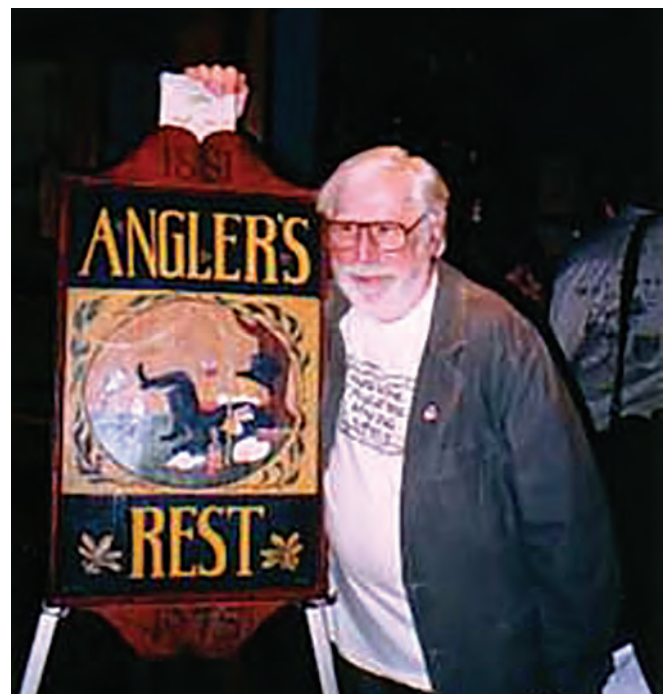
**Stir.**

I think this potion could quite possibly cause one to feel "as if somebody had touched off a bomb inside the old bean and was strolling down [the] throat with a lighted torch." It would also, according to the folks at Harris's, make the eyes pop out (though, I hope, not ricochet off the wall before returning to the parent socket). It might even slide one into the convalescent class, making one equal to a spot of conversation.

I am not advocating that anyone actually try this concoction, but if any brave soul should decide to do so, please let us know results. (*Nota bene: Household ammonia is, of course, poisonous and should not be used in the pick-me-up.*)

The actual recipe is known only to Jeeves himself. I suspect that in Wodehouse's magical world, distilled sunshine from Blandings Castle may have been another, now unobtainable, ingredient.

1. *The Eugenic Marriage, Vol I (of IV), A Personal Guide to the New Science of Better Living and Better Babies*, W. Grant Hague, M.D., The Review of Reviews Company, New York (1916), p. 81.
2. *The Medical Guide, For The Use Of The Clergy, Heads Of Families, And Seminaries, And Junior Practitioners In Medicine. Comprising A Complete Modern Dispensary, And A Practical Treatise On Distinguishing Symptoms, Causes, Prevention, Cure, And Palliation Of The Diseases Incident To The Human Frame; With The Latest Discoveries In The Different Departments Of The Healing Art*, George Reece, M.D., (Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, Green, & Longman London, 1833), p. 61.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *A New System of Domestic Cookery. formed upon principles of economy and adapted to the use of private families. by a lady, Mrs. Rundell, Milner, and Sowerby* (1860), p. 281.



*Ian Michaud tells us that the opening sentences of Dan Cohen's "Wodehouse at the Bar" talk about alcoholic stimulants in the canon provide a pretty good indication of why Dan Cohen was such a popular speaker and good companion: "Gentlemen—I mean, ladies and gentlemen—and, of course, boys. What a wonderful day this is. I had intended to deliver this talk at the last convention—but I became too involved in my research." Dan then took a break from his talk to sample the contents of one of the prop bottles displayed beside him on a table on the platform. (Sadly, Dan passed away this spring; you may read the full obituary on page 23.)*

# Wodehouse's Peers in Comedy, Part Two

BY MICHAEL DIRDA

*At last year's TWS convention, Michael (a Pulitzer Prize winner as a book-review columnist for the Washington Post) spoke about writers whom we could consider on their own merit as alternatives to Wodehouse. Part One was published in the Spring 2018 Plum Lines. We'll publish the remainder of Michael's talk in parts over the next issue or two. Enjoy!*

(3)

TODAY, AS throughout most of his life, **Max Beerbohm** (1872–1956) is revered as the last great dandy, author of the best parodies ever written (*A Christmas Garland*), the prose stylist whom Evelyn Waugh looked up to, and one of the most devastating of all caricaturists. His single novel, *Zuleika Dobson*, ranks as a comic masterpiece, an extravagant fantasia on Oxford life, starring a heroine so dazzling she ultimately induces mass suicide among the undergraduates. Even more outstanding is Beerbohm's homage to the 1890s, "Enoch Soames," a portrait of the most decadent genius of all (author of "Negations" and "Fungoids"), utterly neglected in his time, who makes a pact with the devil so that he can travel to the future and look up his name in the card catalogue of the British Museum's library. But instead of the hundreds of critical studies he expects to find, the tangible evidence of his future glory, Soames discovers a quite different and much more harrowing destiny.

Beerbohm himself believed that he possessed only a minor, if pretty, talent for writing. Yet he is a master at establishing a mood through a tone of voice and conveying irony or self-deprecation with the tiniest flick of a phrase.

One early essay begins: "It is a fact that not once in all my life have I gone out for a walk. I have been taken out for walks; but that is another matter. Even while I trotted prattling by my nurse's side I regretted the good old days when I had, and wasn't, a perambulator."

By instinct, Max was a caricaturist, in prose as well as with a pencil, and able to mimic and skewer any writer's style, any eminent personage's pretensions. Consider the opening sentences of "The Mote in the Middle Distance," from *A Christmas Garland*, in which he parodies Henry James:

It was with the sense of a, for him, very memorable something that he peered now into the immediate future, and tried, not without

compunction, to take that period up where he had, prospectively, left it. But just where the deuce had he left it? The consciousness of dubiety was, for our friend, not, this morning, quite yet clean-cut enough to outline the figures on what she had called his "horizon," between which and himself the twilight was indeed of a quality somewhat intimidating.

This is perfect late James. Indeed, the novelist once told an admirer that Max Beerbohm understood his style better than he did himself. Max sustains this Old Pretender prolixity with astonishing facility for three more pages, as Keith and Eva, a brother and his "magnificent" sister, hesitantly try to decide whether or not to peek into their stockings on Christmas morning.

(4)

MASTERPIECES COME in all shapes and sizes. Many are quite grand, like Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, and some almost grandiose, like Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel. But a few are quieter, less apt to overwhelm or dazzle and more likely to elicit nothing more profound than a quiet sigh of pleasure. Such are the elegantly witty short stories of the British writer **Hector Hugh Munro** (1870–1916), usually known by his pen name **Saki**.

Consider, for example, Saki's finest single collection, *Beasts and Super-Beasts*. Many people know one story from this wonderful book: "The Open Window." An anthology favorite, it is among the world's most perfect miniatures, snapping shut as neatly in its closing lines as de Maupassant's "The Necklace" or W. W. Jacobs's "The Monkey's Paw." A neurasthenic gentleman named Framton Nuttel—Saki is brilliant with names—calls at a country house and is shown into the drawing room, where there is an open French window. There he makes desultory conversation with his hostess's fifteen-year-old niece, who relates to him a simply awful story. Three years previously, Vera tells him, her aunt's husband and two younger brothers, while out hunting, were "engulfed in a treacherous piece of bog. . . . Their bodies were never recovered."

But that's not the worst part, adds the girl falteringly. "Poor aunt always thinks that they will come back some day, they and the little brown spaniel that was lost with them, and walk in at that window just as they used to do." To avoid saying more, let me just point out how adroitly, how imperceptibly Saki sets up a double-

whammy ending, first a shock of horror for poor Mr. Nuttel, then a shock of pleasure for the delighted reader.

Still, even the most rapt admirer of “The Open Window” may be unaware that Vera reappears, a year older, in “The Lull.” An up-and-coming politician, seeking respite from a grueling campaign, stops for some r. and r. at the country estate. That very night, the local reservoir bursts and the house, Vera tells him, has been surrounded by rising flood water. The loss of life, moreover, appears to be utterly horrific: “The second housemaid has already identified three bodies that have floated past the billiard-room window as being the young man she’s engaged to.” Thoughtfully, Vera then adds: “Either she’s engaged to a large assortment of the population round here or else she’s very careless at identification. Of course it may be the same body coming round again and again in a swirl; I hadn’t thought of that.”

It is this airy suavity, tinged with maliciousness and melancholy, that makes Saki’s short fiction so endlessly rereadable. In “The Forbidden Buzzards,” Clovis needs to prevent a wealthy young man named Lanner from proposing to the girl his friend Hugo is in love with. Clovis duly contrives to make sure that the interloper is never left alone with her. First, his hostess insists on showing Lanner “the herb garden and the greenhouses, the village church, some watercolor sketches that her sister had done in Corsica, and the place where it was hoped that celery would grow later in the year.” When she is finally called away, Lanner immediately finds a young girl solemnly walking by his side:

Evelyn was fourteen and talked chiefly about good and evil, and of how much one might accomplish in the way of regenerating the world if one was thoroughly determined to do one’s utmost. It was generally rather a relief when she was displaced by Jack, who was nine years old, and talked exclusively about the Balkan War without throwing any fresh light on its political or military history. The German governess told Lanner more about Schiller than he had ever heard in his life about any one person . . . When the governess went off picket duty the hostess was again on hand with a not-to-be-gainsaid invitation to visit the cottage of an old woman who remembered Charles James Fox; the woman had been dead for two or three years, but the cottage was still there.

Among the 36 stories included in *Beasts and Super-Beasts* are at least three further standouts. In

“The Schartz-Metterklune Method,” the wickedly mischievous Lady Carlotta is mistaken for the new governess expected by Mr. and Mrs. Quabarl with hilarious results. In “The Lumber Room” Saki takes up a favorite theme—poetic justice—by relating how young Nicholas revenges himself on an aunt of quite exceptional heartlessness. Yet who can blame him?

It was her habit whenever one of the children fell from grace, to improvise something of a festival nature from which the offender would be rigorously debarred; if all the children sinned collectively they were suddenly informed of a circus in a neighboring town, a circus of unrivaled merit and uncounted elephants, to which, but for their depravity, they would have been taken that very day.

Still, both of these mini-masterpieces by Saki are overshadowed by “The Story-Teller,” certainly the most charming example of his penchant for stories within stories. A young man is trapped in a train compartment with two little girls and their older brother Cyril. All three children are bored and, to keep them quiet, their aunt attempts a story about a goody-goody child. The story is a dismal failure. Challenged to tell a better one, the young gentleman starts off mildly enough, taking as his protagonist a little girl named Bertha who was “horribly good.” That word “horribly” catches the children’s attention. In fact, Bertha was so good “that she won several medals for goodness, which she always wore, pinned on her dress.” They were made of metal and clicked against one another when she walked.

At the tale’s climax, a ravenous wolf decides that Bertha would make a better meal than some little pigs. Fleeing in terror, the girl hides in a clump of bushes, but she cannot stop trembling.

The wolf was just moving away when he heard the sound of the medals clinking and stopped to listen; they clinked again in a bush quite near him. He dashed into the bush, his pale grey eyes gleaming with ferocity and triumph, and dragged Bertha out and devoured her to the last morsel. All that was left of her were her shoes, bits of clothing, and the three medals for goodness.

The younger of the two sisters on the train asks:

“Were any of the little pigs killed?”  
“No, they all escaped.”



“The story began badly,” said the smaller of the small girls, “but it had a beautiful ending.”

“It is the most beautiful story that I ever heard,” said the bigger of the small girls, with immense decision.

“It is the only beautiful story I have ever heard,” said Cyril.”

*Stay tuned in subsequent issues for descriptions of the other authors about whom Michael spoke. We'd be happy to hear of other writers of humor who you believe would be of interest to our readers.*

## Anyone for Pain?

I ENJOYED Michael Dirda's thoughts in the Spring issue. I'm a great admirer of *Three Men in a Boat*, and it might be of interest to the society that his book created a tremendous fad, with thousands of trios of men (and women, for all I know) trying to replicate exactly the trip made by the men in the novel. Needless to say, a dog accompanied most of the efforts. In addition, Peter Lovesey wrote a wonderful Inspector Cribb crime novel—*Swing, Swing Together*—that takes place among the groups rowing up the Thames sometime after the novel came out.

I would also bet serious money that among the next writers mentioned by Mr. Dirda will be the wonderful Barry Pain. He wrote from roughly 1890 until 1926, and he died in 1928. The passage below is from *Eliza*:

“Now then,” I said, on the next night, “I am ready to begin. The tragedy is entitled *Macbeth*. This is the first scene.”

“What is the first scene?”

“A blasted heath.”

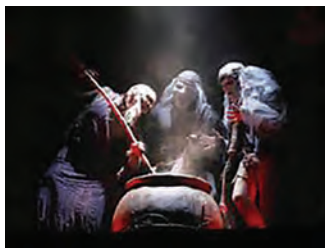
“Well, I think you might give a civil answer to a civil question. There was no occasion to use that word.”

“I didn't.”

“You did, I heard it distinctly.”

And it gets better.

*Dick Woodruff*



## A Few Quick Ones

*These are from our longtime Quick Ones spotters, Evelyn Herzog and John Baesch, unless otherwise noted.*

In the April 23 *Boston Globe*, columnist Alex Beam reflected on Global Anti-Golf Day, the “holiday” invented by Gen Morita, a Japanese activist who “dreamed up the day to oppose the reckless despoliation of Southeast Asia to make room for new golf courses.” Wodehouse is quoted: “To find a man's true character, play golf with him. In no other walk of life does the cloven hoof so quickly display itself.”

\*\*\*\*\*

Comedian Paula Poundstone contributed to the “In My Library” column of the June 4, 2017, *New York Post*. She mentioned several items on her private library's shelf, including *The Most of P. G. Wodehouse*: “In the late '70s I worked in a bookstore. You were given a section to stack and tidy up, and I had the end of the alphabet. There were so many damn books by Wodehouse! I finally picked up one of them, and it was so funny.”

\*\*\*\*\*

The August 18, 2017, *Independent* noted that Richard Gordon, the British novelist (*Doctor in the House*), found early inspiration in Plum's works. Mr. Gordon left a career as an anesthesiologist to become a writer. He traced his writing career back to a childhood love of Wodehouse and to his work at the *British Medical Journal*. He joked that he “learned to write convincing fiction” while running the journal's obituaries section.

\*\*\*\*\*

The February 4, 2017, *Spectator* article “British Placenames” studied the etymology of the names of various settlements with some seriousness, but the lead-in to the article listed some of the real Wodehouse-like names: “Great Snoring in Norfolk, Matching Tye in Essex, Fryup in Yorkshire . . . Lusty Glaze” and so on. Columnist Mark Mason mentioned that Wodehouse borrowed “Emsworth” from “a town in Hampshire, while a village in the same county gave Reginald Shipton-Bellinger his surname.”

\*\*\*\*\*

Evelyn Herzog continues to find luminous rabbits. In the Signals catalogue, for example, one can find item HW9332, a “Bunny Lamp with Lighted Tail.” And from the Rite Aid Pharmacy chain, you can buy an odd rubber “Lite Up Bunny” with fiber-optic fur for only \$1.49. (“For Ages 4 and Up,” which includes most of our society membership, I imagine.) Of course, the treasure trove is on Amazon.com, where a search for bunny lamps gives you a bewildering array of options.

# 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, posts chapter activities on the society website. So please 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: Bill Franklin



**The Broadway Special**  
(New York City and vicinity)  
Contact: Amy Plofker



**T**HE BROADWAY SPECIAL roused itself from long hibernation to attend John Lithgow's *Stories by Heart* on Broadway on January 20, with festive brunch at Bea Restaurant before the show and a talk by Lithgow afterwards about the show's ten-year history. Those of us who had seen earlier iterations of his one-man rendition of "Uncle Fred Flits By" observed no letdown in the latest masterly performance. The pink chap was still pink, the parrot decidedly parrot-like, and Uncle Fred's sheer gall as outrageous as ever.

Spurred by the promise of more theatrical doings, Broadway Specialists gathered again on April 21 to hear a reading of *Good Morning, Bill* by the Lafayette

Salon Series, a group of dedicated actors keeping their hand in. This was rather a nostalgic moment as *Good Morning, Bill* was the first show the chapter had gathered to see on stage back in our infancy in 2003. Almost fifteen years later, we greatly enjoyed the skilled actors' hilarious reading as we lolled about the back room of the Swift Hibernian Lounge and lapped up the Swift's excellent booze and grub.

The jolliment will continue on Sunday, May 20, with an afternoon meeting at a member's house to browse, sluice, and discuss our various perspectives on "Uncle Fred Flits By," both the live and print versions. Then, on Friday, June 15, there will be an evening meeting at the Players Club to bring our focus back to Wodehouse's love affair with New York, beginning with a discussion of key parts of *Indiscretions of Archie*.

And speaking of theatre, next spring will bring . . . but you can read about that elsewhere in this issue.

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



**Chapter One**  
(Greater Philadelphia area)  
Contact: Herb Moskowitz



**T**HE CHAPS OF Chapter One gathered at Cavanaugh's in Head House Square in Philadelphia on Sunday, March 18, for a viewing of a 1955 television version of "Uncle Fred Flits By," starring David Niven and Robert Nichols as Uncle Fred and Pongo, respectively. If you missed the meeting, you can still see the video on YouTube. Go to <https://tinyurl.com/y8x8zezy>

After the video, Bob Nissenbaum led a lively discussion about the story and its adaptations. We welcomed new member Ram Gopalan. Also present were Bob Sloan, Richard Weishaupt, Carolyn Daffron, Mark Reber, Ben and Steve Weiland, Diane and Ed Hain, Dotty Hoffman, Bob Rains, and Norma Frank.

\*\*\*\*\*

**T**HE WEATHER REPORT was predicting rain, but Sunday, May 6, turned out to be a beautiful day.

The Chaps of Chapter One met at Cavanaugh's. Bob Rains announced that the Walnut Street Theater will be producing *A Comedy of Tenors* by noted Wodehousean Ken Ludwig (author of *Crazy For You*, *Lend Me a Tenor*,

and many other hits) from January 15 to March 3, 2019. Bob will try to arrange an outing for a matinee. Further details will follow.

We then watched a *Wodehouse Playhouse* video adaptation of the short story “Romance at Droitgate Spa,” starring husband-and-wife team John Alderton and Pauline Collins. Afterwards, we discussed both the story and the video. Some preferred the dramatization to the original story.

Bob Sloan mentioned that a Mulliner frame was added to the story for the U.S. book *The Crime Wave at Blandings* in June 1937. Mark Reber noted that the non-Mulliner version appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post* earlier in 1937, the *Strand* magazine later that year, and the U.K. edition of *Eggs, Beans and Crumpets* in 1940. Other aspects of the story were discussed, including: Where does snobbery thrive? Is gout funny? Are the conditions (malaises) described at Droitgate real?

Bob Nissenbaum (Anthony, Lord Droitwich) pointed out that Wodehouse had a disdain for hypochondriacs and that Plum himself lived to be 93. Plum was a boxer in his younger days and no slouch: he walked ten miles a day, no doubt a secret to his longevity.

The Chaps decided that the next meeting will be on July 22. Mark Reber will lead a discussion comparing Rex Stout with Wodehouse.

**Chicago Accident Syndicate**  
(Chicago and thereabouts)  
Contact: Daniel & Tina Garrison



**T**HE CHICAGO Accident Syndicate continues to look forward to an exciting event which we thought would come about at our mid-February gathering. However, that meeting (at Susan and Allan’s digs in Bensenville) was sadly missing our much-anticipated new guest. A mid-winter snowstorm of epic proportion left Den (he of the inherited Wodehouse letters) snowbound in Naperville. Promises of attendance at our next gathering were exchanged, and I encourage my readers to keep your dues paid up as there will be news of these letters and their contents forthcoming.

Perhaps partially in anticipation of the reading of correspondence in Plum’s own hand, attendance at our gathering was sizable. Our numbers exceeded a dozen, including a brand-new member, Dexter Bell. As expected, the comestibles were varied and tasty and the potables quite up to standard. Conversation sparkled,

though most of the threads touched on matters non-Wodehousian.

However, one of our newer members, Barbara Brotman, brought up a distressing discovery she’d come upon. An apparently slanted report on Plum’s WWII broadcasts had engendered understandable alarm at his purported “anti-Semitism.” Calmer and more knowledgeable voices quickly sprang into the breach and just as quickly laid her concerns to rest. Our assemblage departed the bucolic environs of lovely Bensenville well sated in mind and body.

**The Clients of Adrian Mulliner**  
(For enthusiasts of both PGW and Sherlock Holmes)  
Contact: Elaine Coppola



**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



**T**HE FLYING PIGS are hard at work organizing for 2019 and wish they had Jeeves on their team. We had a great meeting on March 11, followed by dinner. There were fifteen attendees—more than any previous meetings, with several new members arriving just in the nick of time. And there are now more on the radar! A summer gathering is in the works. Any potential Pig is heartily invited to contact Bill or Susan to join in the fun. We have members ranging from Columbus (Ohio) to the north and Frankfort (Kentucky) to the south. We even have a member from Chillicothe (of *Laughing Gas* fame)!

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

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



*Charles, Tanya, Bill, and Harry being the Rev. Sidney Gooch, Joe Beamish, a Narrative voice, and Sir Leopold Jellaby, OBE, respectively, in "Anselm Gets His Chance."*

**T**HE MELONSQUASHVILLE (TN) Literary Society met on April 21 for a rousing reading of "Anselm Gets His Chance." This Mr. Mulliner story, starring Anselm Mulliner as a curate, makes for a lovely love story and a moral tale of recidivism and redemption, along with lessons of the power of the pulpit to affect lives.

We had a dozen members, a swell luncheon, and a superb reading by Harry Hall, Tanya Hall Geheen, Mary Jane and Stephen Curry, Bill Watts, Charles Ovenshine, Elizabeth Koester, and Joan Clevenger. The discussion that followed noted all the classic and delightful aspects of Plum's short stories and mentioned all of the unique Mr. Mulliner story traits, but we could not solve the mystery of the "Children of Adullam."

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



**The New England Wodehouse Thingummy Society (NEWTS)**  
(Boston and New England)  
Contact: Lynn Vesley-Gross



**I**T WAS EARLY December 2017, in the quieter days before Christmas had firmly grabbed us by the throats, when the NEWTS gathered for a nottle in Dedham to celebrate all holidays at the festive venue provided by Ellen Donovan and Bob Norberg. They offer a fireplace and a pool and a comfortable great room for nottling. No one has yet fallen into the pool in dress clothes, but we've heard rumors around the clubs of a plan to loop back a ring or two at some future date. Heavy snows that started the night before nearly derailed our festivities, but almost all of the NEWTS made it through the storm, with a few even dressed in gowns or tie and tails.

We read the story "From a Detective's Notebook," (*Escapade* magazine, February 1960) in which detective Adrian Mulliner advances his theory on the source of Mr. Sherlock Holmes's income. Doubts were expressed. Browsing and sluicing exceeded even the accustomed high standards. Gifts of cow creamers, wine, and books were exchanged, and we headed home through the dark and the slush.

For spring, the NEWTS swarmed just outside of Boston in Waltham, Massachusetts, on St. Patrick's Day. There was some concern about parades in Boston at which one does get the feeling that in another shake of a duck's tail hell's foundations will start to quiver and one's paint might be scratched, but in the end no NEWTS were arrested. Snacks were up to standard, and many of us were introduced to a remarkable "Aviation Cocktail," which is a pretty, pale blue concoction of gin, crème de violette, and a Luxardo cherry.

In a spirited cooperative reading of "Mr. Potter Takes a Rest Cure," we were impressed anew with the devious strategies of the Red-Haired Menace, Bobbie Wickham. Of course, she is extremely bright, especially if relatives are an indication: You'll recall from "Something Squishy" that Mr. Mulliner is a cousin of her mother's. The nice thing about reading a PGW story aloud is that everyone starts laughing and the laughs cascade.

Our next Nottle will be in June in the bucolic splendor of a Bedford garden.

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

**W**INTER IN Minnesota is a dicey proposition. The day before the February 15 book salon, a nasty little storm dropped inches of snow and sleet and left a mess in its wake. But the Northwodes chapter is made

up of hardy folk who turned out in large numbers to discuss *The Small Bachelor*, a book inspired by the 1918 musical *Oh, Lady! Lady!!* Our researchers, Holly Windle and Richard Rames, illuminated Plum's many allusions to famous works: Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*; Sir Walter Scott's works; and casual salutes to other great art, literature, and thought. Major characters were named, discussed, and digested. There was a question of how to pronounce "Madame Eulalie": "you-LAY-lee," like the mayor's wife in *The Music Man* or "YOU-la-lee," as heard in popular audiobooks? This led to a discussion of the merits of "reading" via audiobooks rather than "eyeballing" a book, and the relative advantages of e-books versus the printed and bound. As the discussion progressed, the group never made it back to the secret agenda of leader Mike Engstrom, but we agreed that *Bachelor* was a ripping fun book.

Our April 21 book salon, whereat we discussed *French Leave*, was on the first really warm and pleasant day in seven months. We first considered the parallels with Alcott's *Little Women*. The March and Trent sisters are roughly analogous in name and personality, and there's a similar tone in writing and plot. In both books the sisters pool their money and resources to present the best appearance considering their limited means.

In *French Leave*, Old Nick drew many comments for his variable moral compass. One of the favorite lines in the book was from Mrs. Pegler, who rued having wantonly neglected several opportunities to drop heavy objects on Old Nick's head. Northwode Bruce Willey cobbled up some handpainted logos on empty bottles to represent the book's two sparkling waters: Fizz-o (still an extant brand in Oklahoma) and Clear Spring, which appears to have been an invention of Wodehouse. Chapter member Gail Toussaint's rough-coated collie, Gracie, destroyed Gail's first-edition, first-printing copy of *French Leave*. About her dog, Gail noted philosophically, "At least she's got good taste."



Gail Toussaint's *French Leave*,  
rather more than dog-eared

**The Orange Plums**  
(Orange County, California)



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



OUR REPORT this time around is a thank-you composed by Ruth Colombo, which will be delivered to Linda Beck, who has been invited to speak at a future meeting of the Pale Parabolites:

Like everyone else in the Great Hall (Arts and Letters Club, Toronto), I am impressed with and enchanted by Linda Beck's spirited appreciation of "The Many Careers of P. G. Wodehouse." The author once wrote, "I always find a great charm in Canada and sometimes toy with the idea of settling there." Alas, he did no more than "toy with the idea of settling there." Perhaps the weather forecasts kept him away.

However, the smallest and the most select society in the country does honor him. The society is called "The Pale Parabolites." The society's name is based on the line "Across the pale parabola of joy" which comes from *Songs of Squalor* composed by the fictitious Ralston McTodd, the so-called "Singer of Saskatoon," who visits Blandings Castle in Wodehouse's 1923 comic novel *Leave It to Psmith*.

Although the membership of the Pale Parabolites is minute, the society does boast its own lapel pin, exquisitely designed by Bill Andersen of Beach Hill, which features an incredibly graceful parabola and a brightly stylized maple leaf. [See the P. P. logo above.]

On behalf of the other Pale Parabolites, it gives me great pleasure to thank Linda Beck by presenting her with one of these rare lapel pins. If you wear it, Linda, we can all admire it as we appreciate your talk.

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



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



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



**The Pittsburgh Millionaires Club**  
 (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania)  
 Contact: Allison Thompson



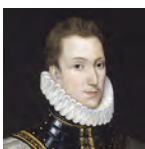
**The Plum Crazyes**  
 (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania and vicinity)  
 Contact: Betty Hooker



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



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



**Rugby In All Its Niceties**  
 (Rugby, Tennessee Region)  
 Contact: Donna Heffner



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



Central Library, recently the recipient of an international award. The library is located in Halifax and it's the very same which was the lucky recipient of the bequest of a complete new set of the works of PGW a few years ago.

We met to welcome new member Peter McNulty. He is relatively new to PGW, new to our number, and very welcome given that the membership in this chapter is spread far and wide over four Canadian provinces.

All the usual subjects were covered: How did you come to Wodehouse? What books do you have? Which are your favorite books and characters? Who is the smartest—Psmith, Galahad, or Uncle Fred? Is Bertie really dim or smart enough to get Jeeves to do most of his dirty work? And speaking of this dirty work, since McNulty's background is in things lawful and unlawful, we spent some few moments on the recidivism of Jeeves. We agreed that there may be a paper in this some day.

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



In its general essentials the coffee room at the Goose and Gherkin differed very little from the coffee rooms of all the other inns that nestle by the wayside in England and keep the island race from dying of thirst. It had the usual dim religious light, the customary pictures of *The Stag at Bay* and *The Huguenot's Farewell* over the mantelpiece, the same cruets and bottles of sauce, and the traditional ozone-like smell of mixed pickles, gravy soup, boiled potatoes, waiters, and old cheese.

*Ring for Jeeves (1953)*



Dan Cohen and Amy Plofker pose together during one of Dan's convention appearances in his full gorilla suit. According to Max Pokrivchak, the highlight of Dan's career at TWS conventions came at the 2005 Hollywood event, when Dan appeared in the NEWTS skit as an extra in the studio commissary, where he ordered banana pudding.

**T**HE NOT-SO-ANNUAL general meeting of the Size 14 Hat Club was held in mid-January at our new

## Dan Cohen (1936–2018)

**D**ANIEL COHEN, aka Cyril Waddesley-Davenport, passed away on May 6, 2018. A past editor of *Plum Lines* as well as a frequent contributor to its pages (he and his wife Susan, aka Rosie M. Banks, contributed more than 30 articles and items), Dan was a speaker at three TWS conventions. His subjects were varied: “The Search for Rosie M. Banks” (presented with Susan); “Gorilla My Dreams,” a very funny look at gorillas in Wodehouse (no surprise, given his chosen nom de Plum); and “Wodehouse at the Bar,” a superb summary of all the alcoholic drinks to be found in the canon. Such was Dan’s enthusiasm and dedication to Wodehouse that he transported and wore a gorilla suit to two conventions!

Dan’s wife of sixty years, Susan, is a past president of TWS. Both fought for justice for the families of the 243 victims killed in the 1988 bombing of Pan Am 103 over Lockerbie—a bombing in which, tragically, they lost their daughter, Theodora. To help cope with their loss, they turned to Wodehouse. As part of their TWS activities, they joined forces with David McDonough to establish Chapter One, based in Philadelphia. They also helped found the Caper’s Sherlock Holmes Society in Cape May County. Their activities were curtailed following Dan’s stroke nine years ago.

Dan was editor in chief of *Plum Lines* from 2003 to 2007. He created the wonderful series “Rivals of P. G. Wodehouse,” highlighting many of PGW’s humor-writing contemporaries. In addition to his Wodehousean work, he was a freelance writer, producing over 200 books, including children’s books on subjects such as the occult, mythology, ghosts, and dinosaurs.

Dan loved his clumber spaniels, cats, bird watching, walking on the beach, and his wife. Deepest condolences to Susan on losing your beloved Cyril. We will all miss him greatly.



*Dan Cohen was an entertaining speaker, a prolific writer, and a frequent contributor to Plum Lines. Dan spoke at two of our conventions. He know how to sport a fine Drones Club tie. We will miss Dan’s humor and wisdom.*

## *Perfect Nonsense* in America

BY AMY PLOFKER

**A**MERE FIVE years after the triumphant eleven-month London run of the comic play *Perfect Nonsense*, the show is finally coming to North America, and my conspiracy theory falls apart. You see, this show has no objection to traveling: since 2014, Bertie and Jeeves have played (to name a few) Mumbai and Chennai, Sydney, Wellington (New Zealand), Bangalore, Singapore, and such centers of English culture as Harrogate, Mold, and Woking. But across the Atlantic, they just would not go. It made no sense—what, in 2014 or 2015, had altered Jeeves’s attitude toward America?

Now those of us not quick enough off the mark to catch the show in London (or Bury St. Edmunds, Ipswich, or Dundee) are getting our chance in Hartford next spring. This three-man show (whose plot device is that Bertie is trying to do a one-man show based on his experiences at Totleigh Towers in *The Code of the Woosters*) is to be put on by the enlightened Hartford Stage from March 21 to April 14, 2019, guided by the show’s original director. Tickets go on sale July 2018, so mark the date to call the box office at 860-527-5151 or visit [www.hartfordstage.org](http://www.hartfordstage.org).

What I might loosely call the locals—Bostonians and New Yorkers—plan to gather on Saturday, April 13, to catch the show and do some browsing and sluicing. We welcome those from farther away, too! Most of us will aim for the 2 PM matinee, but there’s also an 8 PM show if the matinee fills up. An early dinner should accommodate the schedules of all. If you’re not a member of the NEWTS or the Broadway Special but you’d like to be kept aware of developments for April 13, email me

Whether you drive in for a day trip, or arrive complete with luggage and Peke for a long weekend, Hartford is the place to be next spring.



# A Plum Lines Poem

BY OLIVER FERGUSON

Dueker on time and Morning on class;  
Hedgcock on cats, Prenkert the Nobel  
To honor Plum's achievements too numerous to tell;  
Dirda on a moiety of rivals to adduce;  
Then the tribute to Norman by Hilary Bruce.  
Such is the appeal of *Plum Lines* this Spring:  
Since drear winter's gone, let merriment ring,  
Despite the clear truth that for Plum to bring joy  
Need have no reason whatever the season.

## The Times Are A-Changin'

CHRIS DUEKER's entertaining account of "The Times of P. G. Wodehouse" (*Plum Lines*, Spring 2018) resolves some conundrums and explains away other complications in time sequence, but two of his assertions are questionable. At the end of his "History" section, he argues that "Jeeves Takes Charge" makes Jeeves's participation in the First World War unlikely. But that 1916 story tells us that its events happened "about half a dozen years ago," so its account of Jeeves's employment history is from the pre-1910 era, long before the war began. In the first paragraph of the Short Stories section, there should be no uncertainty about the timing of the Blandings stories; Wodehouse tells us in the preface to *Blandings Castle and Elsewhere* that "in point of time, these stories come after *Leave It to Psmith* and before *Summer Lightning*."

Neil Midkiff

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Quick Ones (unless otherwise credited) courtesy of  
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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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