

PG. Wodehouse



"Mr. Wodehouse, for the entertainment he has given us alone, has as much claim as any to be considered (as Bertie Wooster might put it) the Grand Old Man of England." London Times, 1963

OUR SOCIETY IS MAKING PROGRESS! TWS now owns property!!! Specifically, we own one (1) Rolodex V-Glide Card File, Model No. GL-24. Value \$16.00. # # #

PLEASE say that you didn't notice. Say that you didn't notice that blank space in our July Supplement (See What you Missed) where a word should have been and wasn't. To correct an error made by our Apprentice Typist, OM opaqued the aforesaid error then, in his mad rush to beat the deadline (a popular pastime with editors we are told), neglected to replace it. Just went off and left it blank. The word should have been CHARACTERS. NOTE: This is an explanation, not an apology. NOTE FURTHER: When an issue of PLUM LINES arrives free of typographic errata, with no unsubstantiated rumors, no solecisms, no glaring misstatements, then, fellow-Plummies, you'll know that the editorship of PLUM LINES has changed hands. # #

YOU ARE REMINDED (unless you didn't know) that two of our members are booksellers by avocation, specializing in Wodehouse books and ephemera: Barry Phelps and Charles E. Gould, Jr. And that another, David Jasen, issues a list of first editions of Plum's works. And that two other members, Edward Lehwald and Grover Askins, both booksellers, often have Wodehouse books for sale though, being collectors, they hate to part with some of them. And that H. B. Quoyoon sells periodicals of the 1900-1975 vintage, many of which carry first printings of PGW stories. Then there is the Wodehouse Bookmart, published by Jeremy Thompson as a service to Plummies, which lists PGW books for sale, exchange, or wanted. OM recently received a listing of The Louis Hughes P. G. Wodehouse Collection, being sold by Barry Phelps in addition to his regular inventory. Serious collectors will be interested. # #

SHAKESPEARE QUOTATIONS that Plum never used (but which might describe delicious moments in the lives of Plummies as they read the Master's stories):

"O, I am stabbed with laughter." Love's Labors Lost, III 2.

"They all did tumble to the ground, with such a zealous laughter." LLL III 1

Margaret and Douglas Stow, TWS, have published PLUM PUDDING, a Wodehouse Alphabet, SF (nd, copr 1984), Avenue Press. Edited by The Stows, illustrated by Chris Marrinan, printed on the Stow Press, bound by Barbara Blumenthal, it is a very creditable first-book production by a small private press.

A membership in TWS is a thoughtful gift for a friend or relative who enjoys Plum's stories..... # # #

OM's ANSWER TO 'CURIOUS' in the July issue of PLUM LINES aroused the storm which it richly deserved. "C. Northcote Parkinson, indeed! No authority he!" came from Walter S. White, TWS. He continued, "A far more authoritative source is The Master himself. See Much Obligated, Jeeves, p. 36 or Jeeves and the Tie

TWO WODEHOUSE NOTES

Robert A. Hall Jr.

1. "A brief commination service"

At the beginning of Chapter 8 of *Sam the Sudden* (Am.: *Sam in the Suburbs*), Sam Shotter is in Valley Fields, outdoors in the rain at midnight. His ship-mate Hash Todhunter has taken all his money; he has been snubbed by his fellow-Wrykynian Claude Bates; and he has been deserted by another class-mate, Willoughby Braddock, on whom he was counting for a night's lodging. Consequently,

after going through a brief commination service in which the names of Hash Todhunter, Claude Bates and Willoughby Braddock were prominently featured, he decided to make a move.

The *commination service* to which Wodehouse refers here is a part of the Church of England's *Book of Common Prayer*, dating from 1559, entitled "A Commination against Sinners, with Certain Prayers to Be Used Divers Times in the Year," especially on Ash Wednesday.¹ In it, the curse of God is called down upon sinners, a number of sub-classes of whom are named in ten separate sentences to be uttered by the minister, after each of which the congregation is to reply *Amen*, as in the following samples:

Minister. Cursed is he that maketh the blind to go out of his way.

Answer. Amen. [...]

Minister. Cursed is he that smiteth his neighbor secretly.

Answer. Amen. [etc.]

Clearly, Sam simply said something much briefer, on the order of "Damn Hash Todhunter! Blast Claude Bates! Curses upon Willoughby Braddock!". For Wodehouse, brought up in his family and at school on the teachings of the Church of England,² to refer to Sam's objurgations on this occasion as "a brief commination service" would be a natural humorous touch. In this respect, it is like many other instances in which he uses an unobtrusive chuckle-raising hyperbole. For instance, in describing the assemblage on the station-platform at Ashenden Oakshott, Wodehouse says "The platform was dark with what practically amounted to a sea of humanity. At least forty persons must have been present" (*Uncle Dynamite*, ch. 1). After Johnny Halliday and the Duke of Dunstable have fallen down the stairs at Blandings Castle, "Lord Emsworth went to bed that night in something of a twitter. To a sensitive man the spectacle of a cascade of people falling downstairs is always disturbing" (*A Pelican at Blandings* [Am. *No Nudes Is Good Nudes*], ch. 10:1), and there are many similar instances in Wodehouse's other books.

The expression *commination service* is present in both the English and the American first editions of the book. In the Penguin reprint of 1974, however, it has been replaced by *COMMUNION service*, which of course makes no sense. Probably, not understanding the word *commination*, the key-board-operator replaced it

with something more familiar. Perhaps he or she made a direct substitution of *communion* for *commination*, and the Penguin proof-reader failed to compare the new printing with the original, thereby missing the error. Another possibility is that *commination* was misinterpreted by the key-boarder as *combination*, and that the proof-reader (again without checking it against the original) replaced the obviously nonsensical **combination service* by *communion s.* Whatever the explanation, this is another instance in which a reprinted edition has deviated from the original³ and thereby lost one of the author's subtleties. If it were financially feasible, a definitive critical edition of Wodehouse's works would be highly desirable, in order to eliminate as many as possible of these textual corruptions.

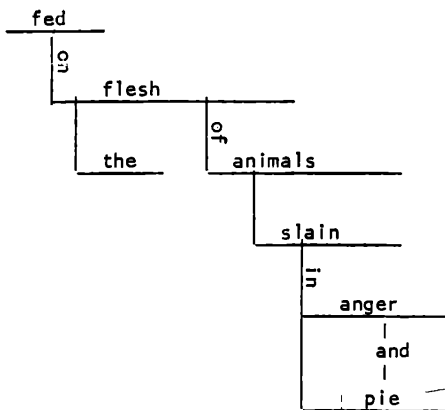
2. "Anger and pie"

The short story "Leave It to Jeeves", in *My Man Jeeves* (later republished as "The Artistic Career of Corky" in *Carry On, Jeeves*) contains a sentence which has puzzled readers because of an apparent *non sequitur*. In various places throughout his works, Wodehouse made references to Indian fakirs or mystics dissolving into thin air in, say, Bombay and re-appearing elsewhere, e.g. in Calcutta.⁴ In this story, Bertie Wooster says

He [Jeeves] is like one of those weird chappies in India who dissolve themselves into thin air and nip through space in a sort of disembodied way and assemble the parts again just where they want them. I've got a cousin who's what they call a Theosophist, and he says he's nearly worked the thing himself, but couldn't quite bring it off, probably owing to having been fed in his boyhood on the flesh of animals slain in anger and pie.

But what, some-one may ask, does it mean to speak of animals being slain "in anger and pie"? The reader's immediate impulse is to take the two final nouns as having the same grammatical function, that of co-ordinate objects of the preposition *in*, as shown in Diagram 1:

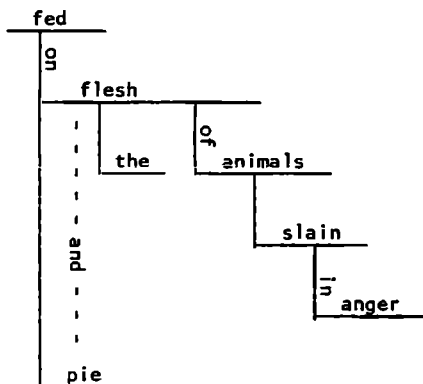
DIAGRAM 1



With this interpretation, there arises a semantic problem, the incompatibility of *anger* and *pie* in this context. An animal can be slain in anger, and it can end up in a pie; but how can it be slain in pie?

The problem is easily resolved if we take *pie* as co-ordinate, not with *anger*, but with *flesh*, and both *flesh* and *pie* as objects of *on*, as shown in Diagram 2,

DIAGRAM 2



and if we read the sentence with a slight break in intonation before *and pie*. It then becomes clear that it was due to Bertie's cousin's being fed on flesh and pie that he was not able to emulate the fakirs.

Nevertheless, there is a certain comic effect which results from the incongruous juxtaposition of *anger* and *pie* at the end of the sentence. It is quite possible that Wodehouse may have come across this awkward phrasing in some source, Theosophist or other, and may have used it here specifically because of its incongruity. If this is the case, then we have here another of the little "private jokes" which Murphy (1981, ch. 1) has detected in a number of Wodehouse's other obscure or apparently unmotivated references.

NOTES

1. I am indebted to the Rev. A. R. Strauss and to Prof. R. B. Jones for a copy of this material.
2. As pointed out by Osborne (1981:79-80).
3. Cf. the animadversions of Edwards (1977:180) on the poor proof-reading in the reprints both of Barrie and Jenkins and of Penguin Books.
4. These references are usually thought to have been related to his brother Armine's having become a leader of the Theosophist movement in India; cf. Osborne (1961:36) and (1976:49).

REFERENCES

- Edwards, Owen Dudley. 1977. *P. G. Wodehouse*. London: Martin Brian and O'Keeffe.
- Murphy, N. T. P. 1981. *In Search of Blandings*. Carshalton Beeches: N. T. P. Murphy.
- Usborne, Richard. 1961. *Wodehouse at Work*. London: Herbert Jenkins.
- . 1976. *Wodehouse at Work to the End*. London: Barrie & Jenkins.
- . 1981. "Native Wood-Notes Wild." In James H. Heineman and Donald R. Bensen (eds.): *P. G. Wodehouse: a Centenary Celebration 1881-1981* (New York: Pierpont Morgan Library and London: Oxford University Press).

RESULTS OF PRESIDENT'S QUESTIONNAIRE (1984)

Item-number	Topic	No. of persons expressing wish for item	
		Yes	No
For <i>Plum Lines</i> :			
I.a	Info. on new editions of PGW's works	20	0
b	" " " books about PGW	22	0
c	Names of individuals or firms from whom copies of PGW's works can be obtained	10	0
d	Short essays or critical studies	20	0
For 1985 meeting of TWS:			
II.a	Talks or colloquia on PGW's works	21	0
b	Song-fest	6	0
c	Reading of PGW "nifties"	13	1 (NO!!!)
d	Video-tapes of PBS or other adaptations of PGW stories	17	0

Among "other" suggestions for *Plum Lines*:

Opportunity to hear from and share with other members
 New items, e.g. plays or TV-shows, devoted to PGW's works
 Info, on discs or cassettes based on PGW's works.
 Advance announcements of local meetings
 [Calls for?] reprinting of long-out-of-print titles of PGW's works
 Meeting, writing to other collectors
 Advance news of TV-shows based on PGW stories or of Wodehouse
 plays touring country

Among "other" suggestions for 1985 meeting:

Tables for trading or selling books
 Social or cock-tail hour [e.g. cash-bar before banquet — RAHjr]
 Personal statements concerning one's own relationship to PGW's works
 Brief statements concerning how PGW has helped participants and their
 value in helping us to live with today's problems
 A defense by "Baker-street Irregulars" (or equivalent) against Adrian
 Mulliner's charge that Sherlock Holmes was Professor Moriarty

NOTE: Any constructive ideas which may occur to you after reading this tabulation, whether or not you replied to the original questionnaire, are welcome. OM

Respectfully submitted,

Bob Hall

Robert A. Hall, Jr.
 President, TWS, 1983-85