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Aunts Aren't What?

BY CHARLES GOULD

Recently, cataloguing a collection of Wodehouse novels in translation, I was struck again by the strangeness of the title *Aunts Aren't Gentlemen* and by the sad history that seems to dog this title and its illustrators, who in my experience always include a cat. Wodehouse's original title is derived from the dialogue between Jeeves and Bertie at the very end of the novel, in which Bertie's idea that "the trouble with aunts as a class" is "that they are not gentlemen." In context, this is very funny and certainly needs no explication. We are well accustomed to the "ungentlemanly" behavior of Aunt Agatha—autocratic, tyrannical, unreasoning, and unfair—though in this instance it's the good and deserving Aunt Dahlia whose "moral code is lax." But exalted to the level of a title and thus isolated, the statement "aunts aren't gentlemen" provokes some scrutiny.

First, it involves a terrible pun—or at least homonymic wordplay—lost immediately on such lost American souls as pronounce "aunt" "ant" and "aren't" "arunt."

That "aunt" and "aren't" are homonyms is something of a stretch in English anyway, and to stretch it into a translation is hopeless. True, in "The Aunt and the Sluggard" (*My Man Jeeves*), Wodehouse wants us to pronounce "aunt" "ant" so that the title will remind us of the fable of the Ant and the Grasshopper; but "ants aren't gentlemen" hasn't a whisper of wit or euphony to recommend it to the ear. Nor, out of the context of that concluding dialogue, has it much appeal to the understanding, for it makes the wholly baseless (or fruitless, or bootless) assumption that even American readers will not take "gentlemen" literally. Even then, even in English in England, the title makes but little sense. You have to read through to the last line of the novel to get it entirely.

Illiterate in every language cited here if not in my own, I can't imagine what it means in Danish or Norwegian (*Tanter er ikke gentlemen*) or Dutch (*Tantes zijn geen heren*)—unless, as I have elsewhere suggested, it hints at one of those sex-change operations which it shall ever be my study not to know about or deserve. Like the Italian (*Le zie non sono gentiluomini*) and the Swedish (*Fastrar är inga gentlemän*), these literal translations must be mystifying in a culture where "gentleman" does not have the immediate, automatic metaphorical connotation of "straight shooter" or "one who plays cricket." Why—how—would an aunt be a gentleman? The question reminds me of Gussie Fink-Nottle and Catsmeat Pirbright in their Pat and Mike knockabout cross-talk act in Chapter 22 of *The Mating Season*: "Who was that lady I saw you with?" "That was no lady, that was my wife." Similarly, in Bertie's words, "an amusing little misunderstanding, you would say," thinking that an aunt was a gentleman.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the Teutonic translator—Christian Thiermann—avoids all this "incoherent raving," as Gussie would call it, by the simple expedient of not attempting to translate the title at all. The German title—*Fünf vor zwölf, Jeeves!*



A sensible Teutonic translation

zwölf, Jeeves! (Five before Twelve, Jeeves!)—is perhaps as sensible as the others, since it, too, doesn't mean a thing . . . unless you notice, on the front-cover illustration of the German first edition, the time on the stable clock (11:55), which marks Bertie's encounter with Pop Cook at Eggesford Court, while he is expected for lunch with the Briscoes at Eggesford Hall, though the Briscoe binge is actually slated for 1:30. This illustration is clearly derived from Osbert Lancaster's dust wrapper for the Barrie & Jenkins edition (used also on the Danish edition), in which the time on the stable clock is 5 minutes *past* 12; but I think we will all agree that *Fünf nach zwölf* hasn't nearly the dramatic suspense of the present title, while *Eggesford Mittags* would be the merest shilly-shallying. (Chapter Nine begins at 5 minutes to 3—*fünf Minuten vor drei*—but that is completely irrelevant to this discussion.) My point is that by this Teutonic titular criterion, Melville might as well have entitled his masterwork *Eight Bells*, while we would know *The Sun Also Rises* as *About 6 A.M., E.S.T.* I believe there is a work entitled *High Noon*, but—for obvious reasons—I don't know what it's about. Just imagine the bibliography if Herr Thiermann were to re-entitle Wodehouse's entire output after this fashion! There'd hardly be enough hours in the day.

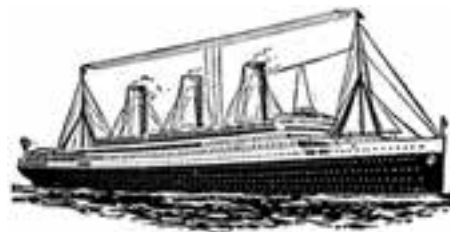
American translator Peter Schwed similarly avoided the difficulties attendant upon the literal by changing the title to *The Cat-nappers*, making another—if possible, worse—pun too tedious to explain . . . though admittedly, Bertie is sleepy at the beginning of Chapter Six, and the plot turns on Aunt Dahlia's assigning him the task of kidnapping the cat on whom the well-being of the race horse she has bet against depends. (Somewhere in this little zoo there should be a kid-goat.) Peter Schwed was a revered friend, but some of his PGW titles are embarrassing. Just think where we'd be if the Danish and the Deutsch and the Dutch had started with *this* one. We'd have *Katzendämmerung*, or *Das Schläfchen um zwölf Uhr*, and then it would come back into English as *The Late-night Litter Lifters*.

I do not have in hand all of the titles I've mentioned, relying on Ms. McIlvaine for the Italian and Swedish, and I mention only the artwork I have actually seen for this title, sparing us all what I would heretically say about the Ionicus illustration if it were here. Trying to illustrate (as often is true) the title without reading the novel, these artists agree there's a cat in it. The Dutch first edition—preceding, alas, the advent of Peter van Straaten—presents a sole photographic image of Jeeves with an umbrella on his left arm and a cat on a leash in his right hand: as an illustration of anything in the book it's as baffling as the title. In England, Osbert

Lancaster came in at his worst . . . which is not bad; but Jeeves wouldn't have let Bertie leave even a cottage in that green checked tweed suit, green (green?) hat, and orange shoes! Then Simon & Schuster brought in Norman Greene to produce probably the worst Wodehouse dust-wrapper illustration in history: Bertie Wooster looks like a middle-aged Kennebunkport Realtor (or retired Schoolmaster) awaiting his third martini—which in fact Jeeves has in his hand, not on a tray, looking like Alistair Cooke after a bad date with Tallulah Bankhead. Not a pretty sight. But behind it all is a cat.

David Jasen once told me that Wodehouse routinely threw dust wrappers away when he received copies of his books. Sad news for some collectors, but in this case who'd blame him? Some of the paperback covers I've mentioned would have—may have, if he saw them—puzzled him as much as they do me. I used to tell my classes that if they couldn't judge a book by its cover they'd waste a lot of time on a physics text that could have been a Dickens novel. James Thurber ("What's So Funny?" in *Thurber Country*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1962) offered as his first standing rule about humor: "The reader should be able to find out what the story is about." I feel this rule should apply to titlelists, translators, and cover illustrators. When Agatha Christie offers us *4:50 from Paddington*, we know where we are and when, and—from Dame Agatha—we know what to expect. *Five to Twelve at Eggesford Court* doesn't do it for Sir Pelham.

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Tour of Wodehouse's England

Word has just been received that the P G Wodehouse Society (UK) has set dates—specifically, July 8–15, 2007—for its next Tour of Wodehouse's England to celebrate the Society's 10th anniversary. Full details of the tour and its costs will be published in the winter issue of *Plum Lines*. Until that time, if you may be interested in signing up for it, email the Society's chairman, Hilary Bruce.

Providence Convention 2007!

Are you moaning that it's been far too long since we last had a convention? Do you get an itchy, can't-wait sensation whenever thoughts of stimulating talks, scintillating skits, and sensational browsing and sluicing come to mind? Alas, immediate relief is not



in store, because the next convention is still more than a year away. It's not too soon, though, to start planning now for what promises to be a heavenly time (that's a clue) in Providence, Rhode Island. So if you haven't already done so, get out your calendar and reserve the date:

October 11–14, 2007, at the

Providence Biltmore Hotel (www.providencebiltmore.com). Details and registration forms will be provided in the next issue of *Plum Lines* and all issues thereafter until it's time to convene once again with our fellow Plummiess, known far and wide for their divine natures. (That's another clue.)



Convention 2009 Bids

A reminder: All chapters who may be interested in hosting the 2009 convention must submit their bids to Elin Woodger, chairperson of The Wodehouse Society Convention Steering Committee (TWS CSC), by *January 11, 2007*, at the latest. Bidding chapters will be notified by April 11, 2007, whether their application has been successful or not. The criteria for bids are set out in the TWS CSC charter, which can be obtained from the Society's website (<http://www.wodehouse.org/twsCSCcharter>), or by writing to Elin.

She sniffed bitterly. "Why, you can't be too stout for Number Two towns. The thing isn't possible. They like their heroines stout. It makes them feel they've had their money's worth."

"The Code of the Mulliners" (1935)

Notice for Visitors to Dulwich College

Please raise your glasses in a toast to Dr. Jan Piggott, who recently retired as Dulwich College's archivist. We Wodehousians have always been fortunate in having an able and dedicated individual administering the Wodehouse papers at the archive, and we all appreciate the wonderful job Jan did during his years in the post. The Wodehouse collection will now be overseen by Mrs. Calista Lucy.



With this changing of the guard, it is worthwhile to remind Wodehousians of the protocol for visiting Dulwich College. For those who wish only to see the Wodehouse Study in the library, you may view it without appointment, Monday–Friday, at any time during the school's regular terms. All you need to do is report to Reception for a visitor's pass. However, if you plan to visit the college out of term time, please write to: Julia Field, Enterprise Manager, Dulwich College, London SE21 7LD. In your letter, specify the date and time of your proposed visit, along with alternatives (if possible), and be sure to state your desire to see the Wodehouse Study. Mrs. Field is also the person to contact for tours of the college itself as well as group visits.

Wodehouse students and scholars who wish to view or study the manuscripts and letters in the Wodehouse archive may write directly to Mrs. Calista Lucy, Keeper of the Archives, Wodehouse Library, Dulwich College, London SE21 7LD; or email her at archives@dulwich.org.uk. For additional information on Dulwich College, including its academic term dates and how to get there, visit their website at www.dulwich.org.uk. (Clicking on "Events" will lead you to "Exhibitions," which includes information about the Wodehouse Study.)

Spotted on the Internet

In a recent review of the book *Manliness* by Harvey C. Mansfield, the reviewer, Matthew Rarey, made this cogent observation: "But silence is preferable to explaining what makes humour work, which is why critics have shied away from giving P. G. Wodehouse his due as a gifted humourist. Try explaining Gussie Fink-Nottle and you get the picture."

Plum in Hollywood: Just the FAQs, and a Few Myths Shattered

BY BRIAN TAVES

Brian presented this paper at last year's "Hooray for Hollywood!" convention in Los Angeles. To the delight of Wodehousians everywhere, he has recently published P. G. Wodehouse and Hollywood: Screenwriting, Satires and Adaptations—see page 7 for details.

In June 1931, finishing a year in Hollywood as a scriptwriter for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, P. G. Wodehouse told a newspaperwoman the words that have since defined this time in his life.

"I cannot see what they engaged me for . . . They were extremely nice to me—oh, extremely—but I feel as if I have cheated them.

"You see, I understood I was engaged to write stories for the screen. . . .

"Yet apparently they had the greatest difficulty in finding anything for me to do. Twice during the year they brought completed scenarios of other people's stories to me and asked me to do some dialogue. . . . That about sums up what I was called upon to do for my \$104,000."

The first inkling Wodehouse had of the impact of his remarks came with a call from Reuters early the next morning, asking if the interview was authentic. When another call was received shortly afterward, Wodehouse finally went out to get the morning paper and saw that the interview had merited a headline. The next day the *New York Herald Tribune* used it as the basis for an editorial on practices in Hollywood. *Variety* mentioned an English playwright and author making \$2,500 a week "without contributing anything really worthwhile to the screen." In the weeks to come, and indeed throughout the 1930s, the press never missed an opportunity to remind readers of Wodehouse's words. And, worse, Wodehouse biographers accepted what he had said.

In truth, Wodehouse wildly exaggerated. He tried to correct matters at the time with a letter to the *Los Angeles Times*, asserting credit for the dialogue in a number of films, but for many years that letter was overlooked. In fact, Wodehouse had indeed been very busy in Hollywood and successful by the standards of screenwriting, especially in the studio era.

In August 1929 it was Wodehouse himself who came knocking on Hollywood's door. In the wake of his first visit, he wrote "Slaves of Hollywood" for the *Saturday Evening Post*, about its lure for writers. Yet, succumbing to this very lure himself, he then authorized his wife to negotiate a screenwriting contract for him, and the deal she arranged with MGM called for Wodehouse to be paid \$2,000 a week. Even stepdaughter Leonora was given a job at the studio.

Wodehouse was 49 when he arrived in town to begin work on May 8, 1930. The studio allowed him to write largely at home. He was assigned to create a story for Jack Buchanan, then asked to rewrite *Those Three French Girls*, with a script ready by July 8; the studio hoped to distinguish it by the Wodehouse flavor. Reginald Denny starred as a not-too-bright Englishman who comes to the rescue of three women, falling in love with one of them despite his scheming but buffoonish uncle, an earl.

Wodehouse had hoped to write an original screenplay for Marion Davies, but instead he became a collaborator on a project to star her, the musical *Rosalie*, already two years in the making. Wodehouse had been involved with the stage version. By August 1930 he had contributed to the script, and in October he was commissioned to write *Rosalie* as a novelette. Then, after six months, *Rosalie* was cancelled, as musicals seemed to be in decline.

MGM credited Wodehouse, along with Sarah Y. Mason, as author of additional dialogue on a movie adapted by Mason from the previous year's H. M. Harwood play, *The Man in Possession*. Wodehouse made clear his feelings about this credit. In "George and Alfred" the narrator remarks that "The lot of a writer of additional dialogue in a Hollywood studio is not an exalted one—he ranks, I believe, just above a script girl and just below the man who works the wind machine."

In October 1930 Wodehouse was asked to write dialogue for the screen adaptation of the play *Among the Married*. Part of the reason for this assignment may have been his humorous golf stories, for in *Among the Married* the rakish hero is a golf champion. Wodehouse was not credited on the final film, retitled *Men Call It Love*, which became entirely dramatic. Similarly, Wodehouse contributed to another play adaptation,



Brian Taves presenting *The FAQs* in L.A.

Just a Gigolo, again without credit.

At the end of 1930, MGM bought *Candle-Light*, which included paying Wodehouse £500 for his share of the rights to his own 1929 adaptation of the Siegfried Geyer play. The title of *Candle-Light* comes from an old maxim: “Choose neither women nor linen by candle-light.” It is very frankly continental in its outlook, concerning several attempts by Josef, a valet, at seduction. The screen version was to star John Gilbert, but the studio wanted to end the actor’s contract. Wodehouse recalled: “So they decide his next picture will be such a flop that he will make a settlement. And the disturbing thought that occurs to me is that when it is essential that a picture shall lay an egg, does the cry go around the studio ‘Wodehouse is the man. Send for Wodehouse.’” MGM decided not to film *Candle-Light* but, two years later, sold the rights, and all their scripts, to Universal, who filmed it in 1933 as *By Candlelight*.

The head of MGM told Wodehouse that *Leave It to Psmith* was a favorite novel, but he was unwilling to film it. MGM wanted Wodehouse the playwright, not the novelist. Hollywood was only in its third year of making sound films, and the industry sought screenwriters with stage experience. Adaptations of plays had dominated Hollywood’s films of Wodehouse on the silent screen since 1920, typified by MGM’s one previous Wodehouse film, *The Cardboard Lover*, a 1928 silent with Marion Davies. Even the one novel that MGM did buy (but never produced) was *If I Were You*—which Wodehouse had written, from a play coauthored with Guy Bolton, during spare time on the MGM payroll. Within months of his leaving MGM, production began on a sound remake of *Her Cardboard Lover*. Buster Keaton played the lead in what was

retitled *The Passionate Plumber* (with a separate French version also produced).

In 1935, 20th Century-Fox bought the film rights to *Thank You, Jeeves* in a deal that allowed the studio to make additional films centered around Jeeves for up to 20 years. Fox’s series was launched on what was perceived as a sure bet, casting Arthur Treacher, known for butler roles, in the title role. However, *Thank You, Jeeves* dispensed with the plot of the novel, and any other Jeeves story, in an incredibly unlikely tale of espionage.

On screen, Jeeves is irritable and petulant, and Wodehouse himself said that Treacher “pulled faces all the time. Awful.” David Niven made an acceptable Bertie, but in marrying him at the end of *Thank You, Jeeves*, half of the Wodehouse team was eliminated, judging Bertie to be dispensable. The second of the series, *Step Lively, Jeeves*, does contain a few mild, brief laughs, but it was still far from the necessary quality to sustain a series, which ended after the two films.

In 1934 Paramount inquired unsuccessfully about engaging Wodehouse as a screenwriter at \$1,500 a week, and in 1936 the studio brought *Anything Goes* to the screen. The same year, MGM released a new version of *Piccadilly Jim*, and *The Man in Possession* was remade with the title *Personal Property*.

In the wake of the Jeeves films and *Piccadilly Jim*, Hollywood seemed more amenable to filming Wodehouse stories, despite the varied results. Was it time to try again? When Wodehouse’s tax problems were resolved, and despite his earlier vows never to return to Hollywood and his series of satirical short stories and novels about the industry, he engaged his agent to arrange his return to the ranks of screenwriters.

By October 1936 Wodehouse was back at MGM at \$2,500 a week for six months. Again he was assigned to *Rosalie*, and although this time the movie was made, the producer elbowed Wodehouse aside. Yet he didn’t leave town.

Wodehouse rejected several writing offers, including a Hollywood satire that was about to begin production. I even discovered, many years ago during my graduate years at USC, a Warner Bros. memo suggesting Wodehouse as a dialogue writer for the upcoming Errol Flynn swashbuckler, *Adventures of Robin Hood*.

RKO had bought the rights to both the novel and the Wodehouse–Ian Hay stage versions of *A Damsel in Distress*, since the studio needed a Fred Astaire vehicle. In May 1937 Wodehouse was hired to adapt his novel, and he finished on August 14, having made \$14,500. He then went to work at Warner Bros. but left unhappily after six weeks, receiving \$10,000.

A Damsel in Distress proved to be the first Astaire movie to lose money at the box office. Wodehouse may also have been glad to leave Hollywood because of a letter from Philip Dunne. Dunne was an acknowledged leftist and a chief organizer of the Screen Writers Guild. In response, the producers recognized a competing union, the Screen Playwrights, of which Wodehouse was a member. Dunne wrote Wodehouse saying he was consorting with scabs, and the letter was published in *Variety*. The Screen Playwrights announced they were suing Dunne, and the Guild, for libel. The suit was quickly dismissed, but Dunne, who became a producer and director, would accuse Wodehouse of “right-wing leanings” and, later, anti-Semitism, based on the German broadcasts.

In 1942 MGM remade *Her Cardboard Lover*, this time starring Norma Shearer. The first American Wodehouse television broadcast was in 1950: *Uncle Dynamite*, perhaps inevitably starring Arthur Treacher. During the 1950s his former partner in *Thank You, Jeeves*, David Niven, proved to be an ideal Uncle Fred in two television versions of “Uncle Fred Flits By.” *Candle-Light* appeared on the small screen three times, and there were two new television versions of *Anything Goes*, as well as a movie. One of Wodehouse’s plays, *Arthur*, never staged before then, instead appeared on television as a 1960 segment of the hour-long anthology series *Ford Startime*.

And there the story ends. Forty-five years have passed since Hollywood last brought Wodehouse to its screen; only British productions show in the United States. Despite his satirical stories of the city and his disappointments, Wodehouse had repeatedly undertaken screenwriting, although fully cognizant of its perils. He had the rare privilege of adapting one of his own novels to the screen. Now we can celebrate Wodehouse’s achievements in Hollywood as a writer who overcame the frustrations of studio employment to make Hollywood a notable part of his career.

Poets and other literary blokes talk a lot about falling in love at first sight, but it’s equally possible to fall out of love just as quickly. One moment, this girl was the be-all and end-all, as you might say, of Percy Wimbolt’s life. The next, she was just a regrettable young blister with whom he wished to hold no further communication. He could stand a good deal from the sex. Insults directed at himself left him unmoved. But he was not prepared to countenance destructive criticism of a Bodmin hat.

“The Amazing Hat Mystery” (1933)

PGW on Campus



Amy Plofker recently sent a couple of interesting college course descriptions, commenting that “I know we Plumies deplore how little PGW is taught in college courses.” I have to note that I don’t deplore this state of affairs. I think Shaw once said he did not want to be taught in schools and become hated in the way Shakespeare is hated. He had a point. All the same, it’s good to see Wodehouse is not being overlooked entirely.

—Ed.

From the Connecticut College 2006–07 catalog, under the heading “English 320: Special Topics in 20th Century Fiction”:

English 320B Modernism and Its Discontents
 A comparison of representative works of 20th-century “modernist” fiction with more traditional works from the same period. Authors to be studied may include Joyce, Ford, Woolf, Wodehouse, Waugh and Nabokov.

Also, Texas Christian University offers this delightfully named class in its 2006–07 catalog as part of the Master of Liberal Arts program:

MALA 61043: Jerks, Nitwits, and Losers: The Anti-Hero in Western Tradition.

This class explores the changing ideas of what makes someone a jerk, nitwit, or loser from antiquity to the 20th century. How and why have these ideas changed? What cultural values—about individuality, about equality, about sympathy—do these ideas reveal? What are the social and political functions of labeling someone a jerk, nitwit, or loser? Under what conditions are these anti-heroes admirable, even heroic? Readings will possibly include: Homer’s *The Iliad* (selections), Plautus’s *Miles Gloriosus*, Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* (selections), Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*, Austin’s *Pride and Prejudice*, Melville’s *Bartleby the Scrivener*, Wodehouse’s *The Mating Game*, and Toole’s *A Confederacy of Dunces*.

Cats who know me well, like Aunt Dahlia’s Augustus, will probably allude to my skill at scratching them behind the ear.

Aunts Aren’t Gentlemen (1974)

Important New Book News

P. G. Wodehouse and Hollywood: Screenwriting, Satires and Adaptations

By Brian Taves

- Foreword by Richard Briers (renowned for his portrayals of Wodehouse characters in movies, television, and radio, from Galahad Threepwood to Uncle Fred to Bertie Wooster)
- Published by McFarland & Company, Inc. (June 2006)
- Paperback, 216pp, illustrated
- List Price: \$35
- Available from McFarland, Amazon, and Barnes & Noble (see below)

We Plummies have a lot to be grateful for, thanks to the continuing publication of new books on P. G. Wodehouse. The latest to reach our bookshelves is the long-awaited work by Brian Taves, Ph.D., on Wodehouse's years in Hollywood. A graduate of the University of Southern California, film archivist for the Library of Congress, and longtime member of The Wodehouse Society, Brian is the author of six books and over 100 articles on popular culture and the media. Last year he gave us a brief sneak preview of his upcoming book in his talk at the "Hooray for Hollywood!" convention in Los Angeles (see page 4).

Although Wodehouse's novels and short stories are all well known, his theatrical and film writings are a different matter. Brian has overcome numerous hurdles to provide a detailed and comprehensive account of Wodehouse's activities in Hollywood, revealing much new information about his work there. Following are the pertinent facts regarding *P. G. Wodehouse and Hollywood*, as provided by Brian himself.

"Wodehouse has been part of film and television history in a number of different ways through some 150 movies and television productions since 1915. His plays, 70-plus novels, and even more numerous short stories have been made into many movie and television productions, not only in England and the United States but also in Sweden, Germany, and India. During the

1930s, Wodehouse spent two sojourns in Hollywood as a scriptwriter, which in turn led to a dozen novels, short stories, and autobiographical memoirs concentrating on Hollywood settings or characters. His satire revealed an understanding of the actual structure of the filmmaking industry, and his alternate Hollywood is the equal of any portrait, comedic or dramatic.

"Television, from single programs to series, found new ways to adapt his work. Almost as important are his radio plays, which often allowed both his dialogue and narration to be spoken in their original form. Moreover, it was with radio that Wodehouse made the greatest mistake of his career, making broadcasts from Germany upon his release from civilian internment.

"This study seeks to bring together these diverse strands. Wodehouse exercised much reticence about his own work for the screen, a habit unfortunately followed by his biographers later, and therefore the full extent of his activities in Hollywood has not been fully appreciated. Included in the book is a comprehensive, detailed list of Wodehouse's stories and articles about Hollywood, as well as a complete filmography of motion pictures and television works to which he contributed or which were based on his stories."

P. G. Wodehouse and Hollywood can be ordered directly from the publisher, McFarland, via their website: <http://www.mcfarlandpub.com> (enter "Taves" in the search field); or by calling McFarland's order line: 800-253-2187. The book can also be ordered from Amazon at <http://www.amazon.com> (<http://www.amazon.co.uk> in the United Kingdom) or from Barnes and Noble at <http://barnesandnoble.com>; in both cases, enter "Brian Taves" in the search field.

Brian will be bringing copies of the book to the Providence convention next year, and he will be selling them at a discount of \$30. He is also willing to accept emailed orders for discounted, autographed books now; shipping would be \$4 within the U.S. and Canada, \$8 overseas. Make out your check to Brian Taves and send it with your order to him.

On PGWnet, **David McDonough** provided a Wodehouse sighting from the *New York Times* travel section of May 28. In a review of Brown's Hotel (located in London's Mayfair district), Mary Billard wrote: "New copies of English classics, not a moldy book among them, are a sweet touch, among them Dickens's *Little Dorrit* or P. G. Wodehouse's *Cocktail Time*." After sharing this quote, David challenged the group on PGWnet: "What do these two books have in common?" Give up? The answer is on page 18.

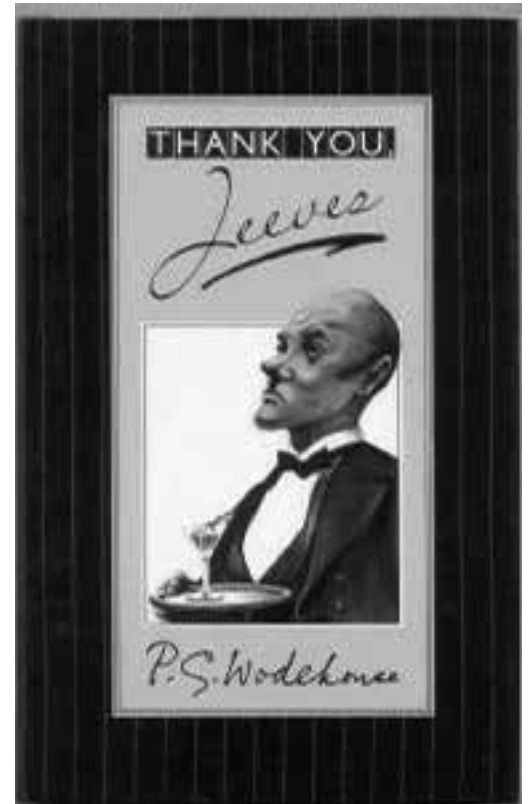
The Autograph Edition Told Again

BY JOHN GRAHAM

Last quarter I devoted the Collecting Column to a short history of the Herbert Jenkins Autograph Edition—at 41 volumes, the longest uniform series of Wodehouse hardbacks published during Plum's lifetime. The first eight books in the series made their debut exactly 50 years ago. To this day, the Autograph Edition remains an attractive and reasonably priced alternative to acquiring costly first editions of the same titles. Eileen McIlvaine's comprehensive Wodehouse bibliography (1990) provides the interested collector with enough details to get started.

You might not think there is much more to say about the Autograph Edition; in that, however, you would be wrong. Thanks to a recent letter from a loyal and observant reader of this column, I can now provide new information on the series' dust wrappers. In addition, I will use this occasion to amend Ms. McIlvaine's description and incomplete listing of the New Autograph Edition, a short-lived successor to the original series, published in England in the 1980s.

In my previous column, I observed that the books in the Autograph Edition were wrapped in light-brown jackets decorated with a multicolored "flowered wallpaper motif of uniform design." Not long afterward, I received a letter from longtime book dealer Charles E. Gould of Kennebunkport, Maine, who wrote: "The Autograph Edition dust wrapper . . .



The 1986 taller format of Thank You, Jeeves

is actually a design featuring

a monogram formed from the publisher's initials, HJ, and the publisher's logo; what is on the spine of *The Clicking of Cuthbert* and *The Inimitable Jeeves* seems to be distinctly a Hippogriff but elsewhere appears to be a Pegasus." Charles went on to note that, beginning with its appearance on the spine of *Meet Mr. Mulliner* in 1927, the Herbert Jenkins logo evolved into a "sort of winged Promethean Centaur," and it is this particular mythological incarnation that formed part of the Autograph Edition dust-wrapper design. Finally, he cautioned that "more exacting research is probably required before I publish the definitive 3-volume work on this formidable bibliographic topic." If Charles uncovers any new details, I will certainly pass them along in a future column.

The last three books in the Autograph Edition were published by Herbert Jenkins in 1966, which coincidentally marked Plum's 50th year with the firm. Not long after that, Herbert Jenkins was bought by Crescent Press, who changed its name to Barrie & Jenkins. After Plum's death in 1975, the firm was taken over by the Hutchinson Group and soon became known as Century-Hutchinson. For the next few years, according to Kristin Thompson in her useful and (I think) underappreciated book, *Wooster Proposes, Jeeves Disposes*, Hutchinson continued to keep Wodehouse titles in print "more for prestige than profit." Then, in 1986, they suddenly reissued four cornerstone titles (*Right Ho,*



The 1986 taller format of Something Fresh

Jeeves; Something Fresh; Summer Lightning; and Thank You, Jeeves) in a new, taller format (8¾" high rather than the standard 7½") with illustrated dust wrappers. On the lower half of the inside front flaps of these wrappers appears the following statement: "Hutchinson announces an elegant New Autograph Edition of the best novels and short stories of P. G. Wodehouse. Spaciously and attractively designed, these books will fulfill a long-felt need for a handsome standard collection of the works of the twentieth century's greatest writer of humour." (Eerily reminiscent of the announcement accompanying the debut of the original Autograph Edition 30 years earlier, this paragraph was dropped from the wrappers of all subsequent volumes in the series.)

Eileen McIlvaine provides a short description for nine books and dust wrappers in the New Autograph Edition in section K of her Wodehouse bibliography. In addition to the four titles that were issued in 1986, she lists these five issued in 1987: *Psmith Journalist*, *Heavy Weather*, *The Mating Season*, *Psmith in the City*, and *Ukridge*. Surprisingly, she fails to list five other titles that also appeared in 1987: *Uncle Fred in the Springtime*, *Uncle Dynamite*, *Meet Mr. Mulliner*, *Leave It to Psmith*, and *The Code of the Woosters*. As far as I know, no additional titles were ever forthcoming, and the New Autograph Edition ended with just 14 volumes to its name.

In addition to overlooking five titles, McIlvaine also fails to mention one of the series' more interesting distinguishing features: All of these books have decorated endpapers. The Blandings Castle titles have lavender endpapers adorned with small black pigs—Berkshires, no doubt. The endpapers for the Jeeves and Wooster titles as well as for *Uncle Dynamite* show a slim Edwardian gentleman in top hat and tails. Umbrellas are the theme for the Psmith books, beer mugs for *Meet Mr. Mulliner*, and boys' caps for *Ukridge*.

A final note to round out this column: The dust wrappers for the New Autograph Edition each have a different character depicted on their front covers surrounded by a background of assorted fabrics from men's suits, so varied that only Jeeves would know all their names. I think Charles Gould would not quarrel with my general description; he might, however, want me to make note of the publisher's logo that appears on the spine and half-title and title pages. No longer resembling a mythological creature, the logo looks to me like the antlers of an overgrown Western steer. Not particularly Wodehousian, you say? Well, perhaps I should also mention that hanging from the right antler is—a top hat! Now that's more like it.

Wodehouse Influences in *The Drowsy Chaperone*

BY HERB MOSKOVITZ

Back in the 1920s and 30s, Broadway musicals were notoriously short on plot and character development but full of wonderful songs that were quickly adapted into the great American songbook. With the exception of frequent revivals of *Anything Goes* by Cole Porter, P. G. Wodehouse, Guy Bolton, and others, you don't see that kind of a show around much anymore. Until now! There is a new 1920s musical on Broadway, and it has just won Tonys for Best Featured Actress, Best Set Design, Best Costume Design, Best Book of a Musical, and Best Original Score Written for the Theater. It had nominations in just about every other category for musicals.

It is *The Drowsy Chaperone*, playing at the Marquis Theater on Times Square, starring Sutton Foster and the aforementioned Best Featured Actress, Beth Leavel, as the Drowsy Chaperone. Director/choreographer Casey Nicholaw and his creative team have lovingly crafted a tribute to the type of musicals that Porter, Wodehouse, Bolton, and Jerome Kern used to create. The music and lyrics by Lisa Lambert and Greg Morrison and book by Bob Martin and Don McKellar all contribute to the final wonderful effect.



There is a small New York theater company that hosts a series of concert versions of old Broadway shows called *Musicals Tonight!* Over the past few years they have produced a few Kern/Wodehouse gems, including *Oh, Lady! Lady!!* and *The Beauty Prize*. The plot for these shows invariably involves a handsome young man and a lovely young woman who are about to get married when misunderstandings and complications arise and threaten to end the couple's engagement. There is always a close friend for each of the leads who will be involved in an even sillier subplot, and usually a lovable criminal or two will further complicate the proceedings. There is also always a wisecracking butler or valet and a doddering parent. Seeing these revivals prepared me well to appreciate *The Drowsy Chaperone*, because all of these plot devices and characters are in this charming piece of fluff.

The Drowsy Chaperone opens with a man, a devoted musical theater fan, seated in a chair in his

typical New York City apartment, telling the audience about one of his favorite musicals of the 1920s, *The Drowsy Chaperone*. As he talks and plays the original cast album, the actors who performed in the show at the old Morosco Theater appear in his apartment and perform the show for him—and us. The story involves a young couple who are about to be married, but a misunderstanding arises. There are also a couple of funny gangsters, a doddering parent, a wisecracking butler, and amusing confidantes—you get the picture. They are all here. *The Drowsy Chaperone* is both a satire of the 1920s musicals and a valentine to them.

Other conventions from the period that are incorporated into *The Drowsy Chaperone* are the novelty song where someone sings while performing some unusual physical act—in this case roller-skating blindfolded—a Latin lothario, a new dance that the entire company learns and performs with great aplomb, an anthem that has nothing to do with the plot but is there nevertheless, multiple weddings at the curtain, a deus ex machina literally coming down from the sky, people singing on the wings of a biplane going to Rio, and the occasional song that has a beautiful melody but terrible lyrics.

There is a certain kind of silliness and formula in the musicals from this period, and yet we never get tired of seeing the shows or movies adapted from them. Nor do we tire of the many pastiches that have appeared over the years, such as *The Boyfriend*, *Dames at Sea*, and *Thoroughly Modern Millie*. Very much the way we all feel about Wodehouse stories! The more you know about the old musical shows, the more you will enjoy *The Drowsy Chaperone*, but even if you know little, you will love the show for its infectious tunes, lively dancing, and energetic cast. It is at the Marquis Theater, which stands on the site of the old Morosco Theater—where the fictional *Drowsy Chaperone* supposedly played in 1928 (just another one of the in-jokes known to theater fans).

I have been told that those who did not have prime orchestra seats (I did) have trouble seeing the action that does not take place in the center of the stage. The Marquis is a huge theater, so be careful where you are sitting.



Editor's note: Several other TWS members who have seen The Drowsy Chaperone have also raved about it. Reviewers, virtually all of whom gave the show high marks, have noted the Wodehouse-Bolton-Kern connection.

A Hoax?

BY DAVID LANDMAN

Why haven't you been paying attention? Now I have to start all over again from the middle and work my way to both ends! This time, don't let your mind wander. Mine wandered in 1967 and, except for a postcard from Ypsilanti, Michigan, saying "Heigh-ho" (or perhaps it was the other way 'round), hasn't been heard from since.

So much for the Benchley imitation. Now to my article.

Having nothing to do last Thursday—or perhaps it was next Thursday—(there goes Benchley again!) I began to while away the time examining the backs of the book jackets in my Wodehouse collection. (I am saving the fronts for Sundays at the nursing home.) And lo! When I got to the back of *Jeeves and the Tie That Binds* (Simon & Schuster, 1971) what had previously appeared to my failing eyes to be a sepia snapshot of a winter scene in old Bucharest turned out to be a photo of Plum at the age of 90 touching his toes. At least that's what the photo purports to be. But how do we know?

All we can see is what appears to be a man (the figure is wearing a tie) or a gourd bent over. But, whether human being or gourd, in either case the face is not visible. All that is given to us from which to determine identity is a nose, the top of a left ear (it might be a potato bud), and the dome of a bald head. And there lies the rub. (By the way, if you rub a bald head, you are bound to have luck—whether good or bad, I forget). Frankly, it looks to me rather like an early telescopic photo of a gibbous moon that has been superimposed upon the shoulders of a bending headless man. Or, for all we know, it may be a Sharper Image store dummy projecting an early telescopic photo of a gibbous moon on its head. They sell stranger things.

Let us take a closer look at this purported head. Not too close or you'll upset my drink. To make our investigation scientific, divide the head (mentally, or course) into quadrants (threes) along its North-South and East-West axes. And now that I've used the words "divide" and "axes" you must be thoroughly confused. Never mind. Let us not split hairs (oops!). You know what I mean.

Cast your eyes on the lower right quadrant. Does not that irregular dark spot look suspiciously like the lunar Sea of Myrmecology (don't bother to look it up; it's the scientific study of ants)? It defies credibility to accept that Wodehouse had an exact image of the Sea

of Myrmecology tattooed on the top of his head. A profile of the Lubavitcher Rebbe I could accept, but the Sea of Myrmecology? Don't make me laugh. (Better yet, don't make me cry.)



Plum or Not Plum? David Landman plumbs the depths of the mystery.

Next, look at the upper left quadrant very near the center. Do you see two circular depressions? Not there. There! Now it is well known that the depressions suffered by writers are notoriously polyhedral and can easily be alleviated by vigorous application of a cold six-pack of Red Bull. Those in the photo are obviously volcano craters.

What other evidence is there that the person (or gourd) in the photograph is not Plum? Consider the fact that the figure is wearing a checked shirt and a tie that appears to have tiny polka-dots. Granted that P. G. Wodehouse was no fashion plate, but nevertheless, I defy anyone to convince me that he was sartorially so far gone as to combine polka dots and checks! Forsooth! And to clinch the matter, can we reasonably be asked

to believe he would wear such a revolting combination in the presence of the large whirly pattern of the room's drapes? The man would have had to be mad! And besides, are those floral whorls on the cornice or are they satellite photos of Atlantic hurricanes?

Notice also that the tie is depending not from the center of the collar where it would normally be, but rather falling askew from under the right lap or, perhaps, it is being held in the teeth. And notice further that it is not the overpiece of the tie—it is apparently tucked into the belt—but rather the underpiece (French: *das unterStuck*), that vestigial appendage which no man knows what to do with (with which no man knows what to do? what does which man do with it?). Personally, I cut these useless bits off below the knot, pick out the stitching, and use them as matching breast-pocket handkerchiefs. Natty. And why is the tie so wrinkled? (Not to mention the trousers. Don't look at the socks!) Are we to believe that Ethel was so lax a helpmeet as not to iron her husband's ties? My Elizabeth (bless her) spends many a Saturday night ironing my ties and an occasional spat. (Yes, we do have an occasional spat, but these soon blow over and we laugh at ourselves as we apply the Neosporin.) And though Eliza's burden has been made easier by the fact that I have cut off the small ends of my ties, sometimes she is still at it when I awake Tuesday morning. This paragraph doesn't seem to be much of a proof, but I leave it in because it has a few good gags.

Finally, undeniable evidence that we have been duped by a hoax photo is that enormous hump on the subject's back. We have been assured by Col. Murphy in his book *In Search of Wodehouse's Hump* that Wodehouse never had a hump and wouldn't accept one if it was offered to him on a platter with watercress around it. And indeed, a hump was once so proffered by A. A. Milne, who had it left over from an early version of Pooh Bear.

If it is not a hump, then what is that thing? In the interests of science I sought to discover if the back of a man touching his toes would naturally bulge dorsally like the Grampian Hills and to that purpose asked a number of my friends and not a few casual passers-by to bend over so that I might see if they billowed in the back. Sad to say, the most my test cases were able to achieve was a nod. And only a few could manage that much. And so my researches ran into dry sands and I into dry martinis.

No, it all adds up to one thing—a hoax. And I for one intend to write a stern letter to Simon & Schuster. Or maybe just Schuster. Simon is still fuming over that mayonnaise bomb.

My Introduction to P. G. Wodehouse

BY FRANK V. PIORE

One is usually introduced to the works of P. G. Wodehouse in some variation of the following manner: (A) A Kind and Enlightened Benefactor takes pity on a Poor Unenlightened Blighter who has been weaned since the age of reason on a steady diet of horse operas, hugger-muggers, and, if you will excuse the expression, “relevant literature.” (B) Said KAEB slips a Plum novel into the PUB’s stack of reading matter. (C) Before long, epiphany and conversion to a lifetime of absolute reading pleasure ensues.

My own introduction to PGW was nothing at all like that. Sometime in the mid-1960s, my soon-to-be brother-in-law got me interested in the daily radio broadcasts of Jean Shepherd, humorist and raconteur extraordinaire. If you are unfamiliar with Jean Shepherd, think of the movie *A Christmas Story*, which was based on his stories, narrated by him, and also featured him in a cameo. Sometime in the ’70s, Shepherd did a show about Plum. Strangely enough, I don’t recall him saying much about how wonderful an experience reading a PGW novel was. Rather, he went on quite a bit about the titles. He made, as I recall, much of the title *No Nudes Is Good Nudes*.

Well, if it was good enough for Shepherd, I figured, how wrong could I go by trying out a book or two. At that time, I was regularly receiving a mail-order catalog from an outfit that specialized in selling used books that had once been part of pay-as-you-go lending libraries. Sure enough, the current catalog had three books by Plum listed. I ordered all three (in for a dime, in for a dollar and all that, you know).

When they arrived, the first one I delved into was *Do Butlers Burgle Banks?* I suppose it was the alliteration that attracted me. I thought it was a fine book and all, and promised myself that I would read the other two sooner or later. Fortunately for me, it was sooner. The second book, you see, was *The Code of the Woosters*.

Epiphany.

Conversion.

When I say read, I really meant re- and re- and re-read, for I found it was impossible to progress through the book in the customary strictly linear fashion—that is, read page one, turn page, onto page two, and so forth. I kept going over and over what I had just read before venturing forward in the book. I could not believe it! Here was a novel that not only had you laughing out loud on every page but also managed to achieve the same effect with every paragraph. Scratch that—every

sentence! Before long, I was scrounging through used-book stores and every mail-order book catalog I could lay my hands on for further novels by Plum.

The end result is that I now have an entire four-foot-long, three-shelf bookcase in my personal library, dedicated to works by and about The Master. And I am now on my second copy of *The Code of the Woosters*, since I practically wore out my original copy with all the re-readings.

By day I teach grammar school, but in the evenings I crank out plays for the high school and junior high school market. Since 1976, some 50 or so of my titles have seen print. All are comedies, and I am sure there is scarcely one that does not reflect the influence of the great man.

Incidentally, in a later broadcast, Jean Shepherd went on and on about an author whom he would not name, but since he did mention the titles of some of his books, I was quickly able to discern it was Thorne Smith. I went the same route as with Plum’s work, buying up all I could get my hands on. (Unfortunately, Smith died young and his *oeuvre* consists of about 20 or so novels.) I was certainly impressed with Smith’s humor and ahead-of-his time plotting, but I couldn’t help thinking, “Now, if he had only spelled his name with a ‘P’ . . .”

A Few Quick Ones

In July, **Tony Ring** forwarded some information about a New York-based dance theater company called the Wooster Group. Tony speculated that they might have a connection with Wooster Street, where Overlook Press, U.S. publishers of the paperback reissues of PGW books, is based. Investigative reporter **Amy Plofker** followed up this lead and discovered that, according to their website, the Wooster Group started in the 1970s on the selfsame Wooster Street. “Pity,” writes Amy. “I’d have liked to see their interpretation of *Code of the Woosters*, for instance, in rhythmic dance.”

Northwodes member **Richard Streum** tells us that Advanced Book Exchange, a popular online source for used books, recently released a list of their 10 most-searched authors in 2005. At number 7 was our own PGW. To view the full list, go to <http://www.abebooks.com/docs/10-anniversary/powers-10.shtml>.

Letter from England

BY ELIN WOODGER



Yes, yes, I know—you thought I had given up these letters, didn't you? After all, it's been more than a year since the last Letter from England, and it was Kris Fowler, not me, who wrote that one. Speaking of Kris, she was here again earlier this year for what has apparently become an annual dose of campanology. Aside from reading P. G. Wodehouse, nothing makes her happier than pulling on a bell rope, and the best place for that is England, so over she comes for a week or two to ring bells throughout the countryside, not to mention a few in London. In late April Norman and I hooked up with her down in Salisbury, and we three gamboled about the area, eyeballing ancient monoliths and attending evensong at the cathedral, as one does.

It is always jolly good to see Kris and other Wodehousians from abroad who find it worthwhile to pop into the country and see what's happening here. More recently we saw Marilyn McGregor, erstwhile membership secretary of The Wodehouse Society. Ordinarily this wouldn't be news, since Marilyn is *always* coming to London (flying over from Davis, California), and we *always* see her when she's here. But this, dear reader, happened to be a very Special Occasion.

Marilyn, you see, was born on August 1, 1926, and for the past few years she has chosen to be in London for her birthday, inviting a few friends to join her for a private celebration at the Lansdowne Club, where she stays. When Norman and I realized that this year marked the Big 80, well, it was the work of a moment to assume party-planning responsibilities. The result was a bash at the Lansdowne attended by 24 of her close chums (including one who had flown over from Davis for the occasion). Edward Cazalet offered the evening's main toast, a humorous and moving tribute to Marilyn's years of service to The Wodehouse Society in addition to her many other sterling qualities. As Marilyn is also a keen (and renowned) Sherlockian, Catherine Cooke offered another toast: "Confusion to the Pinkertons!" (Don't ask me to explain that one.) Then Tony Ring had Marilyn choose the winners of a *Wooster Sauce* raffle of *Piccadilly Jim* DVDs, and I had the honor of presenting her with a Book of Memories—an album containing personal notes, letter, cards, photos, etc., sent by friends from around the world. All in all a splendid evening, and I have the impression from Marilyn that she rather enjoyed it.

In July there was another celebration of a rather interesting nature when a groom-to-be and his best man kicked off what was to be a week-long stag party by joining Norman's Wodehouse Walk. It was an unusual way to begin one's wedding fun, but entirely appropriate, I suppose, if one is a keen Wodehousian, which apparently was the case for both groom and bride.

By the way, Norman estimates that his July Wodehouse Walk was his 99th (or thereabouts), which means he hits his century this fall. He is now making noises about 100 being enough for anybody and has taken the precaution of typing out the entire Walk so that some other poor mug (watch out, Christine Hewitt!) can take it over in the future. To find out when a Wodehouse Walk is scheduled to take place (hopefully a time when you are in London), see *Wooster Sauce* or the U.K. Society's website (www.eclipse.co.uk/Wodehouse; click on "Future Events").

These two sources, of course, are also where to go for other news on the U.K. Society's doings, including their thrice-yearly evenings at the Savage Club. The most recent gathering, in July, featured Jonathan Cecil, one of the finest readers of Wodehouse books on tape, who wowed the crowd with a number of songs mentioned in the PGW canon. These evenings are always well-attended and a lot of fun.

Meanwhile, the Society's cricket team, the Gold Bats, have been whizzing about the countryside, meeting all comers. Well, not quite, but in addition to their two annual games against Dulwich College's Dusters and the Sherlock Holmes Society of London (the latter played according to 1895 rules), members of the Gold Bats also took part in games at the Charterhouse School (playing against the masters there) and in Kent (playing alongside members of the Siegfried Sassoon Society). These were not official Gold Bats games, mind you—those took place in June, when the results were a tie with the Dusters (a very unusual outcome in cricket) and a draw with the Sherlockians (much more usual—but don't ask me to tell you the difference).

The Gold Bats' games are always fun, and the Dulwich game in particular is worth noting because of two of the players involved. Playing for the Dusters was one A. A. Milne—and, for the Gold Bats, our own Mike Jackson. One can't help but feel that Wodehouse would have appreciated the symmetry!

Rivals of P. G. Wodehouse: H. Allen Smith

BY DAN COHEN

The most popular humor writer in America during World War II was H. Allen Smith. Three of his books, published in 1941, 1943, and 1944, were on the New York *Herald Tribune* best-seller lists for 108 weeks. That's impressive because it was a time when best-seller lists actually meant something.

Of course, the *Herald Tribune* is long gone, and so is H. Allen Smith's reputation. That's not surprising. Most of his work was nonfiction—well, sort of—and very topical. The modern reader would find it dated and sometimes incomprehensible. For example, in *Lost in the Horse Latitudes* he describes being at a party and trying to impress people by his knowledge of world affairs. He says he was “Kaltenborning.” If you know what that means, you were probably born during the Roosevelt administration. Today one might say “RATHERING” or, to be completely up to date, “COURICING.”

Wodehouse included a section from one of Smith's books in *The Weekend Book of Humor* that he and his agent, Scott Meredith, edited in 1952. They called Smith “the screwball's Boswell.” Though Wodehouse and Smith regularly sold their work to the mass market and middlebrow magazines like the *Saturday Evening Post*, and both did time in Hollywood, I have not seen any evidence that they either met or corresponded. Certainly their backgrounds were different. Wodehouse went to an English public school (albeit a minor one). To hear Smith tell the story of his childhood, he barely went to school at all.

Smith was born on December 19, 1907 or 1906 (sources differ), in the southern Illinois town of McLeansboro, Illinois. Of his mother he wrote, “From 1900 on she was turning out Smiths at an alarming rate. . . . Before the current was turned off there were nine children. They all inherit a magnificent sense of responsibility from my father who when he grows weary of life at home drops out of sight for three or four months at a stretch and finally comes home with wondrous tales of adventure.”

The family moved around a lot, and at one point Smith “attended St. Mary's parochial school but thinking back now, I can't recall that I ever learned anything.” His schooling ended in Huntington, Indiana, where he dropped out of high school after two

days in the ninth grade. According to Smith, he was working in a barbershop shining shoes when his sister's boyfriend, a reporter on the local paper, asked him if he wanted a newspaper job. He figured it was better than shining shoes, even if it paid only three bucks a week. He started as a proofreader, became a reporter, and was successful because he wrote funny stuff, even if it wasn't all true. He worked for small-town newspapers all over the Midwest, Southwest and South, but his goal was New York. He got there in 1929, just in time for the stock market crash and the depression:

Within two months of my arrival in New York, the town went to pot. A gadget called ‘the bull market’ reached its peak, and then something happened to it, something far beyond my comprehension, and people began leaping from the windows of Manhattan skyscrapers as if those towers had been functionally designed as springboards for Gehenna.

It was a bad time for New York and the rest of the country, but it was a good time for newspapers. There were loads of them, and Smith's cynical, breezy, mildly risqué humor was what the masses wanted. Mostly he was known for his interviews. “I have interviewed infant

prodigies and old ladies who said they were present when Lincoln was shot . . . naked women and presidential candidates . . . Albert Einstein and a man who professed to see the spirits of the departed in a tub of freshly shucked oysters. . . . It is not an exceptional list. Almost any working New York newspaperman might better it.”

In 1941 Smith's book *Low Man on a Totem Pole* hit the best-seller lists. There was a war on, and Americans were reading H. Allen Smith, not only on the home front but on troop trains and military camps. He now had enough money to quit the daily newspaper grind and work as a freelancer. He wrote magazine articles and radio scripts, and he put in time in Hollywood.

It is Smith's brief career in California that will be of most interest to Wodehouse fans. He signed up with Paramount in 1943, six years after Plum had



H. Allen Smith

left Hollywood. It had not changed. The first thing Smith discovered as a Hollywood writer was that he didn't write anything. He spent his first day filling out forms: "I wrote more that first day than I did during the remainder of the six months, and all I wrote was my name."

Smith had an office in the Writers Building. "I sat alone for a while and then I began to hear yips and snarls coming from other parts of the building. 'Good God!' I thought. 'Can that be the writers at work?'" Later he learned that writers were allowed to bring their dogs to work. Then he discovered that the desk and chairs in his office had been chewed. First he assumed the office had been occupied by a dog-owning writer. "Later on I revised this theory and concluded that the desk and chair had been gnawed by a writer."

Smith's description of director Cecil B. De Mille in action resonates with every reader of Wodehouse's Hollywood stories: "The Master puts on a bigger show than the actors." De Mille would arrive followed by a half dozen of his personal aides. "His eyes were fixed on the scene before him and they stayed there. He took off his hat and tossed it over his shoulder without looking back. A hand came up and snatched it before it traveled two feet. He took off his necktie and cast it into the air behind him. A necktie man grabbed it. Slowly the Master unbuttoned his jacket. . . . He let the jacket slip from his arms but it never came near the ground. A jacket man behind him swept it out of the air as it started to fall. I was surprised then, to see Mr. De Mille roll up his own sleeves."

While working at Paramount, Smith met one old Dulwich boy. Raymond Chandler had an office down the hall. Smith liked Chandler and didn't have anything nasty or very interesting to say about him.

After his brief time in Hollywood, Smith went back to New York, and then, like so many other city dwellers in post-World War II America, he moved to the suburbs, where he began writing funny books and articles about "rural life." He was a genuine celebrity during the 1950s. Not only was he turning out a huge number of articles and books, he appeared regularly on radio and was even a guest on Edward R. Murrow's TV show *Person to Person* in 1959. Smith became a celebrity endorser for Lucky Strike cigarettes. Can you imagine a humor writer today being paid to endorse anything?

But times and tastes change. Many of the newspapers and magazines that had once published his work disappeared, and radio was swamped by television. Smith made a few tries at writing for television, but it never amounted to much. His brand of wise-guy humor simply went out of fashion.

H. Allen Smith had one more brief burst of fame. In 1967 he wrote an article entitled "Nobody Knows More About Chili Than I Do". That got him involved in a highly publicized Chili Cookoff with Texas chili maven Wick Fowler; it ended in a tie. Smith's original chili recipe is available on the Internet (<http://whatscookingamerica.net/Soup/SmithChili.htm>).

Smith kept plugging away at what he called "The Business" until his death in 1976. Today none of his 30 or so books remains in print, but used copies of many of them are readily available. Reading (or in my case rereading) some of them was a pleasant exercise in nostalgia. And if you weren't there, a dose of H. Allen Smith will give you a look at some of what life was like in America way back in the middle of the last century.

A New Way to Pay Your Dues

BY JEAN TILLSON

While you were off shrimping at Herne Bay or trying on white mess jackets in the South of France, your TWS officers have been working their fingers to the bone arranging a way to make it easier for you to pay your membership dues. And, at last, they believe they have achieved success! The Wodehouse Society now has a PayPal account and can therefore accept online payments via that service. Instructions and the appropriate PayPal button have been added to www.wodehouse.org/tws, and we encourage you to take advantage of this new capability. In addition to general ease of use, we are hopeful that this payment option will increase our international membership since our friends outside the United States will no longer have to go to all the fuss and bother of remitting their dues in U.S. funds.

Benjamin Disraeli, Richard Wagner, and P. G. Wodehouse

Contributed by Joel J. Brattin

In the July 3, 2006 issue of *The New Yorker*, Adam Gopnik reviews recent books about the Prime Minister and Victorian novelist Benjamin Disraeli (1804–81), noting that "Disraeli's English history was, in any event, partly fantasy—a bedtime story served up for his none too bright young acolytes, a kind of 'Ring' cycle designed for Bertie Wooster."

“What’s Going On Out There?”

BY JOHN HAYWARD

John, a British expatriate living in Los Angeles who is also a member of the Hollywood Cricket Club, spoke on PGW and the HCC at the Hooray for Hollywood! convention in August 2005. He has kindly provided this explanation of the game for those of us who don't know our wickets from our bowls.

The game of cricket is played between two teams, each with eleven players. The captains toss a coin, the winner having the choice of his team batting or fielding first. During the game, two players are always at bat at the same time, one at each wicket. A wicket comprises three wooden stumps about three feet tall which have two wooden dowels (known as bails) positioned in slight depressions at the top of the stumps. The batsman (batter) facing the bowler must stand between two lines called the batting and bowling creases (the batter's box in baseball). But, unlike baseball, he may step out of this area to hit the ball, if he wishes.

The bowler (pitcher in baseball) runs up to the bowling crease of one wicket and bowls the ball at the other wicket. Bowling differs from pitching in that the ball must be delivered with a straight arm and not thrown. The bowler's objective is to hit the opposite wicket with the ball and, in so doing, dislodge the bails, or cause the batsman to offer a catch by hitting the ball in the air (pop fly). To achieve either of these (to put the batsman out), bowlers use various speeds and strategies, usually by causing the ball to bounce off the

ground.

At the same time, the batsman is using his bat to defend his wicket and to hit the ball to score runs. A run is scored when a batsman hits the ball far enough that he and the other batsman can exchange places before a fielder can throw the ball in to the wicket. If the ball is hit to the boundary of the playing field and crosses this line without touching the ground (home run) it is signaled by the umpire that the batsman has scored six runs and neither batsman has to run. Should the ball be hit across the boundary along the ground, it counts as four runs.

Cricket has no foul areas and two umpires (sometimes in professional matches a third umpire may be a camera), and the leather ball must weigh not less than 5½ ounces nor more than 5¾ ounces. The 22-yards-long area between the wickets should be likened to a lawn-bowling grass surface. The duration of a cricket match usually depends on the regulations of the local authority, and it can be won, lost, drawn, or tied. [Editor's note: A tie, when two teams score exactly the same number of runs, is a rare occurrence.]

This short description does not attempt to explain the intricacies of the game, but rather to indicate what's going on out there! Cricket is the grandfather of baseball, anyway. In fact, three cricketers are in the Hall of Fame at Cooperstown, New York. They are Harry and George Wright and a Mr. Chadwick (one of the earliest baseball writers and a great cricket journalist of the 18th century).

Wikiing the Time Away

Stephen Brown found this item in an article by Stacy Shiff in The New Yorker, July 31, 2006.

Wikipedia may be the world's most ambitious vanity press. There are two hundred thousand registered users on the English-language site, of whom about thirty-three hundred—fewer than two per cent—are responsible for seventy per cent of the work. The site allows you to compare contributors by the number of edits they have made, by the number of articles that have been judged by community vote to be outstanding (these “featured” articles often appear on the site's home page), and by hourly activity, in graph form. A seventeen-year-old P. G. Wodehouse fan who specializes in British peerages leads the featured-article pack, with fifty-eight entries.

Wodehouse Wiki

A wiki is an online encyclopedia to which anybody can contribute articles; one can also edit existing articles. Recently **Nathan Filizzi** announced on PGWnet that he had set up a wiki devoted to P. G. Wodehouse—see http://wodehouse.wikia.com/wiki/Main_Page. Nathan encourages his fellow PGW fans to “rally around and help with adding content and such.” However, as “Aunt Agatha” noted on PGWnet, this may be the equivalent of carrying coals to Newcastle, since Wikipedia already has entries devoted to Wodehouse—see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/P._G._Wodehouse. Whichever site you use, do try and contribute to this expanding online Wodehouse scholarship!

Capital! Capital! Poetry

The inimitable Joan Roberts was crowned the Capital! Capital! Poet Laureate and won the Anglers' Rest Prize for this wonderful poem.

Takeover

My kitchen's invaded—yes it is,
with things that crackle, pop, and fizz.

I see on every rack and shelf
provisions I never bought myself.

There's cold champagne, I kid you not,
with quickening spirits by the bot.
I swear before my lord and maker
I can't explain that cocktail shaker.

The yogurt's gone, and so's the brie
but now there's tons of eggs and b.
My Lipton's vanished and left me reeling
to find Earl Grey and best Darjeeling.

Look at those warmers and tongs and trays.
They're foreign to my domestic ways.
I'll claim the teapot, but you're a dreamer,
if you think I paid for that cow creamer!

You can doubt and debunk, without abstention;
you can prove there isn't a hidden dimension.
But the evidence shows, beyond surmise,
that Jeeves dropped in to Woosterize.

Googling Wodehouse's Earth

BY HETTY LITJENS

The Wodehouse tour project takes advantage of the latest developments of the Internet, though it is still a "work under construction." Google Earth allows us to visit the places where Wodehouse lived and lets us discover the places we know from *In Search of Blandings*, the places that inspired Wodehouse for the settings of his characters. We can see that quite often these sites he described in his novels are situated close to sites he frequented in his life. Though Wodehouse himself did not fancy flying, in the tour we can now skim over London and New York, from Bertie's place to the Drones Club, from Hunstanton Hall to Skegness. It's so bracing. The internet link to the the Wodehouse Tour Placemark can be found here: <http://bbs.keyhole.com/ubb/download.php?Number=571160>. You will want to install Google Earth first (go to <http://earth.google.com>), then download the tour.

In Defense of Jonathan Ames

BY PETER CANNON

After reading the two dismissive notices of Jonathan Ames's Wodehouse-inspired novel, *Wake Up, Sir!*, in the Winter 2004 issue of *Plum Lines*, I was in no hurry to try what sounded like a travesty. When I finally did read *Wake Up, Sir!*, I was pleasantly surprised (as an Anthony Powell fan, I was delighted to find the narrator reading *A Dance to the Music of Time*), and later took the opportunity to hear Ames speak at Manhattan's New York Society Library.

Ames opened the program by reading from an earlier novel, *The Extra Man*, whose young gentleman narrator, Louis Ives, counts Wodehouse as a favorite (along with F. Scott Fitzgerald and the British TV sitcom *Are You Being Served?*), and then from *Wake Up, Sir!* He gave fair warning of their bawdy content. Extracts from both books drew laughs from the audience of 30 or so polite, well-heeled listeners.

When asked during question time about any possible conflict with the Wodehouse estate, Ames admitted that his provisional title for *Wake Up, Sir!* was *Home, Jeeves*. His publisher's lawyers persuaded him to change it. When the lawyers also advised clearly distinguishing the character called Jeeves in his book from Wodehouse's Jeeves, Ames added a passage that highlights the differences. For example, he said, the original Jeeves likes to fish in his spare time, whereas his Jeeves has no hobbies. (Of course, we know he meant shrimping.)

Ames pointed out that the novel's loose, episodic structure owes a lot to another literary influence, *Don Quixote* (also evoked in *The Extra Man*). Like the addled Spaniard who, after reading too many romances, fancies himself a chivalrous knight, so Ames's hapless hero, Alan Blair, imagines he's Bertie Wooster after immersing himself in Wodehouse. If Ames's Jeeves has only a limited role in the action, particularly during the second half set at a writer's colony, it's because there's a strong suggestion that he exists only in Alan's imagination. No other character in *Wake Up, Sir!* sees or converses with Jeeves.

In contrast to Wodehouse, Ames writes dark comedy. In Wodehouse's world, drunkenness is funny. In *Wake Up, Sir!* the hero's drinking leads to big trouble. Ames has in effect done with Bertie what George Bernard Shaw did with Sherlock Holmes when the playwright created Professor Higgins—shown what such an impossible character would be like if he existed in the real world. If this is a send-up, it's also an act

of homage. Ames admitted that once during a period of depression, reading Wodehouse cheered him up considerably.

Ames concluded the evening's entertainment by passing out "business" cards, one each for Louis Ives and Henry Harrison (another character in *The Extra Man*), and by delivering at the top of his lungs the "Hairy call," which put me in mind of Pig-hoo-o-o-o-ey! (For more on the "Hairy call," go to www.jonathanames.com.) Ames may strike some as an odd fellow, the type you might not want to invite to your club, but he is a serious literary author whose work many, if certainly not all, TWS members would find amusing.

Crimewave!

BY LESLIE STEM

This script arrived too late for consideration in last summer's Great Wodehouse Movie Pitch Challenge, but as Leslie writes: "Sometimes when I have a great but unformed idea, I put it on the back burner of my mind to percolate, and soon there it is, bright and sparkling, ready to be transcribed. At other times it is like a body, weighted down with stones at the bottom of the lake, and there is no telling when it may emerge from the depths. The following is the result of the latter process."

CRIMEWAVE!

Directed by Peter Jackson

OPENING SCENE

The camera soars and swoops over the glittering peaks and dense forests of the land of *Shropshire* (New Zealand), past quaint villages and a puffing steam-engine, until, with a crash of cymbals and trumpets, the menacing turrets and ominous windows of *Blandings Castle* arise from a mist-shrouded lake, encircled by phantasmagoric gardens. Below us, we see a little figure on a motorbike. It is our hero, *Baxter* (Andy Serkis). His magic spectacles, which enable him to see another's evil purposes, seem to shine with a light of their own. Ahead, peering balefully from a tower window, is the Master of *Blandings Castle*, *Lord Emsworth* (Ian McKellen).

INTERIOR: CASTLE TOWER

Beside Lord Emsworth is his deceptively young and innocent-looking minion, *George* (Elijah Wood). In George's hands is a strange weapon. He is fiddling with some dials on it.

Emsworth Ah, he is come, as has been foretold! How far away would you say he is, young George?

George (squinting) No more than thirty ells, my Lord Emsworth. Shall I shoot him now?

Emsworth Nay! Stay thy hand. The Empress must be informed. We must seek her will in this matter.

INTERIOR: DEEP BELOW THE CASTLE

The Empress (Frank Oz) is a monstrous pig, ancient and cruel, who lies in the bowels of the castle, plotting world conquest, emerging only at night to gorge herself on the unwary peasantry.

INTERIOR: LADY CONSTANCE'S SOLAR

Meanwhile, *Lady Constance* (Cate Blanchett) is in her solar with her niece *Jane* (Liv Tyler). Jane has just told her of a strange young man she met out in the woods, *Sir George* (Orlando Bloom).

Jane But Sir George is a fair and well-spoken young knight, Aunt Constance! And he says a lot of the timber wants seeing to, *badly!*

Lady C. I have heard no good report of this Knight of the Scarlet Cumberbund! You are to be betrothed to Sir Roegate!

Pauses. Enter Beach (John Rhys-Davies).

Lady C Yes, Beach, what is it?

Beach Mr. Baxter has arrived, your ladyship.

Lady C (gasps) Mr. Baxter! Jane, we are saved!

Will Baxter be able to save them? Armed only with his magic spectacles, will he discover the secret flowerpot and defeat the evil Lord Emsworth and his menacing airgun? Will Jane find true love? And what of that darker evil—

THE EMPRESS?!



The answer to David McDonough's PGWnet question on page 7: In both books, a main character does a stretch in the pokey.



Chapters Corner

CONDUCTED BY SUSAN COHEN



It's fun being with other fans, and it's fun reading about what other fans are doing. So please use this column to tell the world—the Wodehouse world, that is—about your chapter's activities, zany and otherwise. Representatives of chapters, please send all info to me, Rosie M. Banks, otherwise known as Susan Cohen (see Chapter One below). Anyone reading this who is not a member of a local chapter but would like to attend a meeting or become a member can get in touch with the contact person listed.

Good news! A new chapter has been formed in Oregon. See the Portland Wodehouse Society for details.

Anglers' Rest

(Seattle and vicinity)

Contact: Susan Collicott



Phone:

Email:

The Anglers' Rest meets every other month (aside from holiday madness months when all bets are off) at various locales in the Puget Sound area. Much discussion of any topic in any way associated with Wodehouse takes place—and then everything else, too. We attend local arts events and try new restaurants, pubs, and teahouses. We read passages from favorite Wodehouse books out loud; trade interesting Wodehouse-related items; and lend books, tapes, CDs and DVDs to one another with abandon. Join us for a relaxing or invigorating time with folks of like mind and attitude.

Blandings Castle Chapter

(Greater San Francisco Bay area)

Contact: Ed and Missy Ratcliffe



Phone:

Email:

The Broadway Special

(New York City and vicinity)

Contact: Amy Plofker



Email:

The Broadway Special's June 9 meeting at the Players Club was small but select, which means we had a lively, well-focused conversation. Before discussing several Mulliner stories, however, we broke with tradition and discussed chapter business first: the election of new officers, daring plans for future meetings, possible philanthropic activities, and ways to help with the Providence convention. Exhausted by this unaccustomed effort, we gratefully returned to the works of the Master. The highlight of the evening was Evelyn Herzog's warbling of "Hard Hearted Hannah, the Vamp of Savannah," and it was agreed that George (he of "The Truth about George") Mulliner was right. It was definitely not the song to sing when offering a cup of tea to a terrified woman on a train.

We couldn't get the Players Club for our September 8 meeting, but the Salmagundi Club is kindly providing us with space instead. The Salmagundi is at 47 5th Avenue; that's between 11th and 12th Streets. Meeting time: 6:00–8:30 P.M. We will discuss *The Luck of the Bodkins*, British edition preferred. The American edition as originally published was somewhat shorter than the British edition and lacked some of the best parts. But you'll be all right as long as your copy begins with the truly immortal line: "Into the face of the young man who sat on the terrace of the Hotel Magnifique at Cannes there had crept a look of furtive shame, the shifty, hangdog look which announces that an Englishman is about to talk French." Miss Postlethwaite tells us that the bar at the Salmagundi opens at 5:00 P.M., and dinner is available from 5:30 on. In addition to discussing *The Luck of the Bodkins* at the September meeting, we will finalize our plans for celebrating Plum's birthday on the afternoon of Saturday, October 21. We will honor the Master with a Meal of Some Sort, and the birthday event may very well include other activities. On Friday, December 1, the Broadway Special will meet at the Players Club, from 6:30 to 8:30 P.M.

Buck-U-Uppo Bottling Company

(Seaside, Oregon, and vicinity)

Contact: Sandy Rea



Phone:

Email:

Capital! Capital!

(Washington, D.C., and vicinity)

Contact: Jeff Peterson



Phone:

Email:

During the summer Capital! Capital! rested after hosting the TWS East Coast Binge in late April. But now, tanned, rested, and, as sayeth that other writer, fit for “treasons, strategems and spoils,” the chapter is about to kick off its fall activities. On September 8 we will meet at the Pickford Theater of the National Library of Congress for a showing of the 1937 RKO film *A Damsel in Distress*, based on the Wodehouse novel of the same name. The movie stars Fred Astaire, George Burns, Gracie Allen, and Joan Fontaine. Chapter member Brian Taves will be on hand that night to sign copies of his newly released book *P. G. Wodehouse and Hollywood: Screenwriting, Satires, and Adaptations*. (See page 7.) And later in the fall Capital! Capital! member Anne Stone will do a presentation that is described as “on the nexus of Wodehousian characters and children.” On this topic one’s recollections are drawn to some writer or other who asked: “Are there no workhouses? Are there no prisons?”

Capital F.O.R.M.

(Friends Of Ralston McTodd—Ottawa and vicinity)

Contact: Megan Carton



Phone:

Email:

Chapter One

(Greater Philadelphia area)

Contact: Susan Cohen

Phone:

Fax:

Email:



Chapter One meets on a Sunday afternoon once every two months except in the summer. Place: The Dark Horse Pub, Headhouse Square, Philadelphia. Time: 1:00 P.M. New members and visiting Wodehousians are always welcome. At our May 21 meeting the news went round the room that loyal TWS and Chapter One member Debbie Bellew (she who won a major

prize at the Hollywood convention), wife of TWS member Douglas Bellew, was going to have a baby boy. Cheers followed and much clapping of hands, not to mention innumerable kudos and playing of kazoos. We suggested names for the baby: Pongo, Gussie, Bingo, Edwin, and Clarence (after Clarence Chugwater). No one suggested Pelham. Many comic articles were distributed at the meeting, most sent by John Baesch, who gets the English newspapers. The articles got lots of laughs, as did one American write-up courtesy of Murray Wilson, headline reading: “Rogue Aunt Loots Grandparents’ House while Family is Away.” Rogue aunts are worse than rogue elephants. The meeting progressed; the usual chatting and gabbing went on. Several literary topics were covered. The Flashman series. The life and times of Joe Keenan, author of *Lucky Star*. And writer Terry Pratchett.

It was now time for crime. With their usual aplomb, David and Karen Ruef presented us with a Mystery Quiz to solve. But the Chaps were ready for them. Armed with guns, masks, bottles of poison (so to speak), a can of soup in honor of safecracker Soup Slattery, and even truncheons and badges for the law-abiding, the Chaps attacked the “Wodehouse Criminals and their Crimes” quiz. It was fiendishly tough. We hapless victims of the Ruefs had to figure out who, or is that whom, in the master’s works committed which, or is that what, crime. Attempts to steal the answer sheet failed, and all we could do was persevere. The winning team of John Graham, Susan Cohen, Hal Lynch, and Maurine Dooley received prizes of chocolate doubloons wrapped in gold, which were eaten at once, proving that the Empress of Blandings is not the only pig in the Wodehouse world. Our next meeting will be September 24, when the Ruefs, now drunk with success, will bring a pig catapult game to the meeting. How the restaurant will react to pigs flying through the air when we aren’t even allowed to throw bread is more than I can fathom.

I am happy to report that Chapter One member Herb Moskovitz recently visited Gussie, our adopted newt at the Philadelphia Zoo, and Gussie is doing extremely well. The sign on the side of the newt tank saying “This exhibit sponsored by the P. G. Wodehouse Society” is still there after 10 long years.

The Chicago Accident Syndicate

(Chicago and thereabouts)

Contact: Daniel & Tina Garrison



Phone:

Email:

Our chapter holds bimonthly meetings with a wide range of activities. Sometimes members of the Syndicate meet in each other's homes to enjoy a potluck supper and read Wodehouse. Sometimes we meet in an Irish pub where there's good browsing and sluicing. We enjoy theater outings followed by dinner at a restaurant, and every time City Lit does a Wodehouse production, we are in the audience. We go to the Chicago Botanical Gardens to stroll through the English garden there, while reading excerpts from Wodehouse. We play miniature golf together and have one grand croquet game every year.

The Clients of Adrian Mulliner

(For enthusiasts of both PGW and Sherlock Holmes)
Contact: Marilyn MacGregor



Phone:

Senior Bloodstains are held at Wodehouse Society conventions. Junior Bloodstains are held every January, part of the big annual Sherlock Holmes celebration in New York. The meetings are always great fun. One does not have to be a Client to attend; anyone interested in both Holmes and Wodehouse is welcome. Our next gathering will be next January; till then, we hibernate.

The Drone Rangers

(Houston and vicinity)
Contact: Toni Rudersdorf
Phone:
Email:



We meet every month, alternating the meetings so that one month we dine out together and the next month we hold a book meeting. At the book meetings, which take place at Barnes & Noble on Westheimer at Voss, we have two reports. One is about the book of the evening, the other is about "something Wodehouse." We browse and sluice at dinner meetings and share views. In June we met at the Raven Grill for dinner. It's a particularly pleasant restaurant for Wodehousians because the owners are Wodehouse fans and allow the Drone Rangers to have separate checks, even on Saturday nights.

We went to the Alley Theater to see *Witness for the Prosecution*. The play was so chilling only chocolate

would sooth our jangling nerves. Thank goodness the Chocolate Bar was open. Various yummys strengthened us and gave us the will to carry on. At our July book meeting, Toni presented an abbreviated version of Elliott Milstein's talk on Ukridge, which Elliott gave at the Philadelphia convention. The book of the month was *Hot Water*, with Cathy Smith giving a delightful talk on the subject. At a later meeting we had dinner at Mingalones, then went to see *Black Comedy* by Peter Shaffer. Dessert at Raindrop Chocolate rounded out the evening. We planned to discuss *Cocktail Time* at our August book meeting, ready to have our top hats knocked off by wise guys with Brazil nuts and slingshots. It is the favorite of all who like ghosting books for others, allowing them to become rich.

On September 30 at 7:00 P.M. we will eat at Prima Pasta on Kirby. The big news is that we are about to resurrect our newsletter *DroneStar*. It will be written and edited by Rebecca Joiner and Bill Mitchell. If you would like to receive *DroneStar*, let Toni know. The cost is \$15 a year, and that includes membership in the Drone Rangers.

The Flying Pigs

(Cincinnati area and elsewhere)
Contact: Susan Brokaw



Phone:

Email:

The Mottled Oyster Club / Jellied Eels

(San Antonio and South Texas)
Contact: James P. Robinson III



Phone:

Email:

The San Antonio chapter of TWS continues to meet monthly on the second Thursday of each month (except when we don't). We have a split personality: March, May, July, September, and November find the Jellied Eels assembling at a local eatery-slash-watering hole, which we work mightily to tie in with PGW or his works in sometimes very obscure ways, while in April and every other month thereafter we gather as the Mottled Oyster at Barnes and Noble. We have lots of lighthearted fun together and would love to add to our roster.

The New England Wodehouse Thingummy Society
(NEWTS – Boston and elsewhere in New England)

Contact: Anne Cotton, president

Phone:
Email:



The NEWTS had a lovely gathering on August 3 at the home of the Ravi family in Bedford, Mass. We began with a rehearsal of our skit for the next TWS convention in Providence, Rhode Island, in 2007; casting is now just about final. We then had the briefest business meeting in the annals of the chapter, followed by our usual intensive feasting and drinking. We are planning a bash on October 21 to be held at the Publick House in Sturbridge. Not only is the Old Sturbridge Village open (it's a living, working museum of life and culture in the early 19th century), but there will be a Harvest Festival that weekend, with a scarecrow contest's exhibits on the lawn of the inn where we'll meet and lunch. We may (or may not) hold another rehearsal; we may (or may not) read a Wodehouse story; we will for sure chat our heads off and dine very well. Needless to say, all prayers for good weather that day are welcome. Our traditional Christmas bash will be held at the Swansons' clubhouse, as usual, on Saturday, December 9. We'll have our traditional gift exchange, feasting, and revelry of one sort or another.

The Northwodes

(St. Paul, Minneapolis, and vicinity)

Contact: Kristine Fowler

Phone:
Email:



We spent the hottest afternoon of the summer in a cool suburban villa (Comrade Sveum's, to be exact) plotting various plots, of which the world will be hearing in due course. One project has moved to the implementation stage: We are turning out our pockets to help the Hennepin County Library acquire more Wodehouse books. HCL is the third library system we've targeted in our annual campaign to spread the good word.

On the purely frivolous side, a small subset of Northwodes attended a charming production of *HMS Pinafore* at the Theatre in the Round on August 11; we knew that Wodehouse was a Gilbert & Sullivan

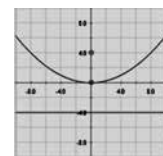
fan for good reason—and so were his sisters and his cousins and his aunts! We look forward to mustering our numbers for the traditional Birthday Toast to the Master on, as will not be surprising, October 15.

The Pale Parabolites

(Toronto and vicinity)

Contact: Peter M. Nixon

Email:



The Toronto chapter will hold a social gathering this fall when it will collectively gather around the TV to watch old Bertie and Jeeves videos. The group did not meet over the summer because life was extremely hectic in the Nixon household, thanks to the birth of Charles (Charlie) Peter Nixon on June 16. He weighed in at 6 lbs, 14 oz. The baby is thriving. His father is thriving. His mother Libby is thriving. Peter can't wait to read Charlie Wodehouse sleepy-time stories. [*Congratulations from TWS to Peter, Libby, and future PGW fan Charlie!*]

The Pelikan Club

(Kansas City and vicinity)

Contact: Sallie Hobbs

Email:



The Perfecto-Zizzbaum Motion Picture Corporation

(Los Angeles and vicinity)

Contact: Melissa D. Aaron

Phone:

Email:



We meet the second Sunday of every month at 12:30 at Vroman's Bookstore, 695 E. Colorado, Pasadena. The readings change every month and can be found by checking our calendar or subscribing to our mailing list; we promise that it's very low traffic. NB to Plummies in Southern California, whether domiciled or just passing through—come up and see us. We also occasionally attend events of interest, such as the Avalon Ball on Catalina Island; an Art Deco dance in the fabulous Casino; and the Lanterman House Tea, a ragtime-era event. We go to ukulele festivals, silent movies, etc. Subscribers to our email list can be kept abreast of such local amusements. Information about our mailing list and important links can be found at our website: www.lahacal.org/wodehouse.

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



Phone:
Email:

The Portland Wodehouse Society
(Portland, Oregon, and vicinity)
Contact: Ray Steen



Email:

Attention, Portland, Oregon, Wodehouse fans! Carol James and Ray Steen are forming a new TWS chapter. The first meeting of the new chapter will be held at 2 P.M. on Sunday, October 1, at Annie Bloom's Books, 7834 SW Capitol Hwy, Portland. To put it another way: Annie Bloom's is in Multnomah Village, which is at the intersection of SW Capitol Hwy and SW Multnomah Blvd. The bookstore has generously offered the use of this room to TWS on a regular basis. Portland formerly had a chapter called The Wuckoos of the Palace. All ex-members of this ex-group are invited to join the new chapter, as are all other TWS members who live in the area. For now the new chapter is calling itself The Portland Wodehouse Society, a good, plain, rugged name that says it all. Carol and Ray urge everybody to troll through recent Chapter Corner write-ups in search of good ideas and interesting activities.

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



The Soup & Fish Club
(Northern Virginia area)
Contact: Deborah Dillard



Phone:
Email:

The noble aim of the Soup and Fish Club is to bring the joy of Wodehouse to the younger generation. The chapter's head and sole member, Deborah Dillard,

aka Mary Kent, visits school librarians to talk them into letting her give presentations on the Master's great works to their students, and she occasionally tackles other projects to spread the word about Wodehouse.

Class Warfare

BY DAN COHEN

Recently it seems there have been some attempts to redefine or modernize the roles of Bertie and Jeeves. The conservative *New York Times* columnist David Brooks recently wrote about how middle-class and upper-class values had changed. An increasingly large percentage of the middle class, Brooks writes, are "living off home-equity loans and disability payments." They don't do any work, and don't feel one bit guilty about it. The superrich, on the other hand are now gripped by "the grinding work ethic of the immigrant." Their lives are "marked by sleep deprivation and conference calls."

Says Brooks, "If P. G. Wodehouse were writing today, Bertie Wooster would be at Goldman Sachs and Jeeves would be judging a meth mouth contest at Sturgis."

In the *Atlantic Monthly*, Sheelah Kolhatker describes the growth of schools devoted to training professionals to serve the super rich. One of the graduates of these schools, a retired air force lieutenant colonel, has just been hired by a billionaire businessman at a salary of \$125,000 a year. His role, the author says, "goes far beyond that of the classic butler or personal assistant—picture Jeeves crossed with the C.E.O. of a Fortune 500 company. It usually involves overseeing multiple residences."

Personally I prefer the world that Wodehouse created for us. Why don't we just leave it alone?

Murphy on the Horizon

The offices of the well-known publisher Popgood & Groolley (yes, that's the spelling) informs us that Norman Murphy is now putting the finishing touches on his ultimate Wodehouse book, the product of some 25 years of research and writing. An extension of *In Search of Blandings*, it will be published in two volumes and should, he hopes, be out before the end of the year—hinting at the possibility of Wodehousian Christmas gifts. Full details will be published in the December *Plum Lines*. For advance information, write to Elin Woodger Murphy.

Hands Across the Sea

The multitalented **Hal Cazalet** continues to do his great-grandfather proud. In May Hal appeared with other singers in “Hands Across the Sea” at Merkin Concert Hall in New York City. This concert featured songs of the 1920s and 30s from musicals mounted by Kern, Gershwin, and others in London, and by Coward and Novello in New York. A post-concert review noted: “As the great grandson of P. G. Wodehouse, Hal Cazalet provided divine interpretations of the lyrics of that celebrated wit. A highlight was his solo work on ‘There Isn’t One Girl’ (*Sitting Pretty*, 1924), a Wodehouse/Jerome Kern number where a man fears he will never find a woman willing to marry him. (‘For all the punch that Mr. Mendelssohn has / He might as well have written nothing but jazz.’)”

Volunteer Officers

President of The Wodehouse Society:
Jean Tillson

Membership Secretary (new members, info changes):
Amy Plofker

<http://www.wodehouse.org/inquiry/>

Treasurer (dues payments):
Kris Fowler

Editor Emeritus: Ed Ratcliffe

Executive Editor: Elin Woodger

Editor in Chief:
Dan Cohen

Layout and Article Contributions
Gary Hall and Linda Adam-Hall

Final Proofreading & Technical Assistance, Printer/
Mailer Liaison, Rosters, Dues Sheets: Neil Midkiff

Website address: www.wodehouse.org
Website Development & Maintenance:
Shamim Mohamed, AKA Pongo

Where to submit articles:

My First Time and *Rivals of Wodehouse*: Dan Cohen
Chapters Corner: Susan Cohen (same address as Dan)
All other submissions: Gary Hall

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- 19 Chapters Corner
- 23 Class Warfare
- 23 Murphy on the Horizon
- 24 Hands Across the Sea

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