



Plum Lines

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Wodehouse's Best Novel BY ELLIOTT MILSTEIN

Here is Elliott's delightful presentation from the recent TWS convention in San Diego. We expect there may be some debate over Elliott's choice, but there will be no debate over the fact that he's given a brilliant paper about the topic with his usual awesome humor.

SAVING TIME by getting quickly off the mark, I will state up front that P. G. Wodehouse's greatest novel is *Leave It to Psmith*. I begin with that big, bold, bald statement because I know there will be some pushback, and I think we need to deal with it at the outset so you can approach this project with an open mind.

The first objection is likely to be that this picking of "bests" is rather a mug's game. I mean, who can really say what is Shakespeare's best play, or Mozart's best symphony, or Stanley Kubrick's best film, or even my grandson's best drawing? Surely this is completely subjective. While there is much subjectivity involved, we do, nevertheless, have established, historical, aesthetic models with which we can objectively consider these things. And while the game may seem pointless, it can, like inventing counterfactual history, point up facets that do not illuminate as well in a straightforward analysis. Besides, it's rather fun.

Just to show you how fearlessly decisive I can be in these matters, the other "bests" are, in order: *Hamlet*, Symphony no. 40, *A Clockwork Orange*, and the one with the green squiggly lines and big red dot.

The next objection, which I am certain more than one of you are itching to shout out,

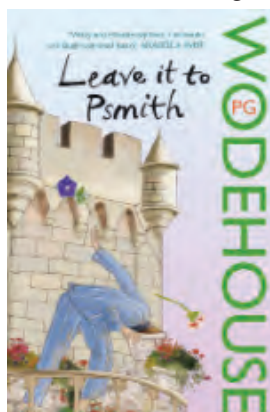


is, "What? Not a Jeeves novel?!" My answer to that is, "Yes, not a Jeeves novel."

Without question, Jeeves and Wooster are Wodehouse's best known and most loved creations, but if one looks at the novels of that saga critically, one can see that their popularity is not because they are better written than his third-person novels, but rather because they contain more chuckles, laughs, and guffaws per page. But just as a great *Saturday Night*

Live sketch or classic *Seinfeld* episode may be funnier than, say, "The Night the Bed Fell" or "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County," clearly the Thurber and Twain stories are superior literature.

The structuralist model I used for evaluating Wodehouse's novels in my 1976 essay "The Growth of Sweetness and Light" was inspired by E. M. Forster's *Aspects of the Novel*. Taking a line from Aristotle's six parts of tragedy—Plot, Character, Thought, Diction, Melody, and Spectacle—Forster



lists his six parts (or “aspects,” as he called them) as Story, People, Plot, Fantasy, Prophecy, and Pattern & Rhythm. I found some of those aspects a bit fanciful and, with the gentle and brilliant guidance of my thesis advisor, the great J. M. Cameron, we came up with Plot, Character, Structure, Setting, Patterns, and Language. I realize that this method of evaluation is a little dated by today’s standards, but I see no reason to abandon a model which served me so well in my infancy.

A full analysis of all six aspects—and how *Leave It to Psmith* excels in each above all of Wodehouse’s other novels—would take more space than is allotted here. Fortunately, it is quite unnecessary. For at least three of these aspects, Wodehouse excels rather uniformly throughout his career and, indeed, there are easily a dozen or more of his approximately seventy novels that rival *Psmith* for such excellence. Stephen Fry says that “Wodehouse’s three great achievements are Plot, Character, and Language,” so, again saving time, we can quickly dispense with the aspects of Structure, Patterns, and Setting with a brief examination of each, and then proceed in detail to the three proffered by Mr. Fry.

After 1920, Wodehouse utilized the three-act structure for most of his novels, and the best of them adhere most closely to that structure. *Leave It to Psmith* does. (That was easy!) As for patterns, it is this novel that is the patternmaker for Wodehouse World, with the first major repetition of characters—we’re talking novels here, not short stories—and the first to combine two sagas. Of course, his patterns become more interesting and complex in the late period, but only because he had such a large body of work prior to 1945 to draw upon.

Regarding setting, this return engagement to Blandings Castle sets Wodehouse firmly on the road to being one of the premier practitioners of the country house novel genre, and the variety and descriptions of settings in *Psmith* are rarely equaled and never eclipsed. Wodehouse has 24 different settings at Blandings Castle alone—ten of which are described in detail—along with twelve in London and two in Market Blandings. This panoramic approach is a carryover from the early period. Through the middle and late periods, he slowly reduced the number of locales, and while he continued to have many and diverse settings, he never again created a novel this expansive.

Now we can turn our attention to the “Fry trio.” He is quite right in zeroing in on these three as Wodehouse’s great achievements, for it is in them that Wodehouse truly sets himself apart from the throng and joins the likes of Jane Austen, George Eliot, and Charles Dickens. And it is also in them that he excelled beyond his customary brilliance in *Leave It to Psmith*.

The basic plot of this second Blandings Castle novel is essentially the same as that of his first, *Something Fresh*, and it draws much from his other previous country house novel, *A Damsel in Distress*, but with the flaws of the two earlier books fixed, and with new structures and complexities added. Indeed, in *Leave It to Psmith*, he devised one of his most intricate plots, with several intersecting threads. The first thread is the story of the necklace and how its theft will alleviate the problems of Mike and Phyllis Jackson. The second is Psmith’s quest for a purpose in his life. The third is the competition for the love of Eve Halliday. The fourth is Rupert Baxter’s ambition to maintain and extend his control and influence at Blandings. While many of his other novels have equally complicated plots, very few have this level of complexity in how deftly he weaves all the threads together, so that virtually every event in the book advances at least two—and frequently more—of these storylines.

Psmith’s imposture of Ralston McTodd, the backbone of the plot, impacts all four storylines. Begun on a whim when he is at the nadir of his search for purpose, it brings him to Eve, whose love he works to win. Once at Blandings, his imposture becomes central to the theft of the necklace, as well as the downfall of Baxter.

The story of the necklace, the novel’s MacGuffin, is particularly complex. Wodehouse has three separate teams going after it—the Freddie/Psmith partnership; the Eve/Joe Keeble alliance; and the Peavey/Cootes gang—each in competition with the others, in some cases without any knowledge of the others’ existence. What makes this particularly clever is that Baxter, aware that the necklace is in danger, theorizes a syndicate consisting of Psmith, Eve, and Cootes; in other words, one from each of the actual groups trying to steal the necklace. And, while Baxter gets things hopelessly muddled up—thus facilitating his downfall—the necklace is, in fact, stolen (with a teensy bit of help from Miss Peavey) by Psmith, Eve, and Cootes—though not exactly working together. It’s really quite ingenious and is far superior to the MacGuffin storyline in any of Wodehouse’s other novels.

We know that Wodehouse’s original ending was different, but we must judge a work of art by its finished form, and the final version of this novel is unique in that the denouement resolves all four threads at once. This is a remarkably difficult thing to do, as evidenced by its rarity in literature. In Wodehouse’s other novels, the main romance is resolved separately from the MacGuffin, but here everything is completed in the gamekeeper’s cottage as Psmith and Eve walk into

the night, the necklace is safe, Psmith's quest is over, Eve's heart is won, and Baxter is kaput. The only other resolutions in Wodehouse novels that happen so neatly are accomplished by *dei ex machina*, such as Jeeves or Uncle Fred. This one ends organically and naturally. The plot is perfection itself.

Well, close to perfection. I must, in fairness, point out the one flaw in the novel's plot, which is the character of the detective Susan. She has one small plot point; then, after vowing to catch the crooks, she disappears. But other than this tiny loose thread, the plot of *Leave It to Psmith* is flawless. Coleridge famously proclaimed, "I think *Oedipus Tyrannus*, *The Alchemist*, and *Tom Jones* the three most perfect plots ever planned." I rather fancy that, had he somehow avoided handing in his dinner pail for another ninety years, he would have added *Leave It to Psmith* to that list.

Now for the characters. Just as Wodehouse improved the plot of his two previous country house novels in *Leave It to Psmith*, so too does he upgrade the cast of characters from *Something Fresh*. I must acknowledge, however, that these characters do not excel over future Blandings novels because, with each new appearance, Lord Emsworth, Rupert Baxter, Freddie Threepwood, Lady Constance, and Sebastian Beach continue to develop and improve. As well, the key characters who appear only here—Joe Keeble, Aileen Peavey, Eddie Cootes, and the delightful Miss Clarkson—are equaled by many others in later novels. Even the wonderful bit players, such as Thomas and Stokes, and the timid young lady referred to simply as "Enquiries," are rivaled elsewhere by Wodehouse's quirky office boys, doormen, barmaids, and the like.

The leads, however, are different. It is they who ring the bell and take the coconut, setting *Leave It to Psmith* apart from all that came before and all that will come after.

The Psmith character has been analyzed so frequently and so fully that it would be a waste of valuable time to review it all again here. Certainly, any list of Wodehouse's great characters would have to be quite short to not include Psmith; but it is equally true that any such list would need to be quite long to include any other male romantic lead. As Wodehouse moved Psmith from schoolboy to city worker to muckraker, the character improved with each iteration, but before transforming him to the critical role of romantic lead, Wodehouse tries him out, as it were, with Jimmy Crocker in *Piccadilly Jim*, with great success. But while Jimmy's speech pattern is Psmithian, many of his actions are not. Only when Wodehouse puts Psmith—the whole Psmith and nothing but the Psmith—in the

romantic lead does he find the perfect formula for that role. Psmith reaches his pinnacle as a character, and Wodehouse never looks back. Nearly every lead that follows is an imitation or piece of him, but never as full or as brilliant. Psmith is, in a word, perfect.

So much for the hero. Let us consider the heroine.

In *Uneasy Money*, Bill Chalmers explicates his "image of the ideal girl" (lightly edited): "She would be brave, plucky, cheerfully valiant, a fighter. She would not admit the existence of hard luck. She would be honest, her courage would give her strength, she would be kind, she would also be intelligent, she would be smart and alert and pretty." A very good description, I think, not so much of Elizabeth Boyd, but rather Eve Halliday.

For the first time we don't have a delicate girl-child needing to be coddled and kept, like Molly McEachern in *A Gentleman of Leisure*; nor a damaged damsel, like Ann Chester in *Piccadilly Jim*; nor a misguided maiden needing to be saved from the wrong man, like Lady Maud Marsh in *A Damsel in Distress*. Joan Valentine, from *Something Fresh*, comes close, but she is constantly trying to establish her feminist credentials and prove her equality.

Eve has nothing to prove. From beginning to end, she is completely independent, strong, worldly, and smart. She knows her own mind and is not afraid to speak it to anyone. She never cries or breaks down, and when she suffers a reversal, she is instantly back, devising a new plan. Let's be honest. There are often bits of dialogue or action by Wodehouse's heroines of the last century that are somewhat cringeworthy in 2022. There is nothing in Eve Halliday, however, that any young woman of today would find objectionable.

Is it coincidence or serendipity or some divine inspiration that made Wodehouse so aptly name the mother of all his subsequent heroines? "It is a question from which speculation recoils." But, while all future leading ladies will be derived from Eve, no heroine reaches her level of self-assuredness. Even plucky Sue Brown is referred to as a "nervous cat" or a frightened mouse, and strong-willed Ann Moon is said to feel "foolish" and "embarrassed" while trying to reestablish her engagement to Lord Biskerton. Later heroines like Valerie Twistleton, Stiffy Byng, and Terry Cobbold, who are just as strong as Eve, sometimes come off a bit edgy. The unique brilliance of the Eve Halliday character is how Wodehouse combines all those strong qualities with her also being kind, compassionate and, in the end, loving.

Wodehouse's physical description of Eve is not significantly different from that of his other heroines, but, unlike the others, her character is much more

shown than described: her speech and her actions tell us much more about who she is than the narrator does. Early on, Wodehouse shows us her compatibility with Psmith by making her speech pattern very much like his, particularly in the scene with Phyllis and Clarkie—the first time he tries this trick of showing affinity in dialogue rather than describing it in narration. He tries it again in *Sam the Sudden* with Sam Shotter and Kay Derrick, but it doesn't come off quite as well, and soon, with rare exceptions, he rather gives up on the technique. Powerful as it is, it is also very difficult to pull off.

The scenes where the two main lovers discover or profess their love is always a test in avoiding the banal, and one at which Wodehouse does not always succeed. It is difficult indeed to have a scene that is touching, romantic, and funny. As Paul Kent points out, “The romantic lover with his poetry, sighs and groans has become an utterly ridiculous, even pathetic figure.” So much for the male half of the duo, but it is also quite difficult to show the woman's part of the scene without making her meekly accepting the hero or, on the other hand, scheming to get him to propose.

Almost every romantic novel of Wodehouse's early period has, in its first act, the “meet-cute,” to use a Hollywood expression. If it results in love at first sight, the narrator tells us. If love must grow over time, the narrator explains that as well. Here, because of the stature of our leads, the narrator is silent regarding how or why love came to Psmith. It simply happens and we simply accept it. But, without Psmith and Eve, we wouldn't, and Wodehouse must then explain, rather than show, what is happening, a process that intrudes on the delicate scene. So, after a few more novels, he pretty much eliminates the meet-cute altogether. In the middle and late periods, his novels typically commence with the main characters' romance—and, frequently, engagement—already established. Of Wodehouse's 56 romantic novels not based on other material, only eighteen show the principal lovers meeting for the first time; in the 35 written after 1933, only five do. *Leave It to Psmith* was written before this trimming, but, again because of the power of the characters, the umbrella scene is blissfully short, and the subsequent scene in Clarkie's office only slightly longer.

After that, there are five extended scenes between the lovers: Eve's arrival at Blandings, confessions on the lake, the proposal, the first confrontation in the gamekeeper's cottage, and the reprise in the cottage which resolves the story. It is rare, in the middle and late periods, to show the lovers together so much. (In *Hot Water*, for example, Packy Franklin and Jane Opal

are alone together for only three short scenes. In *Uncle Fred in the Springtime*, despite there being two sets of lovers, we never see either pair together at all!)

All five scenes bring out the nature of the characters perfectly, without any sign of the ridiculous or pathetic for Psmith, or meekness or scheming by Eve. In every one of them, Psmith is trying to work his way into Eve's heart while remaining dignified, even as Eve evades him in her self-assured way while remaining sympathetic. In the end, Psmith succeeds, but Eve is not won over; she simply comes to him on her own terms. The denouement is truly the best of the entire canon:

Silence fell once more. Eve returned to her thoughts. And then, with a suddenness which surprised her, she found that she had made up her mind.

“So, you're going to be married?” she said.

Psmith polished his monocle thoughtfully.

“I think so,” he said. “I think so. What do you think?”

Eve regarded him steadfastly. Then she gave a little laugh.

“Yes,” she said. “I think so, too.” She paused.

“Shall I tell you something?”

“You could tell me nothing more wonderful than that.”

No trembling lips or wobbly knees. No thumping hearts or pumping fists. No sighs or groans. No histrionics of any kind. Not even any kissing. In short, nothing “ridiculous.” And yet—or possibly because of that—we have, perhaps, Wodehouse's most romantic and moving passage. A similar scene in *Jill the Reckless*, to take but one example, is related in over fifteen pages of dialogue, description, and introspection—some of which is rather tedious. Here, he accomplishes the task beautifully—may I say perfectly?—in twelve short sentences. The power of the characters obviates the need for the narrator.

Finally, I must take at least a moment to discuss one of the most brilliant examples of the literary device of the absent character. It is one that Wodehouse and others use often and well in short stories, but it is much more difficult in a novel to have a character who so fully infuses the entire story while hardly being in it—or not in it at all. The rare examples of, say, Kurtz in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, or Blazes Boylan in Joyce's *Ulysses*, or the first Mrs. de Winter in du Maurier's *Rebecca*, show how extremely challenging it is to pull off. But Wodehouse does it here with Mr. and Mrs. Ralston McTodd.

While we see Ralston McTodd in only one brief scene, and his wife Cynthia never, they serve as a major plot point and are constantly mentioned as a leitmotif from the very first scene to the very last. Wodehouse uses them in many humorous passages as well, especially in the scene on the lake. It is truly a work of genius, and not repeated as effectively in any other Wodehouse novel. Think of Gertrude Butterwick in *Heavy Weather*, or Kitchie Valentine and Merwyn Flock in *Big Money*, and you can see how far superior is his use in *Psmith* of the absent McTods.

And, finally, language. Before I begin this section, it is worthwhile pausing a moment to consider the structuralist model I have been using. I did admit at the beginning that it was a tad outmoded, but even at the time it was in vogue, it came under some criticism. The great literary critic and author David Lodge, for instance, disapproved of structuralism on the grounds that there is, in fact, only one aspect of a novel—language—because setting, character, plot, etc., are all rendered exclusively in words. I still find the structuralist model more useful in literary analysis for its clarity, but I do agree with Lodge. So yes, as we move into this final section, we must remember that language is the key aspect in evaluating a novel.

And when we look closely at Wodehouse's words, we find that his language is particularly—and pretty much uniformly—brilliant. It is in his language—his style—that Wodehouse's genius truly emerges, whether his words are used to describe a character or setting, to provide narration or dialogue, or, of course, to make us laugh. While in many of his novels we find characters and settings and especially plots that are perhaps below the standard we expect, these lapses rarely occur in his language. Even in the late period, when he began to seriously trim his style, he was still frequently throwing off brilliant and original similes, metaphors, and nifties.

In which case, you may be wondering why I have included language in an extended analysis rather than relegating it to the footnote status I did for structure, patterns, and setting.

It is because, in *Leave It to Psmith*, we have one exceptionally brilliant use of language that sets this novel apart; a scene that Wodehouse wrote many times, but which is not crafted nearly as well elsewhere as it is here: the proposal scene.

In the early period, the romance in Wodehouse's novels was front and center, and the proposal scene generally departed from humor and was portrayed as the serious, earnest enterprise that proposals are in real life. But that departure makes the scene feel out of context. As Wodehouse, speaking through Bertie Wooster, says

in *Right Ho, Jeeves*: “Reflect what proposing means. It means that a decent, self-respecting chap has got to listen to himself saying things which, if spoken on a silver screen, would cause him to dash to the box office and demand his money back.” That is what makes it so difficult to render such a serious scene in a comic novel.

So, in every story, Wodehouse must navigate between the Scylla and Charybdis of Classical and Romantic love traditions, the former characterized by the “Ickenham system” of grabbing and waggling (which is a little unfair to the woman) and the latter characterized by the, shall we say, Freddie Threepwood method of tying himself in a knot and yapping like a dog (which is a little pathetic for the man). John Carroll, for example, spends most of *Money for Nothing* oscillating between the two. Later, and especially in the late period, Wodehouse opts for a middle course in which the wooer is humorous and lighthearted. But, after a while, even he could see that this method of avoiding over-earnestness is also flawed, as he finally has Kay Shannon express in *The Old Reliable*:

“It isn't how often he asks me, it's how he asks me. He does it as if the whole thing were a tremendous joke. I'm stuffy and sentimental and take it seriously. I want someone who takes it as seriously as I do, not someone who can't make love to a girl without making her feel as if she were the stooge in a vaudeville act.”

In *Leave It to Psmith*, we have the apotheosis of the humorous proposal scene: respectful to the heroine, earnest enough to be taken seriously, but ingeniously lightened by Psmith's breezy, loquacious style. Listen carefully to how Wodehouse interjects true emotion into Psmith's flood of persiflage. Psmith is desperately trying to win Eve over without appearing “ridiculous and pathetic,” but he also assumes his victory without being rough or condescending. Also notice, at the beginning, how lightly the narrator inserts himself after Psmith's initial declaration of love. Prior to this novel, and quite often later, Wodehouse found it necessary to interrupt the dialogue frequently—and sometimes at length—to explain the emotions of the hero and the reaction of the heroine. Here, the dialogue is so scintillating and perfect, only a few short intrusions are necessary.

The scene takes place on the terrace, just prior to the poetry reading and theft of the necklace which closes the second act. Psmith has tried to engage Eve in conversation, but she is strangely reserved, responding to each of his inquiries only with the word “yes” until

she finally lets loose and gives it to him right between the eyes by informing him that she knows he is an impostor, and she is furious with him for taking her in. The conversation continues (here, very lightly edited):

“The only excuse I can find for you . . . is that you’re mad. When I think of all you said to me about poor Cynthia on the lake that afternoon, when I think of all the sympathy I wasted on you. . . .”

“Not wasted,” corrected Psmith firmly. “It was by no means wasted. It made me love you—if possible—even more.”

Eve had supposed that she had embarked on a tirade which would last until she had worked off her indignation and felt composed again, but this extraordinary remark scattered the thread of her harangue so hopelessly that all she could do was to stare at him in amazed silence.

“Womanly intuition,” proceeded Psmith gravely, “will have told you long ere this that I love you with a fervour which with my poor vocabulary I cannot hope to express. True, you are about to say, we have known each other but a short time, as time is measured. But what of that?”

Eve raised her eyebrows. Her voice was cold and hostile.

“After what has happened,” she said, “I suppose I ought not be surprised at finding you capable of anything, but—are you really choosing this moment to—to propose to me?”

“To employ a favourite word of your own—yes.”

“And you expect me to take you seriously?”

“Assuredly not. I look upon the present disclosure purely as a sighting shot. You may regard it, if you will, as a kind of formal proclamation. I wish simply to go on record as an aspirant to your hand. I want you, if you will be so good, to make note of my words and give them a thought from time to time . . .”

“I . . .”

“It is possible,” continued Psmith, “that black moments will come to you—for they come to all of us, even the sunniest—when you will find yourself saying ‘Nobody loves me!’ On such occasions I should like you to add ‘No, I am wrong. There *is* somebody who loves me.’ At first, it may be, that reflection will bring but scant balm. Gradually, however, as the days

go by and we are constantly together and my nature unfolds itself before you like the petals of some timid flower beneath the rays of the sun . . .”

Eve’s eyes opened wider. She had supposed herself incapable of further astonishment, but she saw that she had been mistaken.

“You surely aren’t dreaming of staying on here *now*?” she gasped.

“Most decidedly. Why not?”

“But—but what is to prevent me telling everybody that you are not Mr. McTodd?”

“Your sweet, generous nature,” said Psmith. “Your big heart. Your angelic forbearance.”

“Oh!”

“Considering that I only came here as McTodd—and if you had seen him you would realize that he is not a person for whom the man of sensibility and refinement would lightly allow himself to be mistaken—I say considering that I only took on the job of understudy so as to get to the castle and be near you, I hardly think that you will be able to bring yourself to get me slung out. You must try to understand what happened. When Lord Emsworth started chatting with me under the impression that I was Comrade McTodd, I encouraged the mistake purely with the kindly intention of putting him at his ease. . . . It was only when I saw you talking to him in the street and he revealed the fact that you were about to enjoy his hospitality that I decided that there was no other course open to the man of spirit. Consider! Twice that day you had passed out of my life—may I say taking the sunshine with you?—and I began to fear you might pass out of it forever. So, loath though I was to commit the solecism of planting myself in this happy home under false pretenses, I could see no other way. And here I am!”

“You *must* be mad!”

“Well, as I was saying, the days will go by, you will have ample opportunity of studying my personality, and it is quite possible that in due season the love of an honest heart may impress you as worth having. I may add that I have loved you since the moment when I saw you sheltering from the rain under that awning in Dover Street, and I recall saying as much to Comrade Walderwick when he was chatting with me a short time later on the subject of his umbrella. I do not press you for an answer now . . .”

“I should hope not!”

“I merely say ‘Think it over.’ It is nothing to cause you mental distress. Other men love you. Freddie Threepwood loves you. Just add me to the list. That is all I ask. Muse on me from time to time. Reflect that I may be an acquired taste. You probably did not like olives the first time you tasted them. Now you probably do. Give me the same chance you would give an olive. Consider, also, how little you have against me. What, indeed, does it amount to, when you come to examine it narrowly? All you have against me is the fact that I am not Ralston McTodd. Think how comparatively few people are Ralston McTodd. Let your meditations proceed along these lines.”

And at that point he is interrupted.

I know I have used the word “perfect” a lot in this talk, but, seriously, is that not perfect? This combination of humor, romance, and character exposition in a proposal is unequalled anywhere else in Wodehouse, or, dare I say, anywhere else in all of English literature. I rather fancy that even the Bard might admit that Psmith is more deserving than Richard III to say, “Was ever woman in this humour wood? Was ever woman in this humour won?”

You may think my assertion that P. G. Wodehouse wrote his greatest novel a mere 23 years into his extraordinary 75-year career to be a trifle unfair. But again, this is not to say that the remaining fifty years were all downhill, by any means. And, if one considers the trajectory of his career, it actually makes sense. Just into his forties, and with fifteen adult novels already under his belt, this was the sweet spot of his development as a novelist: the beginning of his middle period. It was here that he was able to combine the breadth of vision of his early period with a writing quality that had reached midseason form, but well before the late period, where he had exhausted the plot possibilities of his admittedly limited genre.

Evelyn Waugh famously wrote that “to criticize Mr. Wodehouse is like taking a spade to a soufflé.” And for many years scholars have typically avoided getting too academic for fear of sounding stuffy about this least stuffy of authors. As Basil Boothroyd wrote in *Homage to P. G. Wodehouse*, “to analyse humour is the death of laughter”; or Stephen Fry again with “you don’t analyse such sunlit perfection, you just bask in its warmth and splendor.”

But it doesn’t have to be that way. Serious criticism should enhance its subject matter, not detract from

it. And such serious study is growing, as Aaron Ervin detailed in his 2018 Bachelor’s thesis at the University of North Carolina titled “Reconsidering P. G. Wodehouse: A Look Back on [His] Critical Reception.” And why not?

Does this scholarly scrutiny diminish the enjoyment of his works? Not for me. I have read most of the serious studies of Wodehouse’s work and yet when I read the flower-pot scene or the prize-giving scene—although I have read both literally dozens of times (and I do mean “literally” literally)—I still succumb to paroxysms of laughter. Indeed, while I have been absent from the world of academe for nearly half a century, my enjoyment of this book has only been increased by this brief return to its discipline, using its tools and methods to justify my enduring position that, of all of P. G. Wodehouse’s great novels, *Leave It to Psmith* is the greatest.

A Final Round of Applause

IN ALL THE fervor of reporting the very enjoyable convention last October, we neglected give thanks to its organizers. It is time to repair that omission.

This was the first convention put together not by a chapter or a few local TWSers, but by a full committee of members spread across the country. The logistics involved in organizing a convention when the committee could only confer via Zoom or telephone were overwhelming at times. Matters were not helped when Covid forced the postponement of the event from 2021 to 2022, meaning a renegotiation of contracts, some financial hits, and rearrangement of plans. But in the end it all turned out brilliantly, as the last issue of *Plum Lines* made clear.

So three cheers to all those who made it happen! The primary culprits are as follows:

Elliott Milstein: Chair
Maria Jette: Speaker Coordinator
John Kareores: Publicity Coordinator
Larry Nahigian: Acquisition (Loot) Coordinator
Susan Pace: Site Coordinator
Max Pokrivchak: Optional Activities Coordinator
Bob Rains: Legal Advisor
Indu Ravi: Financial Manager
Bill Scrivener: Fundraising Coordinator
Michael Smith: Design, Program, & Forms Coordinator

Roberta Towner: Site Manager
Allie Weeks: Admin Coordinator

While everyone on the committee merits high applause, there are three who deserve singling out. First, Roberta Towner spent the entire weekend tirelessly resolving problems quickly and ensuring that everything ran smoothly. Second, Max Pokrivchak (aka Terry Kitchen) did a fantastic job of putting together and running the optional activities and assisted in many other areas. His creativity and care were awesome. Finally, Elliott Milstein assembled and chaired the committee, overseeing every aspect of the convention, in addition to giving a superbly riveting talk. Elliott truly deserved winning the Norman Murphy Award for his outstanding leadership and for his numerous past services to TWS and Wodehouse scholarship.

But that's not all! A few non-committee members deserve mention for pitching in during the weekend. These include Pat Levinson and Jeff Porteous, who did shifts on the registration table; Pat in particular was a trouper who put in more hours than originally asked of her, coming to the rescue when other volunteers faded. Lynn Vesley-Gross and Elin Woodger made themselves exceptionally useful with both registration and the rummage sale, while Kris Fowler also assisted in the rummaging department. Most of all, Jean Tillson's dazzling skills for accumulating merchandise and then organizing, displaying, and selling it over three days made it probably our most successful sale ever, earning her the title of Rummage Queen.

All TWSers are indebted to these hard-working eggs for their contributions to a binge that, let's face it, staggered humanity. Raise a mighty cheer now!

Convention Culpa

GIVEN THE RAPIDITY with which we assembled the Winter 2022 post-convention issue and with all the global intercommunications that go into its assembly, well, it's a bit of a pleasant surprise that we only have a couple of corrections for the issue three months on.

We have one caption correction: That cute photo of Hilary Bruce in the top hat was actually taken by Jean Tillson. And we have one awards clarification: Your OM made a decision to elevate two other costumees to and honorable level. We'll call them *Plum-Lines*-only Honorable Mentions. The only official convention H.M. winners were Mike Engstrom and Curtis Armstrong. The others wore noteworthy costumes and earned the title of P.L.H.M. I do not expect any lawsuits.

—OM

LOOKING FOR A FEW GOOD PLUMMIES: REQUEST FOR HELP FROM TWS VP BILL FRANKLIN

HEAR YE, HEAR YE! At the San Diego convention of The Wodehouse Society, the board of directors discussed methods to better market the society. We are in the process of kicking off an effort that will be called "Market Blandings." The aim is to get the word out about our society and what we do, and to thus drive recruiting to expand our membership.

To that end, we have a small set of free thinkers and smart coves looking at things like digital marketing, targeted marketing, good old paper advertisements in Little Free Libraries, and some other grassroots activities. We are thinking out-of-the-box and on-the-cheap. Imagine buying a used Wodehouse book from a bookseller on abe.com and finding a TWS flier or membership form in the book. Or imagine going to the library and seeing a Wodehouse poster or flier. Or seeing a Facebook ad when you check up on your local cricket club. Or something on an Instagram feed because you follow an old English country house. Or hearing/reading about our society through the social media of another like society, artist, or Wodehouse fan.

Frankly, although we are a highly dedicated crew, we are few and could do with some additional help, expertise, and, dare I say it, boots on the ground. So if you have experience and a desire to help in the areas of digital marketing, social media, web- or print-based marketing, or advertising development, we need you! If you are a bookseller or have a Little Free Library, we could do with a short chat. Please contact Bill Franklin at sfblandingscastle@gmail.com. We will have occasional Zoom meetings starting in late April or May.

[His lordship] was normally as happy as only a fluffy-minded man with excellent health and a large income can be. A writer, describing Blandings Castle in a magazine article, had once said: "Tiny mosses have grown in the cavities of the stones, until, viewed near at hand, the place seems shaggy with vegetation." It would not have been a bad description for the proprietor. Fifty-odd years of serene and unruffled placidity had given Lord Emsworth a curiously moss-covered look. Very few things had the power to disturb him.

Leave It to Psmith (1923)

The P. G. Wodehouse Collection at Vanderbilt University

BY ANITA AVERY

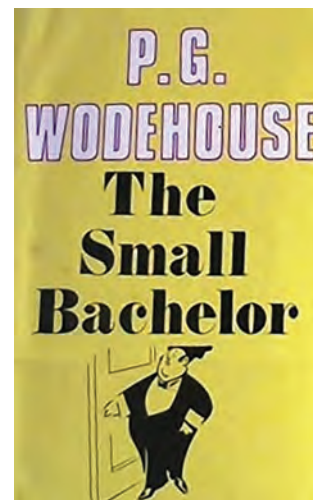
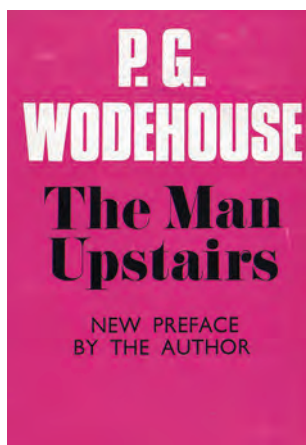
The collection, which we believe to be the premier American accumulation of Wodehouse's works and Wodehouse-related items, came into existence in 2019. Thanks to the vision of several members of TWS, and to Anita's tireless oversight, the collection continues to grow and prosper.

CONTINUING THE TOPIC of volumes in the collection from Wodehouse's years with publisher Herbert Jenkins and its successors, this column focuses on the aspect of the Barrie & Jenkins reissues published from 1969 to 1979 that is most relevant to the Wodehouse canon. Of the more than sixty titles in this edition, fourteen contained new prefaces published between 1969 and 1975—little gems in PGW's own words about milestones, turning points, anecdotes, and his own development, from the vantage point of advanced years, looking back on his long and successful career. Also notable is that none of the prefaces were included in later reprints. The collection includes ten of the fourteen titles with new prefaces.

These new prefaces are as delightful as the stories they precede, and indeed, are worthy of publication as a collected body of work on their own. So, on to some of these sparkling, insightful treasures.

In the new preface to *Something Fresh* (1969), PGW attributed the use of his full name as influencing *Saturday Evening Post* editor George Horace Lorimer to buy the piece as a serial for the "stupefying sum of \$3,500." He said that at the time of his baptism, he wasn't as appreciative: "If you ask me to tell you frankly if I like the names Pelham Grenville, I must confess that I do not. I have my dark moods when they seem to me about as low as you can get. At the font I remember protesting vigorously when the clergyman uttered them, but he stuck to his point. 'Be that as it may,' he said firmly, having waited for a lull, 'I name thee Pelham Grenville.' . . . I little knew how the frightful label was going to pay off thirty-four years later."

In the new preface to *Uneasy Money* (1969), Wodehouse regards the ease of the writing process, the place of writing, and financial reward thusly: "If I am particularly fond of *Uneasy Money*, it is partly because it gave me the minimum of trouble, the golden words pouring out like syrup; partly because I was living on Long Island when I wrote it; . . . but principally because it established me on that firm financial base . . . so



pleasant for a struggling hack to be established on. It finally released me from the necessity of churning out stories for the pulp magazines at the starvation rates paid by those peculiar productions."

With a critical eye toward quality, in the new preface to *Bill the Conqueror* (1970), Plum is humorous and self-deprecating, but arrives at this summation: "When an author reads his stuff of forty-seven years ago, he either says with Dean Swift 'What a genius I had then' or he murmurs with a shudder 'My God! Used I really to write bilge like that?' With regard to the opus under consideration I would hardly go so far as to echo the Dean, but at the same time I would not string along with anyone who called it bilge. I may be wrong, but I think it's pretty darned good."

With his eye ever on the business side of authoring, he goes on to relate that "the *Saturday Evening Post*, which had started me off at \$3,500 for a serial and had been raising me cautiously year by year, suddenly got the Christmas spirit and loosened up. . . . We artists care little for money—personally I despise the stuff—but I confess that I was not displeased when my agent sent me his cheque for \$40,000 . . . or rather for \$36,000, for you know what agents are; they want theirs."

In the next new preface, from 1970, Plum begins, "I have three reasons for being particularly fond of *The Small Bachelor*. I suppose authors generally have a special affection for those of their books which come out easily." Such sentiment is evidenced by his glowing remembrance of *Thank You, Jeeves*: "I love it because it came out as smooth as treacle gurgling out of a jug and never gave me a moment's anguish from the opening paragraph of Chapter One." He put *The Small Bachelor* in the same category, as "one of the easy ones." He was "fond of the book" for its nostalgic setting of "very hard up" but "very happy" days in the charming Greenwich Village, as well as the book having stemmed from *Oh*,

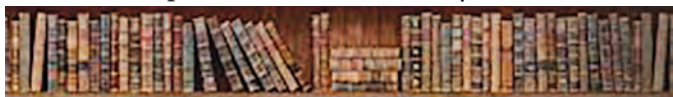
Lady! Lady!!, one of the Princess Theatre shows he did with Guy Bolton and Jerome Kern. The preface closes with a sage reflection about the now iconic song “Bill”: “We all thought it was too slow, so it was cut out. It was not till it was done in *Show Boat* six years later that we realized that, like Othello’s base Indian, we had thrown away a pearl richer than all our tribe. As the fellow said, that’s show biz.”

The new preface to *The Man Upstairs and Other Stories* (1971), short stories written in Wodehouse’s Hotel Earle bedroom in Greenwich Village between the years 1909 and 1912, describes the two-strata world of “impecunious young writers like myself, able to keep body and soul together only by means of the occasional sale of a short story.” As one of those “pulp magazine men,” he remarks of Bob Davis, who bought stories, supplied plots for them, and edited most of them, “It is almost entirely owing to him that I was able to eat between 1909 and 1912.”

At the same time, aspiring “to higher things than the pulps,” the young writers used a fast-talking and less-than-totally-honest agent, identified as Archie. After he made a sale, “then came the stern struggle to extract the money from him. His were essentially one-way pockets. . . . I believe he regarded his clients in the light of so many sons, or perhaps nephews, to whom it would be wrong to give too much money to at one time.” Plum could envision the agent’s rationale: “But you know what Wodehouse is. Give him two hundred dollars (less agent’s commission) in a lump, and first thing you know he’ll be off buying yachts and Rolls Royces. Far better to eke it out in installments of five dollars.’ So he eked.”

With a certain relish, Plum writes of Archie’s comeuppance: “The only time he gave a client a cheque for the full amount was when he sold a story of Charlie Somerville’s for a hundred and fifty.” Charlie anticipated it coming back due to “insufficient funds,” so, learning from a friend at the bank that “Archie’s balance was a hundred and fifteen, he paid in twenty and presented the cheque again, when it was duly honored. Archie said he never would have believed an old friend could stoop so low.”

Next time, we’ll continue with more bons mots from this collection of fourteen scintillating new prefaces. We always welcome donations to the Collection. To view current holdings, please consult the online database at <http://www.wodehouse.org/PGWCVU>. Click on the gold navigation bar for links to all sections. For further information, please contact anitaavery@verizon.net.



Elizabeth Landman, 1935–2023

BY ELIN WOODGER

ALONG WITH MANY OTHERS, I was greatly saddened to hear that Elizabeth Landman had died on January 23, age 87. Elizabeth and her husband, David (who died in December 2020), had been TWS stalwarts for many years, and they were founding members of the NEWTS.

Born Elizabeth Marie Schwartz on December 17, 1935, in Norristown, Pennsylvania, Elizabeth studied speech and drama at Syracuse University. After graduating in 1957, she moved to New York City to study at the Stella Adler Theatre School and pursue a career in acting. In New York she met David, and the two bonded through their mutual interest in English literature, early music, art, and Eastern philosophy. They married and moved to Massachusetts, eventually settling in Lexington in 1973. There they raised their six children and became active members of the community for almost fifty years.

Elizabeth studied piano at the University of Massachusetts Lowell and attended Dr. Shinichi Suzuki’s Music School in Matsumoto, Japan. She became certified in the Suzuki Method of piano instruction and went on to teach this method to students of all ages, in her home and at the Cambridge New School of Music, for more than thirty years. She also performed in recitals. In addition to music, she embraced meditation and was a longtime practitioner at the Cambridge Insight Meditation Center. She found considerable joy in nature and going for long walks in the woods.

Elizabeth continued to love acting and, with David, often performed in NEWTS skits at conventions. Out of many memorable roles, she was especially hilarious as Betsy Madeline Bassett Ross in the 2001 skit “Mirth of a Nation.” She always radiated elegance, warmth, kindness, and humor, and she will be very much missed at NEWTS nottles.



Elizabeth sporting symbols of her NEWTS heritage. She was a delightful and much-loved member of the Wodehouse community.

(Photo by Roberta Towner)

Remembering David Jasen

BY AMY PLOFKER AND ELIN WOODGER

IT SEEMED LIKE the end of an era when David Alan Jasen, author of *P. G. Wodehouse: A Portrait of a Master*, died on November 2, 2022, a month before his 85th birthday. David had been the only Wodehouse biographer to have actually met Plum, meaning one more direct link to the great man is gone.

He was born in New York City on December 16, 1937, the son of a dentist, Barnet Jasen, and Gertrude Cohen Jasen. David attended American University in Washington, D.C. (BA, 1959), and Long Island University (MS, 1972). In December 1963 he married Susan Pomerantz, a nurse, with whom he had a son, Raymond. He eventually became a professor in the communications department at C. W. Post College in Brookville, New York (part of Long Island University), a post he held until his retirement.

While still a young student, David, a keen Wodehouse fan, determined to meet and interview the author for his university magazine. Their first encounter took the form of a walk together with Jed the dachshund and Bill the mongrel. Subsequently, David was invited to join Plum and Guy Bolton for lunch, and the simple interview expanded into his bold proposal to write a full biography. He later related that Wodehouse had initially been taken aback by the idea, but soon agreed. Motivated by his enthusiasm for his subject, and undeterred by his lack of experience as a biographer, David conducted years of research and interviews with Wodehouse's relatives, friends, and colleagues, as well as with Plum himself. Along the way, he earned the honor of having a Wodehouse book dedicated to him: *Stiff Upper Lip, Jeeves* (U.S. edition, 1963). *A Portrait of a Master* was published in 1974, a few months before Wodehouse's death; a revised edition appeared in 1981.

In the course of his research, David discovered numerous articles and short stories that had been lost to time. He persuaded Wodehouse to allow him to edit and publish many of these short works, but Plum didn't live to see *The Uncollected Wodehouse*, which came out in October 1976. Meanwhile, in 1970, reflecting his interest in collecting Wodehouse first editions, David produced his *Bibliography and Reader's Guide to the First Editions of P. G. Wodehouse* (revised and reissued in 1986). Additionally, in 1979 he published *The Theatre of P. G. Wodehouse*, and over many years he brought out several more collections of Wodehouse short works.

David had another passion besides Wodehouse: the ragtime era. The *Syncopated Times* has described him as

“a ragtime pioneer, a finger-bustin' ragtime performer, a consummate collector of the music and literature, and a sought-after scholar on all things syncopated.” This lifelong devotion to ragtime had many manifestations: In addition to being a talented composer and performer, David shared his love for the subject as a radio host, college professor, collector, and author; contributed articles to rag and jazz periodicals; and wrote numerous books, including *Recorded Ragtime 1897–1958* (1973), *Rags and Ragtime: A Musical History* (1978 and 2011), and *Tin Pan Alley: An Encyclopedia of the Golden Age of American Song* (1988).

Made an honorary lifetime member of TWS in 1987, David capped his Wodehouse career by becoming an inaugural and valued member of the New York City chapter, the Broadway Special (begun 2003). He later admitted that as an academic who would be surrounded by amateur Wodehouseans, he hadn't expected to enjoy himself at that first chapter meeting; for many years, his only contact with Wodehouse fans had been with fellow collectors. However, there is a peculiar charm, a sort of ambient happiness, that manifests when Wodehouse fans foregather. David must have succumbed to this as he and Susan became semi-regular attendees at chapter meetings. He was always willing to favor the members with his strongly felt opinions on Wodehouse's work or life. He was also a speaker at the 2007 TWS convention in Providence, where he reminisced about his friendship with Wodehouse.

David had the vivid personality that Plum did not; he was never able to leave the room silently or inconspicuously. But he shared with his favorite author a strong work ethic and an appreciation for things that were both well-written and funny, resulting in many enduring works for our enlightenment and enjoyment.



David and Plum during the friendship that resulted in David's groundbreaking Wodehouse biography

P. G. Wodehouse's Hungarian Playwrights, Part 2: Love Among the Bacilli

BY MARK REBER AND STEVE WIELAND

IN THE 1920S AND 1930S, Wodehouse adapted works from multiple sources, including his own stories and foreign-language scripts, into plays for American and British audiences. Plum's wide-ranging works in the legitimate theater are fully and entertainingly documented by Tony Ring in his book *Second Row, Grand Circle* (2012). In the Autumn 2022 *Plum Lines*, we focused on Wodehouse's adaptation of Ferenc Molnár's Hungarian *Play in the Castle* to *The Play's the Thing*. Now we turn to Plum's more extensive tinkering under the hood to create the play *Good Morning, Bill!* and, later, the novel *Doctor Sally* out of László Fodor's play *Dr. Juci Szabó*.

Dr. László Fodor, Seduced by Theater

IN 1900, when P. G. Wodehouse and Ferenc Molnár were taking their first steps in literary careers, young László Friedländer, born in 1898 in Budapest, had barely taken his first baby steps. Nearly a generation younger than Molnár, László was molded from the start by the twentieth century's industrialization and liberalization, and by its darker currents. Like Molnár, young László changed the German surname of his Jewish parents to a Hungarian one, "Fodor."

Although educated to be a physician, László set aside his stethoscope almost as soon as he earned it. At the age of 25, Fodor's first of four stage productions appeared in Budapest. But he didn't forget his medical training, and he was intrigued by the concepts of intellectual and economic gender equality. Dr. Juci Szabó, the brusque, self-confident heroine of his fifth play, makes a couple of credible onstage physical exams and shows a lot of familiarity with bacteria in milk.

All told, Fodor wrote over twenty plays in Hungarian, English, and German during his long career. But in 1938, like Molnár, Fodor realized that a Hungarian surname was no protection from the Nazis, and he emigrated to the U.S. He had already begun to shift from the stage to the movies even in the 1930s. Once in the USA, now known as Ladislas Fodor, he produced motion-picture stories, adaptations, and screenplays for the nearly forty years. In the 1950s, he relocated to West Germany, where he worked frequently with the producer Artur Brauner while continuing to write for Hollywood. The Internet Movie Database lists 84 credits for Fodor, ranging from adaptations of many

of his stage plays to full original screenplays. One of his late screenplays was a 1968 collaboration for an Israeli-German production of *Tevye and his Seven Daughters*. He died in 1978 in Los Angeles.

Gathering Pieces and Discovering a Loos Canon

TO RECONSTRUCT Wodehouse's steps of adaptation from *Dr. Juci Szabó* to *Good Morning, Bill!* and the novel *Doctor Sally*, we searched for source scripts and related documents. This meant repeated forays into scattered archives, lucky clues, and internet chats with generous librarians. The various archives sent images of requested documents by email for modest fees and often for free.

Fodor's play *Dr. Juci Szabó* opened at the Hungarian Theatre in Budapest on January 15, 1926. By the end of March, Fodor's agent in Budapest, Alexander Marton, had a contract to sell British stage rights to the International Copyright Bureau (ICB), a London agency.

Edmond Pauker was a pivotal Hungarian-American literary agent in New York in the 1920s and 1930s. One archive of his papers at the Beinecke Library at Yale University included a contract negotiated by Gilbert Miller (producer of *The Play's the Thing*) in 1926–27 with Fodor's agent in Budapest covering the rights for U.S. performances and publications arising from *Dr. Juci Szabó*, as well as a 1930 contract with Plum's U.S. agent Paul Reynolds covering novelization of the play. Miller's organization never produced the play on Broadway, but Pauker had a copy of the ICB contract and Miller was behind the London production. Communications with the Lord Chamberlain's Office (LCO) were on Gilbert Miller's St James's Theatre letterhead, signed by T. B. Vaughn, the general manager. The LCO license was granted for the Apollo Theatre, but *Good Morning, Bill!* was ultimately staged at the Duke of York's Theatre. Go figure.

The key starting ingredient for Plum's adaptation was a literal English translation of the Hungarian script of *Dr. Juci Szabó*. With luck, a copy was found in the Anita Loos archive at the New York Public Library. Loos was a Hollywood screenwriter from 1912 to the 1940s, famous for her 1925 novel *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*. (In Hollywood, she let people pronounce her name as "Loose," though her brother preferred the Germanic

sound of “Lohse.”) The archive catalog noted that Loos was planning an adaptation of the play. In addition to Wodehouse and Reynolds, Pauker’s papers also contained contracts between Fodor and Loos and John Emerson, her husband-manager, for U.S. and Canadian performing rights in the period 1931–35, though work never got off the ground. It seems highly likely that Loos’s copy of the translation was the one from which Wodehouse had worked. The translator (anonymous on the typescript) left his/her own introductory comment that “this is a more or less literal translation.”

Wodehouse adapted Fodor’s play and submitted his version, titled *Sally Smith*, for review to the theatrical censor, the LCO, in London. After a few rounds, Wodehouse’s final adaptation, renamed *Good Morning, Bill!*, opened at the Duke of York’s Theatre in London on November 28, 1927. In its final form, *Good Morning, Bill!* was published in 1928 by Methuen.

The archive of the Lord Chamberlain at the British Library yielded Plum’s submitted script *Sally Smith*. On this document there are handwritten edits. These edits, plus some typescript pages appended to the initial copy, show the changes made to satisfy this censor. The files contain communications to and from T. B. Vaughn, including the final approval letter for staging the play, after offensive material had been removed. There was even an indignant audience complaint letter from January 4, 1928, which produced further edits.

An Overview of the Two Staged Plays

THE TWO PLAYS are broadly similar in stage settings, most of the characters, and much of the plot. The action takes place in a hotel suite—in Budapest in Fodor’s play, on the southern coast of England in Wodehouse’s—and in the living hall of the male lead’s country estate. This character is Balint Kuthy in Hungary and Bill Paradene in England. Other main characters include a flashy and frivolous woman with whom Balint/Bill is having an affair in the first act (Mici/Lottie); a thrice-divorced old friend of the male lead (Virgil Kovacs/Lord Tidmouth, AKA “Squiffy”); a woman physician who is the female lead (Dr. Juci Szabó/Dr. Sally Smith); and an older relative of the male lead (Balint’s doting, indulgent “Aunt”/Bill’s judgmental uncle Sir Hugo Drake, a nerve specialist).

Plot elements are also largely similar in the two plays. (Wodehouse’s names will be used here for simplicity.) In the first act, Bill has decided to end his affair with Lottie and return to his country estate. This results in an angry exchange between them and a hysterical tantrum by Lottie, in which she breaks china and faints. Lord Tidmouth is present for this scene and runs to fetch

a doctor, as does the hotel bellboy. The first doctor to arrive is an attractive young woman. Bill is smitten and engages her in conversation, during which she is very critical of him and his view of her as a “woman,” rather than as a strong and independent professional. (In Fodor’s original play, Balint had never seen Juci before. In Wodehouse’s adaptation, Bill was already enamored, having observed Sally “on the links.”)

When Sally finally completes an examination of Lottie, she prescribes a few weeks’ rest in a sanatorium. A second doctor arrives—Bill’s uncle in *Good Morning* and Professor Kerekes in *Dr. Juci*. The senior doctor knows and trusts the young physician and concurs with her treatment recommendations. Sir Hugo also gets Sally to show him how she holds a mashie-niblick and scolds Bill for wasting time “dancing attendance on a young woman of flashy appearance.” After he departs, Sally gets ready to leave but is delayed by the delivery of a child’s rocking horse—a gift that Tidmouth had ordered for his “first wife’s second son.” In *Dr. Juci*, the aunt had sent this old childhood toy to Balint. Sally persuades Bill to sit on the rocking horse, where childhood simplicity cancels out passion. She declares that friendship is possible between them and squeezes his hand as she departs. This concludes Act 1.

The rest of the play takes place several weeks later at the male lead’s country estate, on a single evening and the following morning. Present are Bill, Tidmouth, and Sir Hugo (Balint’s aunt in *Dr. Juci*). Bill is restless, unhappy, and irritable. He has been this way for weeks. Both Sir Hugo and Tidmouth recognize that he is pining for the woman he loves, whom they assume to be Lottie. Sir Hugo has a scheme. He has invited her to the estate, confident that when Bill sees her in his ancestral home, “where every stick and stone breathes of family traditions,” his self-respect will awaken and his infatuation will end.

This scheme is the inverse of the plan of Balint’s aunt in *Dr. Juci*: to bring his lover to him, so that they can reunite and marry. The young woman is expected that night. Bill, however, has a plan of his own. He has placed a call to Dr. Sally saying that he is seriously ill and has sent a car to bring her from London.

When Sally arrives, she has already guessed the reason for her summons. She examines Bill nonetheless and, despite some testy verbal exchanges, strokes his cheek as she heads off to sleep in an adjacent bedroom. Shortly thereafter, Lottie arrives. She rushes to embrace Bill just as Sally emerges from the bedroom. Sally gasps and heads back inside. The curtain falls.

Act 3 of *Good Morning, Bill!* opens with Sir Hugo asking Bill about the woman who arrived the previous

night. Assuming that this refers to Sally, Bill informs his uncle that his love is ongoing and that he is “not going to rest till I have made her my wife.” He then goes out and Sir Hugo tries to buy Lottie off.

Lottie: You offer me money to give up the man I love? . . . You imagine that I will sell my dreams for money?

Sir Hugo: Yes.

Lottie: And you're dead right. How much?

They negotiate a price. Lottie and Tidmouth agree that they are suited for each other and leave together. Sir Hugo returns, is surprised to see Sally, and informs her that he has saved Bill from making a ghastly mistake. They talk golf. Bill enters and explains to his uncle that it is Sally whom he loves.

The act concludes with a wonderful interaction between Bill and Sally. After she declines to marry him because she “cannot take him seriously,” this idle aristocrat, Bill, decides to get back to the estate business he has ignored while pining for her. She is shocked that he actually does work. He goes to his desk; she sits and watches him, learning about dairy farming and various equipment, including a sterilizer. Bill shows her a diagram. They then engage in a long, joyous dialogue reciting the names of milk bacteria.

Bill: That's the boiler there. At seventy degrees centigrade the obligatory and optional bacteria are destroyed.

Sally [*with increasing excitement*]: Do you mean to say that you are familiar with the bacteria of milk?

Bill: I am.

Sally: But this is wonderful. [*Gleefully*] The *cavillus acidi lactici* . . .

Bill: The *cavillus acidi lactici* . . .

Sally: The *bacterium koli* . . .

Bill: The *bacillus erogenes* . . .

Sally: The *proteus vulgaris* . . .

This verbal exchange continues; five additional bacteria are named.

Sally soon starts to recognize unfamiliar symptoms in herself, similar to those that Bill had complained of the night before. She makes a diagnosis of “acute love.” She says, “Do you remember what I said to you that day we met? If ever I found a man I could love I would tell him so as frankly as if I were saying good morning.” The play ends with her remarking, “Good morning, Bill!” and an embrace.

Plum's Creative Decisions

BY LOOKING at some of the changes that Wodehouse chose to make as he adapted *Dr. Juci Szabó* into *Good Morning, Bill!*, we can get a glimpse into his creative decisions. These can be arbitrarily considered in four categories: Setting, Plot Line, Sex, and Humor.

British Setting and Characters

THE MOST prominent of these decisions is his anglicizing of the setting and characters.

If one were to watch or read *Good Morning, Bill!* without knowing it was adapted from the Hungarian theater, one might assume it is pure Wodehouse, with locations at a resort hotel in the south of England and a country manor house, the presence of a dimwitted aristocrat who is called “Squiffy” and talks nonsense, and frequent references to golf. It is reasonable to assume that Plum chose to adapt the play in this way to appeal to English audiences, particularly those playgoers who were familiar with his writing.

From a Stock Ending to Open Possibilities

WODEHOUSE'S SECOND, and crucial, creative decision was to revise the timing and nature of events in Acts 2 and 3. This decision changed Sally's dramatic arc from a simple submission to the opening of a new phase of life with all of its unknowns.

Act 2 of Fodor's play extends well beyond Mici's late-night arrival at the estate. It continues with an antagonistic tête-à-tête between her and Juci, and a second angry confrontation between Mici and Balint. This has been overheard by Juci, who had lain down on the sitting room sofa. Balint offers Juci his bedroom, saying that he has decided to sit up all night and catch up with the work he has been neglecting. He goes to his desk; Juci sits and watches. Their conversation about dairy farming ensues. Juci experiences her symptoms of “acute love,” and the second act ends.

In Fodor's third act, the aunt and Balint have an early-morning conversation. She notices that he is happy and confuses him by saying he owes it all to her. He goes out for a walk and she then greets Mici, surprised that she spent the night in the guest bedroom, not in Balint's. When Virgil emerges from the same room, the aunt is shocked. This couple and the aunt depart. Juci comes out of Balint's bedroom. They had spent the night in each other's arms and Juci is very happy. When Balint wants them to marry, she initially refuses, holding to her self-concept as a strong and independent woman: “I don't need any other name. I am Dr. Juci Szabó. I don't need to have anybody marry me.” She also mentions her medical responsibilities in Budapest. But then the

aunt meets Juci, brings her bridal flowers, and describes work she can do on the estate. Juci gives in: "At first one says 'never,' then one says, 'perhaps,' but now everything is all right." The final line of the play is her asking, "Tell me, darling, who is going to be our family doctor?"

Wodehouse chose to eliminate much of this material from his adaptation. By ending the second act with Lottie's arrival, her embrace of Bill, and Sally's shocked viewing of this scene, he provided some suspense and a hook for the upcoming Act 3. By placing the tender exchange between Sally and Bill about his agricultural work and her self-diagnosis of acute love at the end of the play, he showed respect for his audience. Dr. Juci's agreement to wed and live with Balint may provide a stock-in-trade conclusion to a romantic comedy, but her sudden abandonment of both her career and her proud convictions stretches credibility. Wodehouse wisely eliminated this.

Moreover, the ending of *Good Morning, Bill!* leaves unsaid what Sally will do next. Plum trusted that his audience would not require every question to be answered; he let them rely on their own imaginations. Would Sally become a rural doctor? Would she commute to London for half a week, driving with Sir Hugo and two sets of golf clubs? You decide.

From Continental to British Sexuality

A THIRD SERIES of creative decisions that Wodehouse made revolved around his need to tone down the casual sexuality of 1920s Budapest.

A good example of this process is early in the first act, when Bill tells Lottie he is returning to the country and not taking her with him.

Lottie: And what's the matter with taking me along?

Bill: I don't think you would be quite in the picture.

Lottie: I'm not fit to associate with your beastly vicars and ploughboys, eh?

This is a cleaning up of Fodor's lines:

Balint: You don't by any chance think that I would take you home with me!

Mici: Why, am I not sufficiently comme il faut?

Balint: You were badly bred in the nursery.

Mici: But I breed well in the bedroom.

Balint: That is not enough!

The script of *Sally Smith* submitted to the Lord Chamberlain had already eliminated a key sexual

element from the Fodor play—that Juci sleeps with Balint. But Wodehouse had left Lottie and Tidmouth with a night together in the same bedroom. Comparing the initial Wodehouse script to the final *Good Morning, Bill!*, we see how the censor prodded Wodehouse to prune repeatedly toward something acceptable to this keeper of British sensibilities. Most of the changes are recorded as handwritten cross-outs and insertions onto the original submitted copy.

In Act 3 of *Dr. Juci*, Balint's aunt is surprised when Virgil emerges from Mici's bedroom: she had assumed that Mici had slept in Balint's room with him. In *Sally Smith*, Sir Hugo sees Tidmouth come out of the guest bedroom just after Lottie. He is shocked.

Sir Hugo: Lord Tidmouth! Did . . . did . . . did you spend the night in that room?

Tidmouth: Well—er—er—as a matter of fact, yes. Frightfully sorry. Sort of thing that might have happened to anybody.

The Lord Chamberlain's Office objected to this, apparently in response to an irate letter from a theater patron six weeks after the show had opened. The British Library script has two pages appended, reflecting changes that Wodehouse made to this scene and resubmitted to the Lord Chamberlain. At the top of the first page is a note (in Plum's handwriting?) and this sentence, in red type: "This is the alteration of dialogue and cuts now being played."

Sir Hugo [*staggering back*]: Lord Tidmouth, what are you doing in that room?

Tidmouth: I was just coming out.

Sir Hugo: How long have you been in there?

Tidmouth: If you must know, I climbed down the rain pipe just now to have a little chat with Lottie.

Sir Hugo does not believe him; he leaves to go find Bill. There follows a dialogue between Lottie and Tidmouth that shows he was telling the truth: Lottie had no idea that he was even in her room. But the published version of *Good Morning, Bill!* contains none of this. In the final version of the play, Sir Hugo departs before Tidmouth appears. Plum apparently decided to further censor himself and avoid any possible suggestion that Tidmouth slept with Lottie.

Another example of Plum's scrubbing his earlier draft to produce the final play is when Sir Hugo attempts to buy Lottie off. In *Sally Smith*, she mistakenly assumes that Sir Hugo is offering her cash to become his mistress.

Lottie: What have you got there?

Sir Hugo [*opening his hand*]: Money.

Lottie [*eagerly*]: Money!

Sir Hugo: Banknotes. And—if you're sensible—they're for you.

Lottie: For me? How do you mean, sensible?

Sir Hugo: Well—shall we say nice and obliging?

Lottie: Oh!

Sir Hugo: Listen, my dear. I want you to do someone a little act of kindness. And, the moment you have done it, you get these.

Lottie [*chucking him under his chin*]: Well, aren't you the sly old thing! And I never as much as even expected that you felt like that to me. Was it love at first sight or did it come gradual?

Sir Hugo [*aghast*]: Good God! This is appalling. No, no, you misunderstand me.

Lottie: Don't you love me?

Sir Hugo: No.

Lottie: Don't you want to cover me with jewels?

Sir Hugo: No, I do NOT!

Absolutely none of this wonderful material exists in *Good Morning, Bill!*

Garnishes of Wodehousean Humor

A FOURTH CREATIVE DECISION that Plum made when adapting *Dr. Juci Szabó* was inserting humorous dialogue of his own, even as he included much of Fodor's ingratiating humor—e.g., the delightful dialogue between Juci and Balint about bacteria in milk and the recurrent joke of Virgil's attempts to return the umbrella that he had borrowed from Balint ten years prior, took with him on his many honeymoons, and then holds on to as he and Mici drive off to Budapest.

As one would expect, Wodehouse's added jokes can be found throughout the play. Just one example, at the start of Act 2, when Balint is restlessly awaiting the arrival of Dr. Juci, he tells Virgil to stop his out-loud reading of a newspaper article full of ridiculous (and funny) place names in Arabic. But what annoys Bill in the same situation is Tidmouth's playing patience and singing aloud to himself as he places the cards.

Bill: Do you mean to say you really get any pleasure out of that rotten game?

Tidmouth: Damned good game. Did you ever hear the story of the ventriloquist who played Patience? He used to annoy his wife by holding long conversations with himself during his sleep. It had become such a trial

for the poor woman she had thoughts of getting a divorce. And then one evening . . . [*pauses and plays a card*] . . . by the greatest good luck, he caught himself cheating at Patience and never spoke to himself again.

Bill: Silly idiot.

It can be safely said that Fodor's play is quite funny, but Wodehouse's adaptation is funnier.

Wodehouse's Adaptation of Wodehouse

THE FOUR-STOP JOURNEY that began with *Dr. Juci Szabó* ended in 1931, when Plum published his short novel *Doctor Sally*.

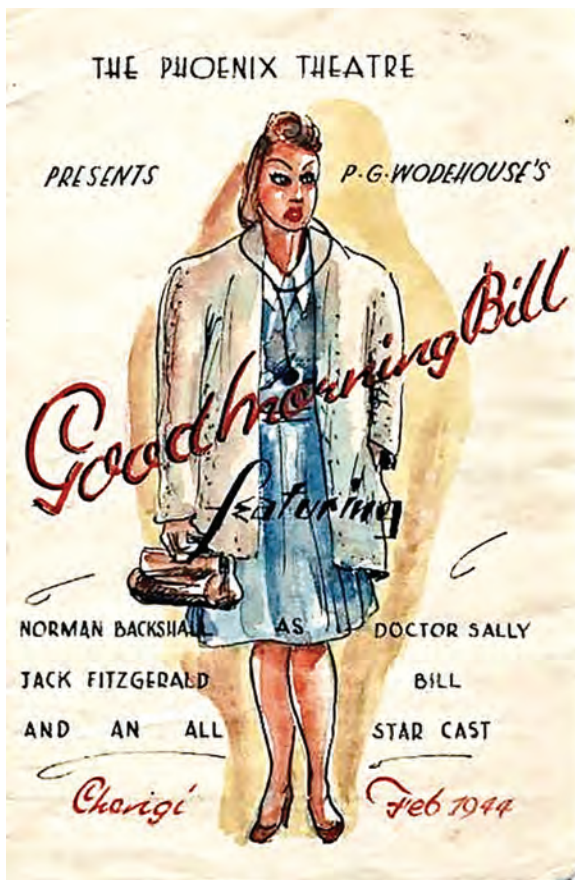
This book is a delightful read. Its plot and characters are virtually the same as in the play, except that Bill's name is Bannister, not Paradene; Sally is an American; and Lottie's surname is Higginbotham, not Burke. She is a widow. Not only that, but she and Tidmouth were previously married!

In a novel, Wodehouse could add some outdoor scenes and report on characters' thoughts and feelings. For example, Chapter 1 opens with Sally playing on the green of the eighteenth hole of a golf course at a seaside resort. Having seen her play, Sir Hugo rushes over to praise her. They talk about golf and medicine, and Sir Hugo complains to her about his nephew. Chapter 9 is set in the car as Sally is being driven from London to Bill's manor house to treat his "medical emergency." It is also entirely devoted to Sally's thoughts and feelings as she anticipates seeing him again.

Conclusion

UNLIKE *The Play's the Thing*, in which his adaptation stuck closely to Molnár's plot, setting, and characters, the story of Plum's creation of *Good Morning, Bill!* shows a master craftsman at work at all levels of his script, though unfortunately constrained by the archaic British censor. It would be fun to see a production of Plum's script of *Sally Smith*, a slightly more risqué Wodehouse, before the LCO bowdlerized it. One final note: A copy of *Good Morning, Bill!* can be found in *Four Plays* (Methuen, 1983), and the novel *Doctor Sally* is, of course, readily available.





In connection with this article on Hungarian playwrights, Mark Rieber and Steve Wieland found this very interesting poster for a production of *Good Morning, Bill!* during World War II. The Japanese camp Changi held thousands of British and Australian POWs after the fall of Singapore. Among their many morale-boosting musicals and plays was Dr. Sally's story, here promoted by POW Des Bettany. This poster is reproduced with kind permission of his family. See more at www.changipowart.com.

Newt Crossing

FROM ROBERT BRUCE: It brings a tear to the eye and warmth to the heart on a chilly winter morning here in England. An article from the January 24, 2023, *New York Times*, entitled "A Big Night for Newts, and for a California Newt Brigade," described the newt population explosion due to the unusually wet winter. The challenge has become the number of squashed newts trying to cross the road (and they have a good reason for crossing the road, to get to their rendezvous points). Fortunately, many volunteers are helping shepherd the newts across a one-mile stretch of Chileno Valley Road in the hills of Petaluma. Here's the article in full: <https://tinyurl.com/yhmjzwbw>

Chris Dueker PGW Books

DR. CHRIS DUEKER was a frequent speaker at TWS conventions and was known for his dry and hilarious wit, as well as for his great research into some obscure corners of the Wodehouse world. His widow, Joyce, has mentioned that he has left a few volumes that might be of interest to our readers and collectors. If you have interest in any/all of these, let me know, and I'll help you get in touch with Joyce. I understand that Chris left perhaps another 200 books in addition to the prizes below, which Joyce wants to share with Plum-appreciating recipients.

—OM

Piccadilly Jim. Dodd, Mead, 1917

Bertie Wooster Sees It Through. Simon and Schuster, 1955

Mike and Psmith. Meredith Press (date not specified)

Carry On, Jeeves. Herbert Jenkins (date not specified)

The Small Bachelor. George H. Doran, 1927

The Prince and Betty. W. J. Watt, 1912

Jeeves. George H. Doran, 1924

Midsomer Plums

DAVID RUEF sent along this bit: *Midsomer Murders* is the U.K.'s longest-running contemporary detective drama, having aired on ITV since 1997. Episode 4 from Season 13 clearly shows a bookshelf of Wodehouse books in the background. (You'll find this about 46 minutes in.) Based on the series by author Caroline Graham, *Midsomer Murders* follows the efforts of Detective Chief Inspector Barnaby to solve crimes that occur in the isolated English county of Midsomer, a peaceful place on the outside but filled with amoral and snobbish eccentrics and their vices. Sounds a bit like parts of the Wodehouse canon, and p'raps the bookshelf was a nod in the Plum direction?



"And she's got brains enough for two, which is the exact quantity the girl who marries you will need."

The Adventures of Sally (1922)

Chapters Corner

WHAT IS YOUR chapter up to these days? Please send all news to Gary Hall (see back page). Note that webmaster Noel Merrill keeps chapter items posted on the society website. It's good to send advance info about upcoming events to Noel; his contact information is on the last page of this issue.

Anglers' Rest

(Seattle and vicinity)

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Blandings Castle Chapter

(Greater San Francisco Bay area)

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sfblandingscastle@gmail.com



AFTER ALMOST three years of our World-Wide Blandings Zoom calls (our first was Sunday, May 3, 2020, and they have continued on the last Sunday of every month at 1 PM Pacific Time), we took Christmas 2022 off, but we were hard at it again in January 2023. We are all grateful to Rowena Southard, who has been hosting us these three years.

At the recent San Diego convention, some of our participants finally got an opportunity to meet in person. Freda Kirkham got to meet Noel Bushnell. Kathleen Murray and her husband, Arthur, came to San Diego based on the recommendations of the Zoomers. We all found everyone to be even more fun in person. After the convention, our October meeting was filled with remembrances of that event.

In November and January, our regular meetings continued. Our topics range wide and far. It is often a bit like an evening at the Emsworth Arms and we are all conspirators in the planning of potting Baxter. We have discussed some of the prominent society members' books: Paul Kent, Tony Ring, and the late Norman Murphy. We have spent time on the finer, and not-so-fine, points of cricket. (The Cricket Experience event in San Diego helped our discussion this time around.) Discussions wander to Penguin books, Tom Stoppard plays, Stephen Fry, and back to Wodehouse.

Elin Woodger, Neil Midkiff, Dan Garrison, and Tony Ring often raise the bar with a bit of Wodehouse scholarship while some of the other attendees raise a glass. Having Tim Andrew and Hilary and Robert Bruce on as well has helped to make some of Plum's

London places and settings more real for many of us. Be it catching up, a bit of Wodehouse scholarship, or just plain discussion, it is always a fun time at Blandings Castle, in person or virtually via Zoom.

Should anyone wish to drop by the virtual Emsworth Arms, please reach out to the above email contact with your email address, and either Lord Emsworth or Baxter will get back to you with the current month's Zoom details. You do not need to be a resident of the northern California region. We have regular attendees from the U.K., Australia, and many of the U.S. chapters, including the NEWTS, the Northwodes, the Chicago Accident Syndicate, and others. All who have interest in Wodehouse are welcome.

—Bill Franklin

The Broadway Special

(New York City and vicinity)

Contact: Amy Plofker

914-631-2554

AmyPlf@verizon.net



Capital! Capital!

(Washington, D.C., and vicinity)

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susandparsons@aol.com



Chapter One

(Greater Philadelphia area)

Contact: Mark Reber

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MEMBERS OF Chapter One met by Zoom on Sunday, November 13, to report to the members and to share memories of the San Diego convention. Steve Wieland and David Ruef offered a series of photographs that provided a summary and reminiscence of important events: cricket, a harbor cruise, a concert with Maria Jette and Dan Chouinard, the Riveting Talks, the banquet, the Sunday brunch. The latter included a book-tour visit by Chef Anatole (our own David Ruef, of course), with interviewer Karen Ruef helping out

Attending the November 13 meeting were Mark and Karen Reber, Karen Byrne, Bob Rains, David and Karen Ruef, Steve Wieland, Susan Barr, and Tom and Betty Hooker.

—Steve Wieland

AT OUR JANUARY 9 MEETING, we touched on a wide variety of topics, including David Ruef's PGW T-shirt from the San Diego convention, *Jeopardy*, NPR, West Coast weather, congressional hijinks, and a book

called *Black Voices of Cape May* from the Cape May Center for Community Arts, where Hope Gaines and David MacKenzie are active.

In terms of future meetings, Mark requested that any ideas for discussion topics be emailed to him. Mark proposed that, at the next gathering, we watch a DVD recording of a performance of the first Bolton-Wodehouse-Kern musical, *Have a Heart* (1917). This performance was by the Ohio Light Opera in 2016, perhaps in anticipation of the 100th anniversary of the musical's debut on Broadway.

We've decided to alternate between virtual and live meetings and have settled on a date of Sunday, March 5, 2023, for our next meeting. The meeting will take place at our longtime venue, Cavanaugh's Headhouse Square on South Second Street in Philadelphia.

Bob Rains reminded us that the next TWS convention will take place in Nashville in 2024. Several members indicated that they hope to attend.

With the formal business items settled (or "the potatoes sorted," as some Quakers say), we turned to discussion of two golf stories, "Feet of Clay" and "The Heel of Achilles." In general, we found them to be funny and enjoyable reads, with memorable descriptions of the characters and amusing metaphors. A *Wodehouse Playhouse* adaptation of "Feet of Clay" was enjoyable—apart from the laugh track that was a standard annoyance of 1970s television.

Both stories have a Pekingese dog (crucial in "Feet of Clay" but more tangential in "The Heel of Achilles"). We mused on the issue of Wodehouse and dogs and children (both frequently seeming to be *bêtes noires* for Wodehouse in his stories). Bob Rains noted that topics like this might have been addressed in past *Plum Lines* issues. He recommended consulting the extensive index on wodehouse.org, compiled by Elin Woodger.

We discussed the interesting character of Captain Jack Fosdyke, who appears in "Feet of Clay" and other stories. His knack for bragging and exaggeration reminded us of a recently elected congressman from Long Island. Coincidentally, Long Island was also the setting for some of these stories.

The notion in "The Heel of Achilles" that one could become an elite level golfer through mere force of will prompted some challenge and disagreement. Nevertheless, we thoroughly enjoyed the clever description of the protagonist and his mannerisms. The grounds for his three divorces led to some reminiscences by our members with matrimonial experience as American barristers. Our discussion concluded with further appreciation for the Master's imaginative use of language in plot and character descriptions.

Participants in this virtual meeting were: Karen Byrne, Susan Barr, Steve Wieland, Ben Wieland, Betty and Tom Hooker, Bob Rains, Karen and David Ruef, Hope Gaines, David MacKenzie, Karen and Mark Reber, Rebecca Reber, and Bob Sloan.

—Robert L. Sloan

Chicago Accident Syndicate
(Chicago and thereabouts)
Contact: Daniel & Tina Garrison
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The Clients of Adrian Mulliner
(For enthusiasts of both PGW and Sherlock Holmes)
Contact: Elaine Coppola
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ON TUESDAY, January 3, 2023, a Junior Bloodstain was held at 7 PM via Zoom in advance of the Baker Street Irregulars (BSI) weekend.

Aficionados of Sherlock Holmes and the stories of P. G. Wodehouse discussed an early short story by Wodehouse, "The Strange Disappearance of Mr. Buxton-Smythe" (published in *Public School Magazine*, December, 1901). This work featuring Wotsing and Burdock Rose was enjoyed for its many Sherlockian references and great humor.

—Elaine Coppola

The Den(ver) of the Secret Nine
(Denver and vicinity)
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petkusj@virtuallight.com



The Drone Rangers
(Houston and vicinity)
Contact: Carey Tynan
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cctynan@aol.com



The Flying Pigs
(Cincinnati area and elsewhere)
Contact: Susan Pace or Bill Scrivener
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billscrivener47@gmail.com
or lpspace@cinci.rr.com



The Fourth Dimension

(Zoom Chapter)

Contact: Freda Kirkham

fskirkham@gmail.com

(443) 904-7364

Zoom meetings are 11 AM Pacific Time on the first Saturday of each month. Email Freda to be invited, or use the standing Zoom Meeting ID of 825-2310-7377.

ACHEERY “WHAT HO!” from the Fourth Dimension! The meandering conviviality and jolly readings continue. Topics have included: Theatre Blackouts: Blessing or Curse?; Gilded Haunts of Vice: Why Not More Widely Available?; Wodehouse’s Ghost Stories: Who Knew?; and, of course, courtesy of Ninad Wagle and Alison Strickland: “What the Well-Dressed Man Is Swearing: A Fond Look at Wodehousian Insults.” Sunny afternoons on the Blandings lawn are currently in full swing, and we look forward to Mulliner nights soon.

Meanwhile, some of us have enjoyed an online Wodehouse walk in virtual London hosted live by fellow Wodehousean, and considerable talent, Richard Burnip. For those unfortunates like myself who missed the original and justly legendary rambles led by Norman Murphy, it’s a joy to see someone carrying the torch. Er, the umbrella. That is, the cursor. More details about these walks are at walks.com. Thanks to the U.K. Society and *Wooster Sauce* for introducing me to these.

In conclusion, the Fourthians continue to revel in the ether and look forward to seeing you soon. Hurray!

—Freda Kirkham



Freda writes: Here’s a possible relative of the Empress, spotted at the San Diego Airport after the recent TWS convention.

Friends of the Fifth Earl of Ickenham

(Buffalo, New York, and vicinity)

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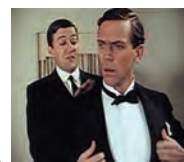
A Little More Bertie Than Jeeves

(Waynesville/Sylva, North Carolina)

Contact: Beth Baxley

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The Melonsquashville (TN) Literary Society

(Tennessee)

Contact: Ken Clevenger

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THE NEW YEAR! And a resolution to renew our TWS regional chapter meetings in person. But hold—a complication arises—wheels within wheels, if you understand my meaning. Yes, we want to get together to browse, sluice, and socialize as we delight in our Wodehouse-infused world, but can we reasonably expect Bill and Noel, our Alabama-based regular participants, to drive up to Knoxville? Would Lee make the trek down from Virginia? And what of our Ottawan Francophone, Sophie? Crossing an international border is hardly a step to be taken lightly. And, in truth, Beth B., Beth C., Jenny, Jane, and Mary Jane would have to cross mountains, literally, to join in from western North Carolina, whose chapter, “A Little More Bertie Than Jeeves,” is very much alive and well.

So, Joan, Fran, Audrey, Alan, Liz, Debbie, and Joyce, and doubtless other Melonsquashvillians, find ourselves on the horns of a dilemma. Since June 2022, and going back much farther than that, we have Zoomed with “Jeeves Takes Charge,” “Jeeves and the Unbidden Guest,” “Without the Option,” “The Inferiority Complex of Old Sippy,” “Jeeves and the Song of Songs,” “The Metropolitan Touch” for our December nod to Christmas, and, to start the New Year, “The Clicking of Cuthbert.” These have been wonderful events. We have learned about the publication history of the stories and about the way Plum used short stories in magazines, and later in hardback short-story collections, and often in additional hardback versions (Folio Society, Omnibus editions, “*The World of . . .*” types of books), and even rare stand-alone editions of a few short stories. So there can easily be four or more versions of the same story, slightly tweaked by Wodehouse or a space-niggling editor. We tend to prefer the U.K. magazine versions from the Madame Eulalie site. (Thank you, Neil, Raja, and the able technical crew who support that ongoing treasure trove.)

The way the different U.S. and U.K. illustrators envision the characters and settings forms a remarkable feature of the publication process. We delight in finding all the common Wodehousian touches like French

phrases, Latin tags, stock jokes, literature and Biblical allusions, and period slang. We rely, when available, on the Madame Eulalie-based annotation lists for guidance. We often add research of our own. But, of course, the story, read out loud, is the key component of mirth and joy.

So, what to do? Please check the next issue of *Plum Lines* to see how we resolved the conundrum.

—Ken Clevenger

The Mottled Oyster Club / Jellied Eels

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The New England Wodehouse Thingummy Society (NEWTS)

(Boston and New England)

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or Roberta Towner, robertatowner@gmail.com



*The NEWTS gather for a photo op,
with beagle Sunny joining them virtually.*

THE NEWTS gathered in early December at the Massachusetts headquarters of illustrious Wodehousean Elin Woodger and her equally illustrious and scholarly hound, Sunny. We celebrated the then-upcoming holidays and all things Wodehouse. An appropriately frivolous gift exchange was followed by a group read. The reading of selected pages from *Hot Water* included diverting renditions of French passages by imposters. The next nottle will be in late March, when NEWTS get excited for springtime.

—Lynn Vesley-Gross

The Northwodes

(St. Paul, Minneapolis, and vicinity)

Contact: Mike Eckman

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AT THE NORTHWODES' November Zoom discussion of *Quick Service*, Holly Windle was confused by Joss's history. Was he cheated out of his fortune and how big was it? Also, who were Brits and who were Americans? Steptoe began by prefacing declarations with "Listen." Later he'd begin: "Look," and Joss would point to this inconsistency, telling him that he was supposed to say, "Listen." Joe Dolson thought Wodehouse was critiquing his own use of Americanisms and poking fun at himself. Bruce Willey wondered if Plum coined "hymeneal" (wedding) trousers. Maria Jette clarified that "hymen" is not just a body part, and Richard Rames added that Hymen the Greek god of marriage ceremonies is all over nineteenth-century pop culture. Kris Fowler defined Joss as one of Plum's great "buzzers," an excellent talker. In *The Penguin Wodehouse Companion*, Richard Osborne writes, "Psmith the buzzer; Bertie the burbler; and Jeeves the orotund." Maria loved the toasts in the sherry scene: "Skin off your nose" and "Here's mud in your eye." Janna Kysilko recalled her grandfather using the "Hey, hey!" toast from later in the scene.

At the January Zoom, we discussed *Jeeves in the Offing*. We liked the witty and entertaining book, despite its flaws. Karen Langenfeld liked how Jeeves throws Bertie under the bus, naming him as the subject of Sir Roderick's observations. Pop Glossop's warming relationship with Bertie was discussed. Phyllis Mills wasn't goofy enough, she didn't have the Bassett's inspired sappiness. Holly disliked Plum's allusions to Bertie wearing a chair around his neck like an Elizabethan ruff, as worn by Thomas Otway, and resident ghosts appearing as in Poe, feeling that these were inaccuracies or out of place. Maria postulated that these slips or inconsistencies arise for authors who have grown so famous that no one edits them.

Richard recited Longfellow's "A Psalm of Life." Holly pictured the schoolboy Wodehouse who had this and many other references seared into his soul. What great literature and art are being taught to students today? Will future literature be as rich?

—Mike Engstrom

The Orange Plums

(Orange County, California)

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ADMIRAL BIFFEN HERE, reporting in via semaphore on the Orange Plums' latest annual nod to the "aquatic contest between Oxford and Cambridge" (from "Without the Option")—Boat Race Night. And shiver me timbers, it was one for the ages!

First, it took place at a new venue for the group: the clubhouse at Lia's condo complex, which featured—along with plenty of space and comfy chairs—a pool table easily converted for game-board play. This brought the opportunity for a potluck: snacks and comestibles of all kinds in heaping measure, in fact! Our crew knows how to eat.

A special treat of another sort was having former regular member Karen Shottling temporarily in town from her usual East Coast digs to join us. She was the emcee for our competition, reading the Plummian trivia question cards, and she also filled in as player-in-absentia for one of our missing regulars. A further treat was the first-time attendance of our recruited-from-the-convention new member, Allie Weeks. A hearty welcome aboard, Allie!

Game play was pitched, not only because of fast-paced questions (with Karen filling in fun backstory on many of the correct answers), but also because the game board's rolls and swells (from long-rolled storage) made the waves a challenge to crest, keeping the oarsmen on their proverbial toes. With time running short, only one round-trip across the river was mounted, with the triumphal announcement of the first-place winner's conquest all but lost in the excitement over the follow-up revelation of the finisher coming in next. For you see, dear reader, it is that contender who must take home our loathsome blot on the scene, the gargantuan foul object—er, the second-place trophy.

As had happened once before, the Second Placer—by sheer coincidence, mind you—turned out in this case to be the absent competitor whose game piece (a shark, for he's a lawyer) was being adeptly played by Karen in his stead: our highly esteemed Tom Campbell, who some may remember as the lead costume judge at our recent convention. Tom—an excitable boy who goes by the non de plum Rupert Steggles in our chapter—must now learn to reap what he'd earlier sown.

Of course, regardless of results, our chapter's Boat Race Night success is measured only in laughs per minute, not in questions correctly answered or in numbers rolled on the die for racing position.

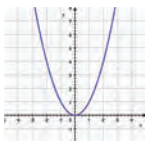
Next month, our book discussion (inspired by a compelling convention talk): *Leave It to Psmith*.

I have the honor to be Your Obedient Servant,
—Admiral George J. "Fruity" Biffen (Jeff Porteous)

The Pale Parabolites

(Toronto and vicinity)

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The Pickering Motor Company

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DUE TO A MULTITUDE of scheduling conflicts, the Pickering Motor Company's annual holiday gathering at Larry Nahigian's house did not occur until January 8, 2023. Fortunately, the attendees were still full of holiday spirit. Or maybe that was just the effect of Larry's mimosas. Whatever, a good time was had by all.

There was no reading assignment for the holiday meeting, which is usually about socializing and catching up on what the members have been up to. However, the Pickerings are avid readers, so when we get together, we tend to talk about books. At this meeting, a group in the living room had a long discussion about spy novels. There was also a discussion about Dry January. Not many volunteers for that one.

Larry prepared and served shakshuka, a delicious baked egg dish that he always makes for our holiday meetings. All agreed that it was one of the best batches he has ever made. All in all a very good meeting. We plan to do it again next year.

—Robert Walter

The Pittsburgh Millionaires Club

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The Plum Crazyes

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UNDETERRED BY closed bridges, the Harrisburg Marathon, and a longtime Harrisburg restaurant that moved to Carlyle after we made our reservation, the Plum Crazyes met on Sunday, November 13, at Millworks for a noon brunch. We welcomed new members Mary and Wade Hinkle (formerly of Capital! Capital!) as well as Sylvie Davidson. Uttam Paudel happened to be passing through town, and he stopped by on his way to his new digs in Johnston. Longtime members Andrea Jacobsen and Bob Rains, Henriette and David Evans, Lisa and Russ Vriezen, Nancy and Chuck Buckley, and Tom and Betty Hooker also attended.

After a tasty brunch, we moved on to the Gamut Theatre to enjoy a performance of *Innocent Merriment; or, An Evening with Gilbert & Sullivan!* The actors presented a review of well-known and lesser-known music from the Gilbert & Sullivan repertoire. We were impressed by the first-rate voices, the energetic dancing and acting, and the musical accompaniment by the talented pianist. It was good to attend a live performance after many months spent mostly online.

We are looking forward to a spring gathering. Time and place to be announced.

—Betty Hooker

The Plum Street Plummies

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A Knightly gathering

THE KNIGHTS gathered in Deventer, The Netherlands, on October 15, which was also Wodehouse's 141st birthday. We had a lively meeting with Yrsa Zuiderhoek via Zoom. She is a seventeen-year-old Belgian student who had entered the U.K. Wodehouse Society Essay Prize contest in the junior category. She had also recently done a thesis about Wodehouse for her high school in Ghent. Yrsa did not win the prize (that was Anna Sanchez O'Brien from Essex), but we were cheered by her Plummy enthusiasm.

We looked at the new research pages on our website, which now has a list of all known Dutch Wodehouse translations in newspapers, weekly and monthly magazines, radio plays, and movies. You can find this resource at: <https://tinyurl.com/8wcpjad5>

The theme at this meeting was Wodehousean flowers. Of course, everyone knows Aunt Dahlia, Buttercup Day, Lord Emsworth's roses, and Madeline Bassett's daisy chain, but members found additional pieces to read out loud. We remembered the real Wodehouse dahlia offered in 1991 to our patron Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother via the British consul-general Denis Doble. And in June 1997, the deep red rose our society named after Wodehouse was offered to Dame Rosemary Spencer, the U.K. ambassador in The Netherlands.



We were also given another Anatole recipe (for the sixth time—becoming a bit of a tradition): the *Cèpes à la Rossini* (cèpes with foie gras).

There were some new translations presented by our members: Leonard Beuger talked about the new *Geluk in de morgen* (*Joy in the Morning*). Donald Duk, twin brother of Ronald, talked about his difficulty in translating the slang in the story "By Advice of Counsel." He chose the slang of the city of The Hague to translate the story as *Vrijblijvende raad*.



Dutch translator Leonard Beuger sports his bobby helmet.

One of our members had passed away, and his family donated a hundred English Wodehouse novels to our society, so that every member present could return home with a stack of new acquisitions. The raffle tickets were drawn from a bobby's helmet.

—Peter Nieuwenhuizen

Rugby in All Its Niceties
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The Size 14 Hat Club
(Halifax, Nova Scotia)
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Wit, Wisdom, and the Daily Dozen

JEFF PORTEOUS sent this along from the online site
Get Wit Quick on January 19:

The best exercise regimen is provided, unsurprisingly, by P. G. Wodehouse. He lived to the age of 93 and wrote about that many books, a feat of endurance he credited to a strict routine. Each and every morning from 1919 until his death in 1975, he would perform the Daily Dozen, a set of twelve squats, stretches, and lunges. And every afternoon, according to a 1971 *New Yorker* profile, he would take a nice long walk.

As he explained in his autobiography *Over Seventy*, the goal of all that exertion was continued laziness: "The less tonnage, the easier the heart can take it, and I am all in favour of letting my heart loaf a bit, always provided it understands that it must not stop beating."

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We appreciate your articles and observations. Send them to Gary Hall at the email or USPS address on this page. Deadlines are February 1, May 1, August 1, November 1.

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