



Plum Lines

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Wodehouseans! Please take note of the 2024
TWS convention articles on pages 4 and 5.

Wodehouse and Liberace: The Long-Lost Link

BY BOB RAINS

Bob Rains would like to acknowledge his debt to Dickinson College music professor Vincent Stephens for calling to his attention certain information regarding Mr. Liberace. At the recent TWS convention in San Diego, Bob delivered this paper to the assembled crowd.

ONE MAN was an inherently shy author of English fiction who would disappear from parties at his own house so that he could go hide in his study and write. The other was a flamboyant, often outrageous, pianist and entertainer known as “Mr. Showmanship.” I have found no evidence that the two ever met or even corresponded. And yet there were certain parallels between their lives and an actual connection which appears to have been lost in the mists of time.

Władziu (Walter) Valentino Liberace was born on May 16, 1919, in a Milwaukee suburb to an Italian father, Salvatore, and a Polish-American mother, Frances. His parents had three children in addition to Walter: George, Angelina, and Rudolph (Rudy). But the marriage was a troubled one, and Salvatore eventually left his wife for another woman. The divorce was granted in 1941, and Walter would not see his father again for more than a dozen years.

Walter (let's now call him Liberace because that what he

later legally changed his name to) began studying piano at age four. A few years later, he started taking classical piano lessons with Florence Kelly, a pianist and teacher at the Wisconsin College of Music. In high school, he didn't engage in sports, explaining that he had to protect his hands. He liked to play dress-up, once appearing at school as Greta Garbo, complete with a slinky gown, blonde wig, and heavy makeup. He was popular with his fellow students because of his piano playing but, not too surprisingly, was occasionally taunted as a sissy.

Liberace started playing professional gigs, either solo or with a band, while still in high school. Although he did well academically, college was financially out of the question as his father had lost his job by the time Liberace graduated. In any event, Liberace's ambitions

lay elsewhere. He toured with the Jay Mills Orchestra, accompanying a singer later known as Vivian Blaine (who played Adelaide in *Guys and Dolls* on Broadway and in the 1955 movie). At age twenty, he played a concert with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, but he was confronted with the question of whether to be a concert pianist or a nightclub entertainer. Presciently, his classical piano teacher, Florence Kelly, suggested that he combine the two.

In search of more sophisticated audiences, Liberace moved to New Jersey in 1941, which enabled him to have access to New York City venues. He succeeded in getting a Music



Bob Rains channels his inner Liberace.
(photo by Robert Fox)

Corporation of America (MCA) agent to represent him, and according to his biographer, Bob Thomas, he also “was suddenly free to admit his homosexual desires and express his affection for other men.” After New Jersey, Liberace moved to Los Angeles, where he acquired a large Blüthner piano covered in gold with a matching piano stool. He worked in clubs and bars, and “found compliant young men, both in and out of uniform, in search of an evening’s pleasure.”

Returning to New York, Liberace started developing the act for which he was to become famous. He shipped the Blüthner piano to concerts, gave chatty introductions to each piece, mixed various musical forms (including shortened versions of classical pieces, leaving out the “boring bits”), invited women from the audience to join him in duets, often introduced his mother to the audience and kissed her onstage, and played with a lighted candelabrum on his piano. He played the Plaza Hotel; performed with the New Jersey Symphony; played on radio; met other musicians such as Leonard Bernstein; toured the country, headlining in Las Vegas, the Hollywood Bowl, Madison Square Garden, and Carnegie Hall; and played command performances at the White House for Truman and Eisenhower. He worked with his brother George as his manager or band leader. Liberace appeared in early television shows and launched his own eponymous syndicated series in 1952. He appeared in two not-very-successful Hollywood movies, *Sincerely Yours* and *South Sea Sinner*.

He knew all the entertainment greats of the day and was friendly with many of them. He even took part in an impromptu duet with Elvis Presley, with Liberace holding Presley’s guitar and Presley at the keyboard. Long before Elton John, Liberace wore lavish outfits with sequined tuxedos and capes sometimes weighing over one hundred pounds. Audiences, especially older women, loved him; serious music critics were generally dismissive. By the mid-1950s, Liberace was such a cultural phenomenon that, in the number one record of 1955, the Chordettes begged “Mr. Sandman” to send them a dream with “lots of wavy hair like Liberace.”

Despite some well-publicized but highly theoretical engagements, Liberace did not marry. Many older women fans voiced strong objections to the possibility of his abandoning his mother by getting married. When asked why he remained single, Liberace often replied, “I am looking for a girl like Mom and of whom Mom would approve.” Carefully hidden from the public were all the young men who hung around at his various houses, much to Mom’s and George’s dismay.

So let’s pause for a moment to compare and contrast Wodehouse and Liberace, two very different individuals,

but with much in common. Both were talented, hard-working, and very successful from a relatively early age. Both were distant from fathers who failed to provide financial support for their higher education. Both had less than gratifying Hollywood ventures. Both were often considered to be “low brow” (recall Wodehouse having been dismissed as a “performing flea”). But whereas Wodehouse was distant, practically estranged, from his mother, Liberace was absolutely devoted to his. Wodehouse had a long and successful marriage with Ethel; Liberace’s intimate affairs were far less conventional and staid. Despite these contrasts, both of these artists’ lives would be marked by controversy.

In Wodehouse’s case, the controversy exploded on July 15, 1941. As regular readers of *Plum Lines* will be well aware, Wodehouse was living at Le Touquet, France, when World War II broke out and France was conquered by the Nazis. He was interned as an enemy male civilian noncombatant under the age of sixty. After his release from internment, but still under control of the Nazis in Berlin, Wodehouse was persuaded to record five camp talks based on the journal he had kept, these talks to be broadcast to the United States, which was still officially neutral. The talks themselves were innocuous, giving an upbeat, stiff-upper-lip account of his internment. After the first two talks were broadcast to America, and before they were, without Wodehouse’s knowledge, rebroadcast to the U.K., the BBC was compelled by the British government on July 15 to broadcast a denunciation of Wodehouse by William Connor, who wrote for the *Daily Mirror* under the pen name “Cassandra.” Without apparently having heard the Berlin broadcasts, Connor ranted:

I have come to tell you tonight of the story of a rich man trying to make his last and greatest sale—that of his own country. . . . When the war broke out, Pelham Grenville Wodehouse was at Le Touquet—gambling. . . . On the last day of June of this year, Dr. Goebbels was ready. So was Pelham Wodehouse. He was eager and he was willing, and when they offered him Liberty in a country that has killed Liberty, he leapt at it. And Dr. Goebbels taking him into a high mountain, showed unto him all the Kingdoms of the world . . . and said unto him: “All this power will I give thee if thou wilt worship the Führer.” Pelham Wodehouse fell on his knees.

(See “The BBC’s *Wodehouse in Exile*,” *Plum Lines*, Winter 2015, and especially Iain Sproat’s *Wodehouse at War* for more detail.)

Wodehouse immediately became persona non grata in England. His books were banned and in some places even destroyed. The BBC ceased airing performances of his works. There were calls for his prosecution for treason. As a result, Wodehouse never returned to his home country after the war; he lived the last decades of his life in self-imposed exile in the United States.

Fifteen years later, on September 26, 1956, Liberace would have his own run-in with Fleet Street. He had arrived on the *Queen Mary* in Southampton the day before with Mom and George, and they proceeded by train to Waterloo Station, London, for what was to be his first concert tour of England. They were met by adoring fans both at the dock and at Waterloo. There was ample press coverage; Liberace had made sure of that. Most, but not all, of the coverage was positive, even enthusiastic. One article, however, published before his first England concert, stood out for its vituperation, reading in part:

[Liberace] is the summit of sex—the pinnacle of masculine, feminine, and neuter. Everything that he, she, and it can ever want . . . this deadly, winking, sniggling, snuggling, chromium-plated, scent-impregnated, luminous, quivering, giggling, fruit-flavored, mincing, ice-covered piece of mother love . . . He reeks with emetic language that can only make grown men long for a quiet corner, an aspidistra, a handkerchief, and the old heave-ho. Without doubt, he is the biggest sentimental vomit of all time.

Of course, the none-too-subtle implication of this rant was that Liberace was a homosexual, which was still a very serious allegation in England in the 1950s. At that time, private homosexual acts between consenting adults were still illegal and could be prosecuted (as was true in various parts of the United States). It had only been two years since World War II hero Alan Turing, credited as having developed the first modern computer, had been prosecuted for “gross indecency” with another man, pled guilty, and was given a choice between prison and “chemical castration.” Turing accepted the latter option, submitted to the “chemical castration,” and subsequently committed suicide.

So who was the author of this screed against Liberace? None other than William Connor, writing as Cassandra in the *Daily Mirror*.

Liberace’s mother was so upset that she took to her sickbed. Liberace sued Connor and the *Daily Mirror* for libel. Liberace’s highly publicized lawsuit, reported in detail in *Crying All the Way to the Bank* by Revel Barker,

came to trial in June 1959. Mr. Gilbert Beyfus QC appeared for Liberace and Mr. Gerald Gardiner QC for the defendants Connor and the *Daily Mirror*. (Factoid: Mr. Neville Faulks QC, who appeared as Gardiner’s junior, was the uncle of novelist Sebastian Faulks, author of the homage novel *Jeeves and the Wedding Bells*.)

QC Beyfus asserted in his opening that the article was intended to hold Liberace up to “hatred, ridicule and contempt,” and to mean that he was a homosexual. Turning to the defendants, Beyfus opined that “Mr. Connor is just a literary assassin who dips his pen in vitriol instead of ink and is hired by this sensational newspaper to murder reputations and hand out to the public those sensational articles on which its circulation is dependent.” And, in words to gladden the hearts of all loyal Wodehouseans, Beyfus asserted that by bringing his lawsuit, Liberace “was offering a helping hand to a host of people that [Connor] and the paper he works for have attacked cruelly, needlessly, unfairly and unjustly.”

On direct examination, Liberace denied Connor’s transparent innuendo:

Q. “Are you a homosexual?”

A. “No, sir.”

Q. “Have you ever indulged in homosexual practices?”

A. “No, sir, never in my life . . . I am against the practice because it offends convention and it offends society.”

Freelance author Dail Ambler testified that she had been hired by *Picture Post* to interview Connor after Liberace’s lawsuit was filed. According to her, Connor said, “This is going to be quite a bit of fun . . . Of course it is libel and he will take a lot of money out of us.” She asked, “If it was libel, why did you write it and why did they print it?” His answer: “They think it will be worth it for a week’s publicity.”

In his own testimony, Connor admitted that the interview with Dail Ambler had taken place but denied having made the incriminating statements. He claimed to be “astonished” that anyone would interpret his column as suggesting that Liberace was a homosexual. Although he had made many trips to America and regularly read many American newspapers, he had no idea that “fruit” was American slang for a homosexual. He maintained this ignorance even when confronted with the *American Thesaurus of Slang* showing precisely that connotation. He further denied that he intended to make Liberace appear contemptible or ridiculous.

Wikipedia’s article on Connor states that “the court case involved both sides lying under oath.” Could this be

true? (As a lawyer with more than 48 years' experience, I am at a loss to understand why anyone would find it remarkable.)

You will not be surprised, dear reader, to learn that the jury returned a verdict in favor of the plaintiff Liberace in the amount of £8,000, along with £14,000 court costs, reportedly the highest judgment for libel in British legal history to that time.

There's an old saying: "There is no such thing as bad publicity." The *Daily Mirror's* circulation rose after the trial, reaching a peak of 5.28 million readers in 1967. And Liberace made the *Guinness Book of Records* as the world's highest-paid entertainer of the 1960s and 1970s, out-earning both Elvis Presley and the Beatles.

A year after the Cassandra article in the *Daily Mirror*, a Hollywood rag called *Confidential* ran an article about Liberace, featuring a photo of him under which was written "Exclusive! Why Liberace's Theme Song Should Be 'Mad About the Boy!'" Liberace filed suit, which was ultimately settled with a payment to him of \$40,000. In a 1973 press conference, Liberace again denied his homosexuality.

Wodehouse was a far less litigious and far more forgiving person than Liberace. When he learned that Connor was in New York in 1953, Wodehouse invited him to lunch (according to a letter to William Townend) and "they got along like a couple of sailors on shore leave." They became pen pals, and years later Connor wrote in the *Daily Mirror* of his wish "to bury the whole [Wodehouse] story and to forgive and, where necessary, be forgiven."

In 1982, when Liberace was sued by his 23-year-old former live-in lover Scott Thorson for "palimony," he claimed that Thorson was just a disgruntled ex-employee who had gotten hooked on liquor and drugs. But he did settle the case by paying Thorson money and goods worth well in excess of \$200,000.

Liberace never recanted his testimony in the Cassandra case. When he died in 1987, his agent initially reported that the cause of death was congestive heart failure. But, after tissue testing, the county coroner ruled that "Mr. Liberace did not die as the result of cardiac arrest due to cardiac failure. . . . In layman's terms, Mr. Liberace died of an opportunistic disease caused by acquired immune deficiency syndrome."

Postscript: When Wodehouse was approaching his eightieth birthday in 1961, he learned that Evelyn Waugh intended to broadcast a defense of the Berlin broadcasts on the BBC. Wodehouse intervened with Waugh, asking him not to attack his friend Connor, and Waugh obliged. Four years later, in 1965, Liberace made

a cameo appearance in the movie *The Loved One*, based on Waugh's novel of the same name. He played Mr. Starker, a burial counselor at the Whispering Glades Cemetery. The following year, William Neil Connor was knighted by the Queen. Sir William died on April 6, 1967, from injuries incurred after falling out of bed—or maybe he was pushed?

Convention 2024!

BY ELLIOTT MILSTEIN

YOUR CONVENTION COMMITTEE is hard at work planning what we expect will be the largest and best convention ever. In preparation, we have decided to begin a full day early, with our Welcome Reception on the Thursday night, instead of Friday! Some of you may have already seen the news on our convention page at wodehouse.org, or on our Facebook page, Plum Crazy in Nashville. If you don't visit either of these places online, I suggest you start doing so. In addition to all of the other information, you can check out photos of previous conventions to get in the mood for the next one. Also, the registration form for the 2024 convention, as well as the link to make a reservation at the hotel, will appear there first, probably in the next few weeks.

Yes, folks, the 22nd InterNASHonal Convention of The Wodehouse Society will be in Nashville, Tennessee, September 26–29, 2024. Nashville is an exciting city—Music City—and what is a TWS convention without music? A fun-packed Friday tour is planned, the highlight of which is the Cheekwood Estate.

But even more exciting, in addition to the usual events—tours, games, browsing and sluicing, and the ever-popular skits, songs, and riveting talks—we will partner with the good folks at the Vanderbilt University Library Special Collections for the dedication ceremony of The P. G. Wodehouse Collection. This collection was created through the efforts of certain superlative members of our society and already numbers over a thousand books, magazines, and other articles of interest. We expect that it will eventually become the premier Wodehouse collection in the world.

In addition to the dedication ceremony, there will be individual tours of the collection as well as other collections in the vaults of Vanderbilt University.

If you've been to previous conventions, you know what to expect, but now you should expect even more. If you've never been, this is the one to attend!

Watch this space for more information. In the meantime, block out September 26–29, 2024, on your calendar.



RIVETING TALKS 2024

BY MARIA JETTE

DO YOU HAVE a unique perspective to share on some Wodehousian topic? Our biennial conventions' Saturdays feature examinations of everything PGW from all possible (and sometimes improbable) angles, serious to silly. Some enticing examples from past conventions include "Of Mumps and Men"; "P. G. Wodehouse, Feminist"; "If Jeeves Were a Dog"; "1917 and Beyond: Plum's Great Year of Music"; "Betting on Bertie, or Wodehouse and Horse Racing"; "The Supercilious Sisters of Galahad Threepwood and a Long, Lingering Look at the Best of Them."

For an almost-complete list, go to the *Plum Lines* index at <http://www.wodehouse.org/extra/INDEX2022.pdf>, and look under "Convention Talks."

For more info, or to submit your topic, précis, or fully formed product, email Riveting Talks Wrangler Maria Jette (mariajette@mac.com). The deadline is midnight on December 31, 2023. Our San Diego Riveters were almost all first-timers, and all were great. Will next year be your year?

Call for 2024 Convention Skits and Other Acts

BY MAX POKRIVCHAK

WE HOPE YOU are looking forward to the next convention of The Wodehouse Society in September 2024. In addition to the Saturday program of Riveting Talks, there are many opportunities for other clean, bright entertainment such as skits, readings, musical offerings, contests, parlor games, etc. The deadline for all proposals is December 31, 2023. So if you or your chapter have the urge to contribute to the festivities, please email me at terrykit@aol.com. I promise to respond, agog. Thanks and see you in Nashville in 2024!

Treasurer's Report for 2022

BY INDU RAVI

Balance as of December 31, 2021	\$22,435.07
Income:	
Membership dues	\$14,027.00
Convention 2022 income	\$37,567.05
Interest	\$2.94
Total Income	\$51,596.99

Expenses:	
<i>Plum Lines</i>	
production and mailing	\$9,635.77
2022 convention	
general expenses	\$35,728.86
PayPal fees	\$345.25
Total Expenses	\$45,709.88

Total Balance	
as of December 31, 2022:	\$28,322.18

At Last a Limerick

BY ELLIOTT MILSTEIN

THEY SAY that you see something new every time you read a great book. I am reading *Leave It to Psmith* for the 47th time, and indeed, I don't think I ever noticed that there is one particular sentence, with a small edit, that could be the first line to a limerick:

A temperamental young man was McTodd;
Though his parabola of joy we applaud,
When the talk turns to flowers,
His attitude sours,
Which Emsworth and Psmith both find odd.

Not So Vile

ELIZABETH HERROLD from the Drone Rangers chapter sent along a quote from Evelyn Waugh. We found the context at <https://www.evelynwaugh.org.uk/styled-45/index.html>: "In the treacherous summer of 1929, while writing *Vile Bodies* at the Abingdon Arms in Beckley, . . . Evelyn wrote to Henry Yorke: 'I have written 25,000 words of a novel in ten days. It is rather like P. G. Wodehouse, all about bright young people.'"

The P. G. Wodehouse Collection at Vanderbilt University

BY ANITA AVERY

This American collection of Wodehouse's works and Wodehouse-related items came into existence in 2019. Thanks to the vision of several TWS members, and to Anita's tireless oversight, the collection continues to grow and prosper.

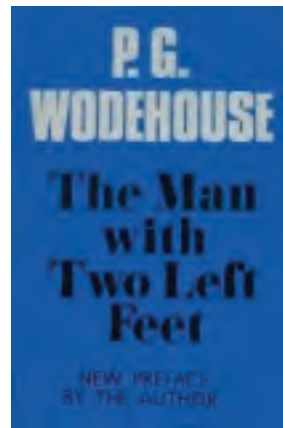
THIS INSTALLMENT continues with more on the delightful new prefaces published by Barrie & Jenkins from 1969 to 1975.

The new preface to *The Man with Two Left Feet and Other Stories* (1971) finds Wodehouse again reflecting with nostalgia on his "early days in Greenwich Village." As before, he views his early works as neither genius nor bilge, and settles on "something between these extremes," writing, "I do think that some of the stuff isn't too bad considering the handicap under which I was operating," namely that "all that was missing [was] the ability to write. I sensed this, and it deprived me of confidence."

Of these perceived shortcomings, he commented that "the ability to write I acquired slowly . . . but confidence came, oddly enough, with a rush." The latter was due to the convergence of selling "a serial to the *Post* and almost immediately afterwards [joining] Guy Bolton and Jerome Kern in a series of musical comedies at the Princess Theatre. . . . All this bucked me up more than somewhat."

The closing comment reveals that after soldiering on for decades, Wodehouse felt a fair degree of validation: "It is rather stimulating to reflect that all those haughty periodicals which rejected me have long been dead, while I, though inclined to puff a bit if I walk upstairs too fast, am flourishing more like a green bay tree than anything I can think of. It just shows . . . I can't at the moment put my finger on what, but something."

The new preface to *The Little Nugget* (1972) paints a good picture of how integral Bob Davis, editor of numerous pulp magazines, was to the early careers of Wodehouse and others. He "would always supply our little circle of hacks with ideas, if requested." Wodehouse recalled Bob as "bubbling over with ideas" but "never very coherent," and, in the case of *The Little Nugget*, unleashing a jumbled slew of plot fragments followed by the dismissal "now for God's sake get out of here, I'm busy." Though commenting that "the final result was almost entirely my own unaided work," Plum credited Davis with getting the ball rolling.



Plum "had a feeling" that the ideas that effervesced so easily to the surface were the result of the editor subconsciously recycling past story lines. Plum's realization that Davis's memory "was inclined to be treacherous" had earlier worked to his advantage. In the matter of a short story, Davis said, "there was something radically wrong about it. . . . He could not pin it down exactly. . . . An editor, he said, spotted these things through a sort of sixth sense" and told Wodehouse to "ponder over it and rewrite it from another angle."

Wodehouse "took it home and left it unread and untouched for ten days." He then sent it back unchanged, after which he received an acceptance with a nice note saying he "had done a clever job in smoothing out the story's kinks and readjusting its angle, and that now it was wholly satisfactory [which was] proof of the advantages of taking one's time . . . and rewriting a story after keeping it by one for a while."

The new preface to *Sam the Sudden* (1972) tells of Wodehouse's unabashed fondness for the novel, citing the setting and the recurring characters who debuted within its pages. Stating that "few purveyors of wholesome fiction . . . can claim to have no special pet among their progeny," and, though trying not to, Plum readily admits, "I find myself beaming on *Sam the Sudden* with a sunny approval lacking when I re-read some of the others." Further, writing "as a literary critic . . . I give it as my considered opinion that *Sam the Sudden* is darned good."

He speculates that this may be due to the fictional setting of Valley Fields being reminiscent of his happy years at Dulwich, and attributes his parallel fondness for Chimp Twist and Soapy and Dolly Molloy as the reason for having "fallen once more into the Saga habit." Alluding to one of the "many anxieties in an author's life"—that is, knowing "how his characters affect people"—he conjectures, "For all I know, thousands may shudder when they find Soapy and Dolly and Chimp among those present." Thankfully, he overcame that concern.

The closing of the preface is a good measure of how highly he held Dulwich in regard—and yes, if one may say, in his heart. On reading of the proposed building of a block of flats in Croxted Road, where he once lived (and perhaps, as in many of his novels, with a desire for that environment to be forever frozen in time), Plum wrote, in no uncertain terms, “Gad, sir, if anyone had tried to do that in my time, I’d have horsewhipped them on the steps of their club, if they had a club.”

The new preface to *Joy in the Morning* (1974), largely drawn from Wodehouse’s 1959 essay “My World and What Happened to It,” examines an era long gone, but as in the Drones Club or Bertie and Jeeves stories, one suspended in time. “‘Edwardian!’ the critics hiss at me” is acknowledged with “Yes, I suppose you’re right.” He then offers an alternate characterization: “But sometimes I am in a more defiant mood. Mine, I protest, are historical novels.”

And what of the inhabitants of that world? Wodehouse describes thusly: “The Edwardian knut was never an angry young man. . . . His normal outlook on life was sunny. He was a humble, kindly soul, who knew he was a silly ass but hoped you wouldn’t mind.”

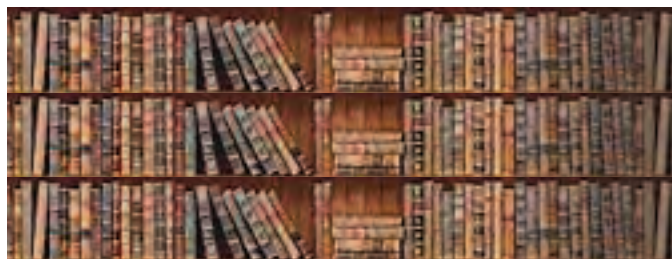
Wodehouse says that “you might disapprove of him not being a world’s worker, but you could not help being fond of him” and then follows with exceptions to that unambitious state—Freddie Threepwood, Bingo Little, and Catsmeat Potter-Pirbright.

One of Plum’s explanations for the vanishing number of drones or knuts was that “hard times hit younger sons . . . ornamental young men. . . . They toiled not neither did they spin but lived quite contentedly on the paternal dole.” When “income tax and super-tax shot up,” the ability to maintain such allowances went down. A recipient dependent, wanting “his three square meals a day . . . hurried out and found a job.” The upshot was that “as of even date any poor hack like myself who . . . writes stories about” such young men “automatically becomes Edwardian.”

“The passing of the spat” is given as a second reason for the fading away of knuts. “Spats were the hallmark of the young-feller-me-lad-about-town.” “The monocle might or might not be worn . . . but spats, like the tightly rolled umbrella, were obligatory.”

Wodehouse neatly summed up the posish that resulted from the sequence of those two developments: “Naturally, if you cut off a fellow’s allowance, he cannot afford spats, and without spats he is a spent force. Deprived of these indispensable adjuncts, the knut threw in the towel and called it a day.” Devoted readers of our time know that Drones and knuts were of a bygone era and were “silly asses,” but we don’t mind.

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 which has been updated with links to more sections. If your browser does not display the full list of What Ho! plus twenty links to Sections A–W, please contact noel.merrill@me.com for assistance. For further information regarding the collection, please contact anitaavery@verizon.net.



Dahlia Travers, Fox Hunter— But When?

BY MONIQUE FAITH BOODRAM

Monique Faith Boodram is a prolific writer and thinker, judging by her 177 items on Goodreads and by her presence on many online forums. She recently submitted an entry to the essay competition (junior division) of The P G Wodehouse Society (UK). The article discusses how Bertie Wooster’s narrative style had a considerable effect on the story plots in the Jeeves series. While Monique did not win, we will publish her article in a future issue. Here her investigation gives our readers a bit of a mystery to ponder (and perhaps to solve).

BERTIE WOOSTER’S fondness for his Aunt Dahlia has a way of growing on readers of his autobiographical chronicles. Dahlia Travers appears many times in the Jeeves collection. She stars in so many of the stories that initially I started my research for this article believing that I could get all of the information I wanted from my collection, to realize that I owned only three stories out of the long list that Wikipedia offers on her character.

Her hunting career is mentioned in the novels *Right Ho, Jeeves* and *Stiff Upper Lip, Jeeves*; in the short story “Clustering Round Young Bingo”; and in some other stories I do not have at this writing, which will leave room for discussion and good-natured argument. Bertie associates the phrases “hunting circles” and “fox-chivvy” with her penetrative and booming voice.

Now, you are probably wondering, “What is this young blighter driving at?” Well, first, we must note

that although the hunting temperament and language forever became a part of her character, Aunt Dahlia gave up the activity after marrying and moving to the city with her second husband, Tom Travers, which event Bertie remembers. More on that later.

Bertie also makes a point of mentioning (specifically while he is talking to Tuppy Glossop in *Right Ho, Jeeves*) Aunt Dahlia's association with the Quorn, one of the most well-established fox hunts in England, and indeed the oldest circle in the country, as claimed by their website (<https://www.quorn-hunt.co.uk/qhhistory.html>). Bertie does not go into detail about her association with the Quorn hunt, but we can make several presumptions about the timing of Aunt Dahlia's endeavors. By using context found in discussions between Bertie and co., we can gather that the aunts and uncles were in all of their glory during the 1880s.

Lady Florence Craye helps with this bit in "Jeeves Takes Charge" when she learns of the "disgraceful" things done by Bertie's Uncle Willoughby, her father Lord Worplesdon, and even the dear Lord Emsworth of Blandings Castle when they were in their twenties. We can make a reasonable assumption that the sisters of those wild uncles were about the same age. Now, to go a step further, let us consider some historical aspects of fox hunting and of ladies in the sport.

Erica Munkwitz wrote a rather interesting article on this called "Vixens of Venery: Women, Sport, and Fox-Hunting in Britain, 1860–1914." Women's participation in fox hunting had been developed well before other sports such as lawn tennis, and proved to be an activity of leisure almost exclusively in the upper social class. The article quotes Robert Henderson, author of *Barb and Bridle: A Handbook of Equitation for Ladies* (1874): "no female equestrians who are not ladies have been seen with the hounds of Leicestershire or its vicinity for some years"—the very shire of the Quorn's hunting grounds. Ladies who joined these hunts gained a reputation for being strong of mind as they accepted a challenge that required skills and diligence; the adjustment and increase in women's participation created a new ideal for the Englishwomen of the nation.

This could well describe a young Aunt Dahlia, whose sporting career would have been at its peak along with other female hunters as fox-chivvy became a definite norm with the gender from the 1870s and onward. What is not described with this information, however, is how long Aunt Dahlia participated in the stuff. Did she continue hunting during her first marriage? Did Bertie witness his aunt in the fields, just as he witnessed her marriage to Uncle Tom? If so, this makes Bertie how much older than his cousins Angela and Bonzo?

Plum created an interesting lady, surely, and Aunt Dahlia's compelling and somewhat mysterious backstory has opened doors to England's history of fox hunting, but it also leads us to a timeline puzzle in the Wooster archives.



Absent Agatha Makes Her Presence Felt

BY NOEL BUSHNELL

In the Spring 2023 issue of Plum Lines, we printed Elliott Milstein's paper given at the San Diego convention, "Wodehouse's Greatest Novel." Elliott had also presented his paper at a U.K. society event in March 2022. We had some suspicion that other scholars might bring forth alternative perspectives. Elliott's response to Noel's compelling argument can be found on page 9.

I REGRET THAT I must take issue with Elliott Milstein and his passion for *Leave It to Psmith*. I do not challenge his misguided assertion that *Leave It to Psmith* is P. G. Wodehouse's greatest novel, so eruditely and eloquently argued in his paper.

I am here zeroing in on his reference to PGW's use of the literary device of the absent character—that is, a character who never (or rarely) appears to the reader but who nevertheless "infuses the entire story." The passage flew past me when Elliott painted his pale parabola from the podium, but it pierced the old pate when I perused it in print.

Elliott believes the non-presence of Mr. and Mrs. Ralston McTodd in *Leave It* is one of the best uses of absent-but-there anywhere in English literature. He says one scene in which they don't appear is "truly a work of genius." Maybe—but that's not where I dissent. He goes on to claim the device is not repeated as effectively in any other Wodehouse novel, and cites *Heavy Weather* and *Big Money* as (inferior) examples. And this is what has made me take notice.

As it happened, I was rereading *Joy in the Morning* at the time and it was immediately clear to me that Elliott had overlooked Aunt Agatha. I go back to his paper: "[The literary device of the absent character] 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.”

Joy in the Morning begins with Bertie expressing fear and loathing of Steeple Bumbleigh and his intention never to go near the place, because Aunt Agatha lives there with her second husband Lord Worplesdon. But inevitably that’s where he finds himself, because Lord Worplesdon has called in Jeeves to help clinch a business deal. Aunt Agatha, though, is not there. Wodehouse has sent her away, and she stays away for the whole novel, except that she is always present.

At one point, Bertie comes face to face with a portrait of his aunt and for an instant thinks it’s her in the flesh: “I came within an ace of saying ‘Oh, hullo!’ at the same moment when I could have sworn it said ‘Bertie!’ in that compelling voice which had so often rung in my ears and caused me to curl up in a ball.”

It’s not only Bertie who lives in fear of his aunt; so does Worplesdon. Bertie has to keep his uncle-by-marriage to a plan to attend a fancy dress ball, a job which necessitates a conversation between the two. The old lord tells Bertie how he was a bit of a dog in his day and because of an incident back then he had “escaped,” and that he “had the misfortune not to marry your aunt thirty years earlier than I did.” He goes on: “I am so particularly anxious that no hint of tonight’s doings shall reach her ears. Your aunt is a wonderful woman, Bertie . . . can’t think what I should do without her . . . but—well, you know how it is.”

When events go awry, Jeeves uses this fear to create the happy ending. He tells Worplesdon, who has been out all night, that his dearly beloved has returned home and wants to know why his bed has not been slept in. The imperative to keep his nocturnal activities out of her ken is the key to unravelling the plotlines in everyone’s favor. Except for one thing. Agatha has not returned—Jeeves is “guilty of a subterfuge.” Agatha is not actually present in the novel from opening capital letter to the last full stop, but the character “infuses the entire story.”

The Mating Season similarly swings on Aunt Agatha’s absence, but she does actually appear, right at the end. Well, sort of. Her presence is announced, and Bertie marches off to see her. Readers don’t get the merest glimpse, however. In three short stories she is only heard on the telephone, not seen.

Indeed, the facts are that of the fourteen short stories in which Aunt Agatha is a character, she appears in only five (seven out of sixteen if you count the two made into four chapters of *The Inimitable Jeeves*). Apart from the noises-off ending in *The Mating Season*, she has no walk-on part in any of the five novels in which she is a character.

The Ralston McTodds might be up there with Kurtz, Mrs. de Winter, and Blazes Boylan as brilliantly executed absent characters, as Elliott says. I’m no literary scholar, but I don’t see any example of this literary device better than Aunt Agatha, certainly not one sustained over such a long period—from “Extricating Young Gussie” in 1915 to *Much Obligated, Jeeves* in 1971.

Response to Noel B.

BY ELLIOTT MILSTEIN

THE PRINCIPAL DIFFICULTY with playing the “What is the best . . . ?” game is that someone—usually a rather unpleasant fellow with a nasty, sarcastic voice (which is most certainly not the case here)—will come up with a second or third best effort and say, “Hey, what about this one?”, leaving one not quite knowing where to look. Generally, a brilliant creator’s second- or third-best work (or, in the case of Wodehouse, even fifth- or ninth-best) is so close in quality to their best that determining which is number one is a case of splitting hairs, as it were. Noel has certainly picked one of Wodehouse’s plums (if you’ll excuse the expression) as a superior example of the absent character, but, while I agree it is definitely in contention, I still put *Leave It to Psmith* and the absent McTodds ahead of *Joy in the Morning* and Bertie’s Aunt Agatha. So let’s split some hairs.

Noel quotes my assertion that Wodehouse uses this device frequently and, at its very best, in short stories (where the device is easier to execute). He also points out that Aunt Agatha began as a short-story character. Indeed, she was a main character in several short stories, but long before the first Jeeves novel was written, let alone *Joy* (the fourth novel, and last of the middle period), she was reassigned to the role of absent character.

I believe it was Richard Osborne who, in discussing Agatha, pointed out that Wodehouse, a master who learned much of his craft by studying other masters, learned from Doyle’s use of his most famous absent character (Moriarty) that villains are most threatening when they remain offstage. And so, after “Indian Summer of an Uncle,” Agatha remains exclusively an offstage character, even as she frequently remains a threat, or is at least mentioned in every nearly Bertie Wooster story or novel. So, in that way, Agatha gains an outsized presence, even while absent, because she has a voluminous backstory that the McTodds do not enjoy. In effect, she brings all that with her, whether the

reader realizes it or not, and I think that Noel is likely also bringing these additional associations into the mix.

When we look exclusively at Aunt Agatha's role in *Joy*, however, we see that Wodehouse's use of the device does not reach the depth, intricacy, or just plain funniness achieved by the McTodds in *Psmith*. Part of this is because there are two characters in *Psmith* instead of one. Another advantage is that the device works best with a third-person narrator because the absence is deliberate, since the narrator can flit anywhere the author chooses, whilst the first-person narrator (in this case, Bertie) can only report what he sees. One can also note the superior use of the McTodd characters in how much more frequently they are mentioned than Agatha is. But mostly, I think, what makes the McTodds superior is the sheer comedic treatment Wodehouse gives them. The leitmotif aspect, as shown in *Psmith*'s proposal scene that I quote at length, is unmatched in *Joy*, even with the portrait reference Noel references. And there is certainly no equivalent in the Bertie Wooster book to the humor Wodehouse wrings from *Psmith*'s musings on the inconvenience of Cynthia's very existence while rowing on the lake with Eve.

Noel and I certainly agree that Wodehouse is indeed a master of this literary device and that he uses it frequently, often to better effect than he does in the two other examples I gave. Agatha in *Joy* is one where it does come close. I also agree that, in the contest of best novels, *Joy* comes near the top (although not in all the aspects of a novel I covered in the talk). And I must once again (as I have in a previous talk and paper) give *Joy* the award for best opening. (You can see I rather like the "What is the best . . . ?" game.)

Nonetheless, I still hold that *Leave It to Psmith* is superior to every other novel in several aspects (yes, including "absent character"), including to *Joy in the Morning*. So Noel and I will forever be split on the overall "best" question. Which is fine. Since more whisky has been consumed than ink spilled over such disagreements, I say, "Let the dispute continue!" See you at the bar in Nashville, Noel.

PGW and the Censors

BY ELIN WOODGER

EARLIER THIS YEAR, following the news that certain books by Roald Dahl and Agatha Christie were being edited or partly rewritten to make them more acceptable to modern audiences (that is, with less racist or sexist terminology), many Wodehouseans began to wonder if *Our Hero* would be next on the chopping block. Sure enough, on April 17 London's

Sunday Telegraph broke the news this way: "Jeeves and Wooster books have been rewritten to remove prose by P. G. Wodehouse deemed 'unacceptable' by publishers . . . Original passages in the comic novels have been purged or reworked for new editions issued by Penguin Random House."

It should come as little surprise that this news did not go down well among the majority of Wodehouse's fans, including many in the media who did not hesitate to lambaste Penguin for its actions. A certain four-letter word beginning with w was hurled about with abandon on social media, and many, quivering with indignation, lamented the apparent inability of modern readers to appreciate and accept that books written in a different time that embraced different mores would inevitably include something cringeworthy by today's standards. "Get over it" was the gist of their message.

On April 26 Penguin issued a statement that can be read in full online (see bit.ly/41YPdtE). The key sentences are these: "The report is about the new 2022 editions of *Thank You, Jeeves* and *Right Ho, Jeeves*. Though the books are described as being rewritten and worse, the reality is that we removed one irrefutably offensive, outdated, and racist word. This change was made by our editorial team with the full support of the author's literary estate." While Penguin did not identify this one word, it is safe to say that intelligent readers know what it is.

In addition to the simple excision of a word commonly used in Wodehouse's time but considered to be racist now, Penguin has also inserted the following statement in both books: "Please be aware that this book was published in the 1930s, and contains language, themes and characterisations which you may find outdated. In the present edition, we have sought to edit, minimally, words that we regard as unacceptable to present-day readers." The first sentence of this statement is also included in a new edition of *Carry On, Jeeves*.

So is this a tempest in a teapot? Perhaps, but it is the idea that Wodehouse needs any editing at all that has many of his fans up in arms. A few have applauded Penguin's actions, and Alexander Armstrong, president of The P G Wodehouse Society (UK), diplomatically noted that Wodehouse would be "quite the last person to have wanted to cause any offence." Not surprisingly, the online debate has been fierce, and there have been valid points made on both sides of the to-censor-or-not-to-censor argument. In the end, readers will just have to decide for themselves, and if they are on the not-to-censor side of things, they can take heart in knowing that the older, unexpurgated editions can be found online and in used-book stores. Vivat Wodehouse!

It Takes a Thief

BY ELIN WOODGER

Here's another of the stellar talks from the recent October 2022 TWS convention, in this case a useful study in pilfering. Elin says, "My thanks to Jeff Porteous, David Ruef, and Jean Tillson for their superb help in presenting this paper at the San Diego convention. References are available on request (write to elinwm@gmail.com). Additionally, see the annotations to Wodehouse books provided on the Madame Eulalie website (www.madameeulalie.org). Many of Plum's thefts are revealed in these notes."

IN A MAY 1937 LETTER to his friend and fellow author, Bill Townend, P. G. Wodehouse wrote:

I don't think there is any objection to basing one's stuff on somebody else's, providing you alter it enough. After all, all one wants is motives.

Wodehouse knew whereof he spoke. His borrowing from the works of others, which has been well documented, was usually accomplished so cleverly that the casual reader would not suspect what some more critical readers may call theft of intellectual property. Occasionally, though, his borrowing was so blatant that he failed to alter the original text sufficiently, leaving himself open to charges of actual theft.

The fact of the matter is, if Plum could purloin it, he would. And in his career he did a lot of purloining—not just plots, for which he was always and notoriously desperate, but words, too. So he was a thief, but as I shall show, he was an exceptional kind of thief—a sort of Robin Hood, if you will, who stole from all kinds of writers but gave back to the world far more than he ever took.

Of course, as the law recognizes, there are varying degrees of theft. The majority of Wodehouse's thievery can be described as a kind of shoplifting, or literary kleptomania. Lines and quotations taken from Shakespeare, the Bible, the classics, Tennyson, and other poets, as well as popular romance and crime novelists, are too numerous to even begin listing here; suffice it to say, one can read Wodehouse and learn quite a lot about the authors and works that made an impression on him.

In *Wodehouse at Work* (1961), Richard Usborne speculates on "the writers whom writer Wodehouse must have read with admiration and fed on to some degree," then adds that he was "not saying that Wodehouse deliberately copied from anybody—at

least, not in the sense of cribbing. . . . But Wodehouse's writing does feed joyfully on his reading."

And as we all know, Wodehouse was an avid reader, to put it mildly; he seemed willing to consume anything printed on paper, no matter what the subject. Usborne assures us that Wodehouse had been "a devoted reader of trash since his schooldays. He teases it, evokes it, parodies it and plays it back in ragtime."

In short, Wodehouse's ability to absorb the writings of others and adapt them for his own purposes was incomparable. Furthermore, his mania for lifting text from innumerable sources provides a treat for readers who delight in identifying them. As many know, I was married to such a reader.

But what if the source is obscure and the text unaltered? Let's remind ourselves of the well-known passage from the 1916 short story "Jeeves Takes Charge":

[Florence] was a girl with a wonderful profile, but steeped to the gills in serious purpose. I can't give you a better idea of the way things stood than by telling you that the book she'd given me to read was called "Types of Ethical Theory," and that when I opened it at random I struck a page beginning:

The postulate or common understanding involved in speech is certainly co-extensive, in the obligation it carries, with the social organism of which language is the instrument, and the ends of which it is an effort to subserve.

All perfectly true, no doubt; but not the sort of thing to spring on a lad with a morning head.

It was Usborne who, in 1982, first revealed that this mind-numbing passage was taken directly from a real book, *Types of Ethical Theory*, by James Martineau, originally published in 1885. Others have followed Usborne in making the same discovery, and some have even slogged through the book to locate the two passages that Bertie quotes in "Jeeves Takes Charge"; their masochistic efforts have been faithfully reported in *Plum Lines*.

This is not blatant theft, of course; it's an obvious quotation. However, Wodehouse never identified Martineau as the author, leaving more gullible readers with the false impression that he was himself responsible for those dizzying sentences. He did this constantly throughout his career—and therein lies the fun for many fans.

The Martineau quote straddles a line between literary kleptomania and the next level: petty larceny. In this area we can find numerous examples of Plum's

propensity for purloining, but time only allows us to look at a few.

Take his 1956 novel *French Leave*, whose plot comes from *Three Blind Mice*, a play by Guy Bolton that was itself adapted from an unproduced musical by Bolton and Wodehouse. As demonstrated by Anne-Marie Chanet, the book contains numerous instances of theft from plays by the French writer Georges Courteline (1858–1929), including character names and personalities as well as plot developments. Some of the conversation between Commissaire Boissonade and M. Floche is a direct translation of lines in a 1900 Courteline play.

Then there's the Hon. Galahad Threepwood, a raconteur whose engaging tales of the Pelican Club and its members were not figments of Wodehouse's imagination. They came, sometimes almost word for word, from books and articles by members of the real-life and short-lived Pelican Club, in particular Arthur Binstead.

Here is Gally giving Gregory Parsloe a firm ticking-off in *Summer Lightning*:

“Unless you restore that pig, I shall insert in my book every dashed thing I can remember about you—starting with our first meeting, when I came into Romano's and was introduced to you while you were walking round the supper table with a soup tureen on your head and stick of celery in your hand, saying that you were a sentry outside Buckingham Palace.”

This story came directly from Binstead's *More Gal's Gossip* (1901):

He was no thorough-bred, as I whispered to you that night in Romano's when he marched round the waiter's wagon with the soup tureen on his head and a stick of celery, from the next people's table, in his hand, under the impression that he was a trooper in the Blues on guard at Whitehall.

Binstead himself had taken the story from a real-life event. (As a side note, in *Sunset at Blandings*, Gally tells the same tale of himself.)

Binstead was a great source for stories and plot developments. In a letter to Norman Murphy, Wodehouse referred to the Clothes Stakes in *Uncle Fred in the Springtime*, won by Mustard Pott thanks to Horace Pendlebury-Davenport's Zulu outfit. Plum revealed to Norman that this was a direct takeoff of

Binstead's report of the real-life Great Hat Stakes, in which the first hat to come through the door of the Criterion American Bar was a turban worn by a Hindu.

My favorite example of Wodehouse's petty larceny involves an author who was one of his personal favorites: Barry Pain (1864–1928). Pain was a prolific writer in a variety of areas, but he became best known for his humorous Eliza short stories, in which one can find many turns of phrase that Wodehouse also liked to use. Pain's novel *An Exchange of Souls* may be just as much of an influence on Plum's *Laughing Gas* as F. Anstey's *Vice Versa* is considered to be. As Neil Midkiff wrote to me, Pain's book is “sort of medical science fiction, but the theme of souls going into other bodies as the result of anesthesia is there.” And in 1997, William Sarjeant found a link between Pain's first book, *In a Canadian Canoe* (1891), and Wodehouse's 1937 short story “Anselm Gets His Chance.”

But as David Landman reported in 1992, it is in Pain's 1917 short novel *Confessions of Alphonse* that we find a particularly delightful inspiration for Plum. The titular narrator of the story is a French-Swiss waiter, who introduces himself thusly:

My friends, listen. Make attention a little. I am a man that knows on which side is the buttered toast. If you think you see some greens in my eyes, you do the bloomer. I know my interest. It is that one day I—I who speak to you—shall be the proprietor of the restaurant. Yes!

A little later in the story, Alphonse complains of his employer's twelve-year-old daughter:

You think perhaps that if the customers buy something to give the spoiled child, then that is profit. I say the loss is much more as the profit. I am somebody, isn't it? I am head-waiter. What respect shall the other waiters have of me, if they see this flapper-kid make mocks of me?

You already know where I'm headed with this. In story after story, God's gift to the gastric juices, Anatole, remains silently in the background until, in *Right Ho, Jeeves*, he finally speaks—and in spectacular fashion:

“Hot dog! You ask me what is it? Listen. Make some attention a little. Me, I have hit the hay, but I do not sleep so good, and presently I wake and up I look, and there is one who make faces against me through the dashed window. Is that a pretty affair? Is that convenient? If you

think I like it, you jolly well mistake yourself. I am so mad as a wet hen. And why not? I am somebody, isn't it? This is a bedroom, what-what, not a house for some apes? Then for what do blighters sit on my window so cool as a few cucumbers, making some faces?"

Now, the only words that are repeated in both Pain and Wodehouse are "listen"; "make attention a little" (with Wodehouse adding the word "some"); and, most significantly, "I am somebody, isn't it?" But it is enough to see that our Plum has conducted a very clever piece of thievery, transforming Alphonse's charmingly mangled English into Anatole's linguistically mind-boggling tour de force.

The scene in *Right Ho, Jeeves* is all we ever hear from Anatole directly. Thereafter his unique contributions to the English language are only reported to us via third parties. But Alphonse narrates an entire book, gifting us with a jumble of Gallic English observations that are great fun to read. And his *Confessions* gave Wodehouse inspiration not only for Anatole but—perhaps—for what many consider to be one of the greatest opening lines ever crafted. You all know it from *The Luck of the Bodkins*:

Into the face of the young man who sat on the terrace of the Hotel Magnifique at Cannes there had crept a look of furtive shame, the shifty hangdog look which announces that an Englishman is about to speak French.

Here is how Alphonse put it:

With long experience, I know now when an Englishman is going to say some words of French even before he begin; there comes always a look of anxious shame into his eyes. That means he is going to say *omelette aux fines herbes* or something a little like it. And the worse a Englishman speak French, the more he pay you for understanding and not laughing.

Perhaps this is why the waiter at the Hotel Magnifique was so accommodating with Monty Bodkin.

Speaking of Anatole, do you remember, in *The Code of the Woosters*, the menu that Bertie created as his reward for being imprisoned rather than allowing Anatole to be stolen away by Sir Watkyn Bassett? Most of it was taken from a 1903 Christmas menu by the great French chef Escoffier. (Note, December 2022: Since presenting this talk, I have read an article in

Wooster Sauce by culinary historian Fiona Lucraft, who convincingly argues the menu was more probably taken from three menus in Escoffier's *Le Guide Culinaire* [2nd ed., 1907].)

Now, excluding the scholars among us, how many reading this have ever heard of Barry Pain, Arthur Binstead, Georges Courteline, or James Martineau? Very few, I'll wager. And with the possible exception of Pain, very few in England and fewer yet in America would have heard of them in Wodehouse's time, either. I suggest—nothing more—that Wodehouse would have been aware of their relative obscurity compared to his own fame, and that may have influenced him in his decision to borrow from their works without fear of repercussion. Thin, I know, but it's a thought.

Another rather obscure source was Charles Brookfield (1857–1913), an actor and playwright who published his *Random Reminiscences* in 1902. Brookfield's memoir includes a number of stories that would seem very familiar to eagle-eyed Wodehouse readers. In 2016 Norman Murphy brought our attention to Plum's numerous thefts from Brookfield, quoting instances found in *Pigs Have Wings*, *Summer Lightning*, *The Girl in Blue*, and several Mulliner stories.

For example, you probably remember the moment in "The Smile That Wins" when Adrian Mulliner meets Lord Brangbolton, who invites him to have a little flutter in cards:

"Ever played Persian Monarchs?" he asked, shuffling

"I think not," said Adrian.

"Quite simple," said Lord Brangbolton. "You just bet a quid or whatever it may be that you can cut a card higher than the other fellow, and, if you do, you win, and, if you don't, you don't."

Adrian said it sounded a little like Blind Hooky.

"It is like Blind Hooky," said Lord Brangbolton. "Very like Blind Hooky. In fact, if you can play Blind Hooky, you can play Persian Monarchs."

Now let's see how Brookfield put it:

"There's rather a good game they used to play at the Embassy in Washington called Persian Monarchs."

"I don't know it."

"Don't you? Well, it's perfectly simple. You merely cut round to the other players in turn,

and each one bets he's got the highest card at the bottom."

"Why, that's just like Blind Hooky."

"Yes, it is—awfully like Blind Hooky; in fact, if you can play Blind Hooky, you can play Persian Monarchs."

Norman had only skimmed the surface of Brookfield's reminiscences. In 2017, Karen Shotting followed up with still more that she had uncovered. There is, for example, Brookfield's description of a comedian who specialized in imitations of farmyard animals. In particular, there is this:

The comedian . . . laid an imaginary egg on the sofa, then ran round the room cackling a maternal paean, and finally stood on the sofa and flapped the sides of his evening coat, and crowded himself purple in the face.

The performance included hen-like sounds that Brookfield describes as "Brt-bt-bt-bt-bt!" Compare and contrast with Archibald Mulliner's egg-laying masterpiece in "The Reverent Wooing of Archibald." Archibald begins with the mother hen's soft crooning, then—

soars into the upper register, and finally swells into a maternal paean of joy. . . . Following which, it was Archibald's custom to run round the room, flapping the sides of his coat, and then, leaping onto a sofa or some convenient chair, to stand there with his arms at right angles, crowing himself purple in the face. . . . Love thrilled through every "Brt-t't-t't" that he uttered.

As Karen has pointed out, this egg-laying routine appears in two more Mulliner stories as well as in *Baa, Baa, Black Sheep*, a play Wodehouse wrote with Ian Hay.

Brookfield straddles another line, this one between petty larceny and our final category of grand larceny. There are not as many examples to be found on this level, but I have two that are worth our attention.

We start with gardening. In the first chapter of *Leave It to Psmith*, we are told: "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.'"

That writer was actually Gertrude Jekyll, who, in her 1904 book *Some English Gardens*, said of Berkeley

Castle: "Tiny mosses have grown in their cavities; . . . Here grasses and many kinds of wild plants have found a home, until, viewed from near at hand, the mighty walls and their sustaining buttresses are seen to be shaggy with vegetation."

Back to Wodehouse on Blandings: "[T]he castle, which is one of the oldest inhabited houses in England, stands upon a knoll of rising ground at the southern end of the celebrated Vale of Blandings."

And now Jekyll on Berkeley Castle: "This venerable pile, one of the oldest continuously-inhabited houses in England, stands upon a knoll of rising ground at the southern end of the tract of rich alluvial land known as the Vale of Berkeley."

There are at least six quotations or paraphrases from Jekyll in *Leave It to Psmith*, and it's possible there are more in other books. She is the source of Lord Emsworth's enthusiasm for mossy paths versus gravel, as well as his views about hollyhocks, and when she noted that "the flower must be very tight and round," Wodehouse used this exact phrase but embellished it with "like the uniform of a major-general."

From matters botanical to matters porcine: In the 1927 short story "Pig-hoo-o-o-o-ey!" Lord Emsworth's desperate efforts to get Empress of Blandings back enjoying the foodstuffs meet with failure until the parson's son, James Belford—recently returned from two years on a farm in America—divulges a master word that gets pigs stampeding to the trough every time:

"Most people don't know it, but I had it straight from the lips of Fred Patzel, the hog-calling champion of the Western States. What a man! I've known him to bring pork chops leaping from their plates."

At the 1999 TWS convention in Houston, Norman Murphy revealed that Fred Patzel was a real person who hailed from Nebraska and whose hog-calling triumphs had been well publicized in 1926, a year before the Wodehouse story. Inspired by this—or, more to the point, prodded by Norman—David Landman conducted further research into the champion's hog-calling achievements. David struck gold when he discovered an article from the *Literary Digest* of October 9, 1926, that had an illustration of Patzel's hog call set out in musical notation. (I should note that the call consisted of repetitions of "Poo-ee, poo-ee, poo-ee"—no "pig" in sight.)

David also came across an editorial about Fred Patzel in the *New York Sun* of September 14, 1926, later

reprinted in other papers around the country. And it is this piece that interests us strangely. Here are the operative sentences:

He begins his “Poo-ey” in a low minor of two quarter notes in four-four time. From this he builds gradually to a higher note, until at last his voice is soaring in full crescendo, reaching F sharp on the natural scale and dwelling for two retarded half notes, then breaking into a shower of accidental grace notes. . . .

[T]he voice must be trained out on the open prairie with tornadoes for sparring partners to give it robustness and strength. A manly, sunburned, wind-scorched voice is absolutely indispensable. . . . [I]t is a voice which should have within it a suggestion of the crackling of corn husks, the whisper of evening breezes in the fodder. Such vocal equipment belongs to Fred Patzel. That’s why he is champion.

With that in mind, let’s revisit the closing scene of Wodehouse’s story. As Lord Emsworth, Beach, and Angela try and fail to get the Empress to tuck in, using James Belford’s magic word, the young man himself comes along, listens, and offers his critique.

“Nothing like it,” he said. “You want to begin the ‘Hoo’ in a low minor of two quarter notes in four-four time. From this build gradually to a higher note, until at last the voice is soaring at full crescendo, reaching F sharp on the natural scale and dwelling for two retarded half-notes, then breaking into a shower of accidental grace notes.”

“God bless my soul!” said Lord Emsworth, appalled. “I shall never be able to do it.”

“Jimmy will do it for you,” said Angela.”Now that he’s engaged to me, he’ll be one of the family and always popping about here. He can do it every day till the show is over.”

James Belford nodded.

“I think that would be the wisest plan. It is doubtful if an amateur could ever produce real results. You need a voice that has been trained on the open prairie and that has gathered richness and strength from competing with tornadoes. You need a manly, sunburned, wind-scorched voice with a suggestion in it of the crackling of corn husks and the whisper of evening breezes in the fodder. Like this! . . . Pig-HOOOOO-OOO-OOO-O-O-ey!”

You all know the happy outcome: Patzel’s patented method did the trick, and all was well. But, oh, that method: If those words don’t constitute out-and-out theft—dare I say “plagiarism”?—I don’t know what does.

This has been a whistle-stop tour of Wodehouse’s thievery—and only a few stops at that; there are many more we could have visited. But before I conclude, I have an admission: No original research has gone into the writing of this paper. The truth is, I too am a thief, having taken all my material from the work of others. A list of their articles, as well as other recommended reading, is available upon request.

Earlier I mentioned the obscurity of some of the authors from whom Wodehouse borrowed. He borrowed from the greats, too, as seen in his literary kleptomania. But let’s face it—all authors are thieves in one way or another, drawing on many sources for inspiration, and sometimes for solutions to writing dilemmas. As Plum wrote in his preface to the 1974 edition of *French Leave*, “even Shakespeare had his sources.”

The simple truth is that in pinching plots, characters, or words from other writers, no matter how well known or obscure they may have been, Wodehouse paid tribute to them; you might even say that he gave them immortality. He invariably improved upon the originals, making them funnier, and in the rare cases when he used material word for word, it was undoubtedly because he felt the original could not be bettered. That in itself was a huge compliment.

Whether his larceny was petty or grand, Wodehouse’s aim—always—was to make us laugh. In this he succeeded so admirably that any court of law would absolve him of all charges.

So perhaps there is only one conclusion to be drawn here. Sometimes, it takes a thief—an exceptional thief—to ensure that sweetness, light, laughter, and happy endings will always prevail.

Some Things Never Change

JEFF PORTEUS tells us that a May 11, 2023, *Los Angeles Times* piece discussed the widely perceived lack of respect for Hollywood screenwriters. In it, opinion writer Stacy Perman quoted from Plum’s June 26, 1930, letter to Denis Mackail: “So far, I have had eight collaborators. The system is that A. gets the original idea, B. comes in to work with him on it, C. makes a scenario, D. does preliminary dialogue, and then they send for me to insert Class and what-not. Then E. and F. . . . alter the plot and off we go again.”

Wooster Proposes, Jeeves Disposes: Final Copies Available

BY KRISTIN THOMPSON, HONORARY MEMBER, THE WODEHOUSE SOCIETY

I READ *The Code of the Woosters* in 1982 and became a devoted Wodehouse fan. Reading the rest of the Jeeves series and Wodehouse's other novels, I wondered how he could be a brilliant writer and yet use so much repetition and cliché.

Although a film scholar by trade, I had some literary training and set out to write a book on the Jeeves series that would answer my question. In 1984, I visited the Wodehouse Estate in Sussex. By coincidence, Lady Wodehouse had recently died, and the contents of Plum's study had just arrived. It was a treasure trove but in a chaotic state. As I had a library science minor, I volunteered to organize the manuscripts and letters if I could take notes for my book while working.

I served as Archivist to the Wodehouse Estate collection from 1985 to 2012, when the process of donating the collection to the British Library began; it was officially turned over in 2016. Among the highlights of the collection were penciled notes for plot ideas dating back to the 1930s, fascinating letters to friends and fellow authors, and multiple revised manuscripts of some of the later books.

I was also fortunate enough to interview four people crucial to Wodehouse's later career: his last British editor, Hilary Rubenstein, of Barrie & Jenkins; his last American editor, Peter Schwed, of Simon & Schuster; his last British agent, Christopher Maclehose; and his last American agent, Scott Meredith. With their help and documents from the Archive, I was able to write a chapter on Wodehouse's career, "The Professional Life of a Performing Flea."

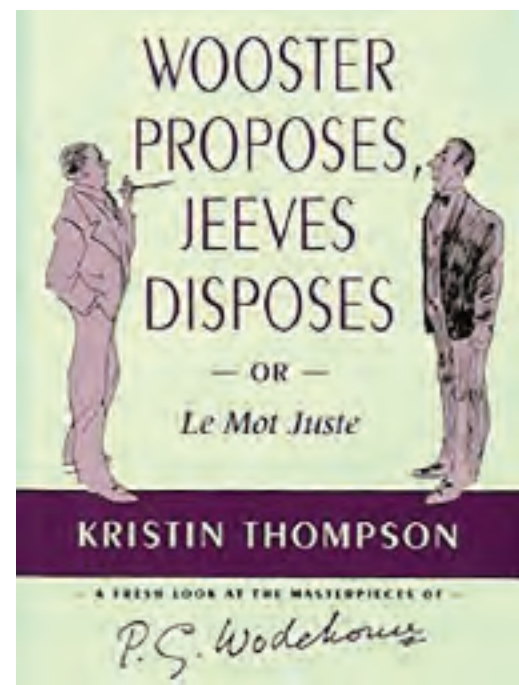
Some of you no doubt remember James Heineman, a collector of Wodehouse manuscripts, which he allowed me to examine. He also offered to publish my book. Jimmy had his own private press that specialized in books by and about Wodehouse. As *Wooster Proposes, Jeeves Disposes, or Le Mot Juste*, mine appeared in 1992.

Coming from a very small press, the book garnered few reviews. Naturally *Plum Lines* covered it, in its Summer 1993 issue. There Ann Whipple wrote, "Thompson's grasp is astonishing; she has truly got inside the books and the characters and deals with Bertie and Jeeves and their world and their relationship as if they were on her own level of reality. Than which, in a critical study, no one could ask more. Thompson's scholarship is far from jejune, and her well-researched insights can add immeasurably to the delight a Wodehouse fan takes in his writings."

The book offers my answers to the question of repetition and cliché. In 1994, Prof. Mary Lydon at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, cited me in an essay on Wodehouse: "Kristin Thompson, in her excellent book *Wooster Proposes, Jeeves Disposes, or, Le Mot Juste*, accurately describes what Bertie and Jeeves do as 'lingering over the conventions of language.' In addition to discussing Wodehouse's use of quotation with considerable insight, Thompson addresses his brilliant use of cliché."

After Jimmy's death on August 10, 1994 (see his obituary in *Plum Lines*, Autumn 1994), his heirs dissolved his publishing firm, thus taking the books out of print. His estate offered me the remaining copies for a nominal fee and postage. Not wanting that beautifully designed book to be pulped, I purchased the last 75 or so copies. I've given some away to friends, but downsizing compels me to disperse them more rapidly. I am giving them to two used-book dealer friends of mine here in Madison, Wisconsin. One is Hank Luttrell, whose website, <http://southparkbooks.com/>, includes links to his stores on Amazon, Biblio, and eBay. The other is Ron Czerwien's Avol's Books, online at avolsbooks.com; check the links under "Buy" at the bottom or write to Ron at avolsbks@gmail.com.

All the copies are in new condition, and I shall sign each one!



Bulldog Drummond at the Drones Club

BY NICK LOURAS

I HAVE BEEN watching the Bulldog Drummond films produced at Paramount Pictures in the late 1930s, adapted from H. C. “Sapper” McNeile’s pulp novels. The titular Captain Hugh Drummond is an English gentleman and veteran of the Great War who seeks out mystery and espionage on the home front in the interwar period.

The Paramount series features American actor John Howard as Drummond; he would go on to play Katharine Hepburn’s fiancé in *The Philadelphia Story*. John Barrymore appears in the first three films as Drummond’s ally, Colonel Nielson of Scotland Yard, occasionally disguised in elaborate Victorian stage makeup. The seven entries are low-budget but thoroughly enjoyable, comparable to Twentieth Century Fox’s Charlie Chan mysteries and Universal’s Sherlock Holmes series of the same period.

In adapting the source material, the screenwriter altered the tone. Howard’s Drummond owes as much to P. G. Wodehouse as he does to Sapper: an improvement. The Wodehousian influence ranges in degrees of subtlety.

Whereas Sapper’s Drummond is married to Phyllis Benton, the Paramount films are set on the eve of their postponed wedding, with the events of each plot once again interrupting the nuptials. They are finally married in the last film, *Bulldog Drummond’s Bride*. As a bachelor, Drummond becomes a sort of capable, two-fisted Bertie Wooster. His valet, played by E. E. Clive, stands in for Jeeves, with lines like “I endeavor to give satisfaction, sir” upon producing a much-needed pistol. Reginald Denny plays Drummond’s friend Algy Longworth as a comic fop like many of the members of the Drones Club.

And, indeed, Wodehouse’s fictional London club features in the series, albeit off camera, implying a shared literary universe. While preparing for their wedding in *Bulldog Drummond’s Peril*, Drummond and Phyllis receive the gift of a porcelain Cupid, accompanied by a note: “To Bulldog Drummond, with felicitations of the Drones Club.” In *Arrest Bulldog Drummond*, we find the title character rehearsing a speech for his bachelor party, addressed to “fellow members of the Drones Club.” Sapper’s Drummond is a member of the fictional Junior Sports Club in St. James’s, but the Paramount character seems to confirm his membership in the Drones.

Both films were adapted by screenwriter Stuart Palmer, a prolific mystery novelist who was obviously

a reader of Wodehouse. Palmer would go on to write an original Jeeves story for radio in 1940. The half-hour production aired as an episode of the CBS series *Forecast*, under the misleading title “Leave It to Jeeves.” The plot is unrelated to Wodehouse’s story “The Artistic Career of Corky,” which had earlier been published under the same title in the *Saturday Evening Post*.

Wodehouse certainly read the Drummond books. *Leave It to Psmith* contains an extended parody of the first novel. So, taken all together, the admiration was mutual, and in the case of the Drummond movies, it resulted in the addition of a nice bit of Plum spice.

Sprung Spring: Corrections to Our Prior Issue

WELL, FELLOW TWS members, we have some corrections to offer, with apologies to our contributors. The forces of time, crossed missives, and sunspots occasionally cause these incidents. As OM, I take the heat, the whole heat, and nothing but the heat. My fine proofing team follows me down a rabbit hole of error on occasion without even knowing it.

So, first and foremost, the headline on page 1 of that issue was wrong. Elliott’s Milstein’s article should be titled “Wodehouse’s Greatest Novel,” not “Wodehouse’s Best Novel.” I know how it happened, but all you’re going to get is a “Sorry!” ’Twas indeed an honest slip. When we put that issue into our archives, we’ll put the corrected version in for all time. Well, until the sun supernovas, at least.

Our other faux pas was in our article on the collection at Vanderbilt. We edited Anita’s statement to: “Also notable is that none of the prefaces were included in later reprints.” Aye, that line was actually meant to be: “Also notable is that all the prefaces were not included in later reprints.” I believe we intended to recast that line as: “Also notable is that not all of the prefaces were included in later reprints.” Be that as it may, you get the point, dear readers, and our apologies to Anita and our thanks always for the terrific work she has done to launch and nurture the collection. We’ll also correct this error in the eventual archive issue for posterity.

That’s all the items of which I’m aware, but certainly let me know if there are any other little slips of the keyboard to which we should attend. Ever onward!

—OM

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.

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Capital! Capital!

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Chapter One

(Greater Philadelphia area)
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WITH FINGERS CROSSED and hoping that the Covid curse was indeed in the rear-view mirror, Chapter One convened on March 5 live and in person at Cavanaugh's Headhouse in Old City Philadelphia, with ten intrepid members in attendance.

The agenda for the meeting was to learn more about Wodehouse's considerable role in, and impact on, twentieth-century musical comedy, using as our intro to this topic a video recording of the Ohio Light Opera's 2016 Summer Festival production of *Have a Heart*, which was a Kern-Bolton-Wodehouse collaboration first staged on Broadway in 1917.

Mark Reber had acquired the video and led off the session with some informative and helpful background on the beginnings of this celebrated three-man collaboration and how their interdependent treatment of the book and lyrics was transformational in the history of musical comedy. Given that PGW's primary role in the collaboration was as lyricist, our meeting focus was on viewing and listening to the major songs. Mark did an admirable job summarizing the plot machinations we were skipping over, which machinations clearly suggested that PGW had a hand with Bolton in writing the book in addition to his serving as lyricist.

In attendance at this meeting were Harry Booker, Bob Rains, Mark Reber, Rebecca Reber, Susan Barr, Steve Wieland, Ben Wieland, Hope Gaines, David MacKenzie, and Robert Sloan.

—Harry Booker

THE CHAPS AND DAMSELS of Chapter One gathered by Zoom on Tuesday, April 11, 2023. Following a free-wheeling conversation about overnight train travel and other topics, we turned to chapter business. Our support for "Gussie"—the newt at the Philadelphia Zoo for whom the chapter has long served as a sponsor—needed to be addressed. Mark Reber suggested that gift checks to the Philadelphia Zoo be mailed to him. He will bundle and forward them to the zoo, explaining that they are our chapter's contribution for Gussie's care.

Next, we dove into today's discussion topic: our favorite Jeeves and Wooster stories. A wide range of tales was identified from various decades of Wodehouse's compositional life. Caryn and David Ruef praised the novel *Right Ho, Jeeves* because it contains so many of Plum's plums, e.g., the lengthy exchange of conversational telegrams between Bertie and Aunt Dahlia, Madeline Bassett at her soppiest, and Gussie Fink-Nottle's drunken speech at the Market Snodsbury Grammar School prizegiving.

Short stories that won acclaim were "Clustering Round Young Bingo" and "The Artistic Career of Corky." Bob Rains read numerous delightful quotations from the former, in which Bertie is writing his article "What the Well-Dressed Man Is Wearing," and Jeeves manipulates the departure of Anatole from the home of Mr. and Mrs. Bingo Little, thereby enabling his hiring by Aunt Dahlia and Uncle Tom Travers.

Another tale that received multiple favorable nods was "The Great Sermon Handicap," with Jeeves placing his winning "S.P." wager based on last-minute inside information. Apparently we all read this tale in English, even though it has been translated into 57 languages.

The next meeting of Chapter One will be in person in mid-June, date and time still to be determined.

Attending were Bob Rains, Bob Sloan, Evelyn Herzog, David MacKenzie, Ben Wieland, Susan Barr and Steve Wieland, Carolyn Daffron and Rich Weishaupt, Karen and David Ruef, Karen and Mark Reber.

—Mark Reber

Chicago Accident Syndicate

(Chicago and thereabouts)

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The Clients of Adrian Mulliner

(For enthusiasts of both PGW and Sherlock Holmes)

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The Den(ver) of the Secret Nine

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The Flying Pigs

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The Fourth Dimension

(Zoom Chapter)

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(443) 904-7364

You may email Freda to be added to the Zoom invitation list, or simply use the standing Zoom Meeting ID of 825-2310-7377.

THE FOURTHIANS send merry greetings! A recent highlight was reading “The Custody of the Pumpkin” aloud. Most instructive. Particularly the

bit about distinguishing between a Scotsman with a grievance and a ray of sunshine. We also pondered the mysteries of “A’ weel” (translation: “Ah, well”) and “A’ weel” (translation: “I will”), the uses of the Younger Son, the respective merits of various state agricultural fairs, and Wodehouse’s New Deal references (translation: “New Deal”). Furthermore, Richard Burnip of the U.K. society and London Walks, kindly gave us a private virtual ramble through Wodehouse’s London on June 3. So many characters and such shenanigans! Taking Bertie alone as an example, bright spots included the source of his Old Etonian spats and the police station where, under the cunning alias Ephraim Gadsby, he was juggled yet again. Join us in the ether any time!

—Freda Kirkham

Friends of the Fifth Earl of Ickenham

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A Little More Bertie Than Jeeves

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The Melonsquashville (TN) Literary Society

(Tennessee)

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THE MELONSQUASHVILLAGERS will resume their long-delayed, in-person meetings on Saturday, June 24, 2023, in Knoxville, Tennessee, with a noontime event for socializing, organizing, and a reading of “Unpleasantness at Bludleigh Court.” We will remember five wonderful Wodehousians we have lost from our group during the course of the recent terrible scourge and take guidance from “Good Gnus” (well, no, we will not actually pot a yak, but you know what I mean).

We have continued our second Tuesday of the month collaboration on Zoom with the flourishing A Little More Bertie Than Jeeves chapter from western North Carolina, and read “The Editor Regrets” in May as a follow-up to “Bingo and the Peke Crisis,” which we had read in April.

A final bit of goose is that the folks from the Birmingham, Alabama, area are seriously talking about

revitalizing the nearly defunct Birmingham Banjolele Band chapter. We wish them godspeed! Wodehouse culture is needed everywhere these days.

—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



SPRING IS AN active season for New England newts. Eggs are appearing, attached to vegetation in ponds, and it is all very inspiring to the human variety of NEWTS. We gathered at the suburban lair of John and Elise Fahey in March to celebrate what Jeeves calls the aquatic members of the family *Salamandridae* which constitute the genus *Molge*.

Plans were quietly begun for a Nashville convention activity. Specifics remain secret, but unknown talents within the mischievous NEWTS chapter are emerging. Shannon Poe-Kennedy sings like a modern Cora Bellinger.

Lighthearted conviviality was in evidence all around. Browsing and sluicing were up to standard. Stef Adams's petit fours were remarkable.



A nottle of NEWTS

The Northwodes

(St. Paul, Minneapolis, and vicinity)

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ON APRIL 23, 2023, the Northwodes discussed *Money for Nothing*. Holly Windle liked the ambiguity of the title: it could mean you get money for nothing or all the effort was for nothing. A lot happens offstage, and many plot resolutions are left to the reader by design. Maria Jette wondered what a push-bicycle was, and Richard Rames found it's another name for a pedal, or chain-driven, bike.

Richard observed characteristics of a romance novel. Bruce Willey noted Pat's actions and emotions for much of the book are filtered through John's point of view. Here again Wodehouse doesn't directly present Pat's inner process but leaves it to the reader to fill in. Maria liked the sweet and poetic scene on the moat between Pat and Johnnie—straight out of a romance novel or a musical comedy. Wodehouse had planted details in the story—that he's the good guy, the guy to settle down with, the guy who's sweet and nice. Pat has felt she needs adventure, a dangerous guy in her life.

Maria suggested that Pat prompts this boat-on-a-moat moment as her ploy to discern if her feelings for Johnnie are a love thing. Holly liked the moment Pat "accidentally" stumbles against John in the darkened boathouse. The perfect gentleman that John is, his internal better self holds him back, and Pat observes, "You're slow." Holly thought it was nice to have a Wodehouse character who's intelligent but not socially intelligent. She discussed Tom's car, which Molly had taken away but sent back. Tom's relieved: "His car was safe after all. His Arab Steed! His Widgeon Seven!" Holly saw the allusion to "An Arab's Farewell to his Horse" (Caroline Elizabeth Norton, 1808–1877).

Emily the dog was our favorite character. When Col. Wyvern bumps into Emily, she reacts: "Just one minute, if you please!" Wyvern tells her to get out. She replies, "And who do you think you are, you poor clumsy Robot?" "Robot" was a newly coined word from the 1920 play *R.U.R.* by Karel Capek. Janna Kysilko had the book read to her by Joe Dolson, and at first she didn't recognize that Emily was a dog. Understandable.

—Mike Engstrom

The Orange Plums

(Orange County, California)

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or Diana Van Horn, dianavhf@yahoo.com



Western Union via Maritime Exchange. Transmission reads: AHOY STOP ORANGE PLUMS COMPLETING RING FOR JEEVES THIS MEETING STOP NEXT BOOK NOT YET CHOSEN STOP BAXTER CEREMONIAL FLOWERPOT PITCHING CONTEST

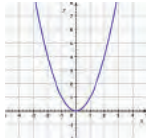
METHODOLOGY AND RULES OF PLAY STILL
BEING CONTEMPLATED STOP GAME PLAY
ANTICIPATED JUNE OR JULY MEETING STOP
TROPHY FOR SAME ALREADY CONCOCTED
STOP SEE ACCOMPANYING TRANSMITTED
PHOTO STOP CANNOT SEEM TO STOP THIS
STOP OH FRUITY JUST STOP STOP STOP IT STOP
BIFFEN SENDS STOP **Transmission ends**

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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THE PICKERINGS gathered at the Warren residence on March 11, 2023. The reading assignment was *Psmith, Journalist*. One of the main subjects of conversation was the recent ice storm and how many of our homes lost electrical power as a result. The good news is that we all survived the ordeal and were able to enjoy being with our friends. Luann told us that when her daughter Emily was in school, she wrote a book report on one of the Blandings Castle novels. The teacher could not believe that such a book could exist, so Luann went to the school and showed it to her.

Everyone agreed that David and Luann served food and drink that raised the bar for this chapter. Luann made a delicious gumbo, the best your humble scrivener has ever tasted. David opened a bottle of WhistlePig rye whiskey and served it neat, no ice or mixer. It was a revelation. It tasted better than any rye whiskey I’ve ever tasted. This made me reread the Mr. Mulliner story “The Story of William.” William, a teetotaler, has proposed to the woman he loves and been rejected. He wonders what to do and is advised by the porter at his hotel to go to Mike’s Place for a good stiff drink. Not knowing much about the ways of liquor, he asks the patrons what he should drink to get over losing his love. One of the patrons says, “When my brother Elmer lost his girl, he drank straight rye.” William Mulliner drank straight rye, and so did we.

As a result, our recollection of the rest of the meeting is rather hazy and foggy. We did discuss our intended novel, but our brilliant comments and insights seem lost in the mist. The consensus was that it is a better book than our last reading assignment, *Psmith in the City*. The reading assignment for the next meeting is *Leave It to Psmith*.

—Robert Walter

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The Plum Crazyies

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THE PLUM CRAZIES gathered for tea, refreshments, and talk at the home of Andrea Jacobsen and Bob Rains on Sunday, April 30.

Dressed in a purple cape trimmed with boa feathers, Bob wowed our members with a reprise of his TWS convention presentation on the long-lost link between Wodehouse and Liberace. Bob’s presentation clarified the details surrounding the Berlin radio broadcasts and the effect that Cassandra’s diatribe had on Plum’s life.

After the program, Henriette and Bob Evans, Sylvie Davidson, Betty and Tom Hooker, and Andrea Jacobsen and Bob Rains enjoyed a hearty spread and happy conversation.

Our next meeting will be held in the summer at Tom and Betty Hooker’s farm.

—Betty Hooker

The Plum Street Plummies

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The Right Honorable Knights of Sir Philip Sidney

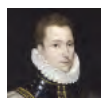
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THE KNIGHTS of Sir Philip Sidney gathered on February 18 for the first time at a new location, Bar 54, in our beloved Amsterdam. We shared on the big screen at the bar some of the photos from the TWS San Diego convention. Vikas Sonak shared some inspiring stories about that event.

Peter Nieuwenhuizen added some experiences from his Wodehouse pilgrimage to New York and Remsenburg; a small booklet about this search and his findings will appear this year.

New member Jeroen Hofland spoke about Wodehouse as a “word artist.” According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, Wodehouse is responsible for 23 new words and 135 other meanings, plus a lot of new expressions (“a Jeevesian attitude”). Some examples of the words attributed to Wodehouse include *crispish*, *rummy*, *oojah-cum-spiff*, *gruntled*, *pip-pip*, *ritzzy*, *lame-brained*, *burglarious*, and *rannygazoo*.

Our translator Leonard Bueger presented his latest translation of “Honeysuckle Cottage,” called “Het kamperfoeliehuisje.”

We then held our well-known spring activity to honor Mr. Mulliner: our annual cock-and-bull story contest. The winner was Rob Sander, who had his choice of prize: a cigar or a coconut. We also sang along with “Sonny Boy” from the movie *The Singing Fool* (1928), in Dutch translation. Chapter president Peter had discovered that in The Netherlands the song was performed in Dutch in 1929 as “Moeders Boy” by Henvo, a pseudonym for the Dutch comedian Henk Voogt.

Maurice Beemster then read his favorite passage from a Wodehouse novel, and a new Wodehouse stamp, drawn by Donald Duk, was presented.

Peter attended the annual dinner of the Drones Club in Belgium in January. He also saw the Robert Daws show *Wodehouse in Wonderland* in Basingstoke in March. This is a delightful story about P. G. Wodehouse living in Remsenburg from 1955 to 1975, contemplating his life as an author, husband, and stepfather. Our traveling Knight also saw the show *Perfect Nonsense* in Holybourne, performed by an amateur company. Peter reported that it was a bit over the top, but entertaining.

A team of Dutch researchers is preparing a book about the Wodehouse illustrations made by the Dutch illustrator Peter van Straaten. He designed 23 covers for translated Wodehouse novels and contributed various drawings of Wodehouse characters. You might know them from *Who's Who in Wodehouse* or the McIlvaine bibliography. His widow has donated all of his work to the Allard Pierson Museum in Amsterdam. The



Donald Duk's new Wodehouse stamp



Perfect Nonsense



Leonard Bueger leads the “Sonny Boy” singalong.



Jeroen Hofland speaks about Wodehouse as a word artist.



Maurice Beemster reads his favorite passage.

research team visited the collection twice to find all of the Wodehouse material. The book will appear later this year, and there may also an exhibit of this material in the museum.

The next meeting will be on June 17 in Deventer.

—Peter Nieuwenhuizen

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The Size 14 Hat Club
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John le Carré and Wodehouse

BY MICHAEL V. ECKMAN

JOHN LE CARRÉ'S son Tim Cornwell has collected some of le Carré's letters in *A Private Spy*. Tim writes that "it was a delight to find references to Wodehouse dotted through the letters, more and less obviously." Also, Tim reports that "there was one set of Wodehouse outside each of the two main bedrooms in the house." In one letter, le Carré referred to "the Master himself, P. G. (master of plot as well of humour)." Le Carré listed some of the people he regretted not meeting and added that he failed to meet P. G. Wodehouse when he had the chance.

It is clear that le Carré was a fan of Wodehouse, as were many of his correspondents. He wrote to a friend in 1963 that the film rights to *The Spy Who Came In from the Cold* had been sold to Paramount. Le Carré warned that he might opt "for the lush pastures of the Perfecto-Zizzbaum Corporation." Soon after, he wrote to his stepmother, addressing her, as Ukridge might, as "Dearest Old Horse." In 2001, le Carré's children organized a seventieth birthday party for him. He was pleased that the party "gives them something to do other than whisper in small groups about who's going to get the silver cow-creamer."

In 2006, le Carré wrote to producer Eric Abraham that he did not "feel any power loss" in his writing, "but it waits, I am sure, like P. G. Wodehouse's Fate, just around the corner armed with a stuffed eelskin."

Le Carré had a special enmity for the Soviet spy Kim Philby. To Nicholas Elliot, a MI6 veteran who visited the author and told him of Philby's betrayal and flight, le Carré wrote, "But can you imagine that Wodehousian character—son of Claud, Provost of Eton, pillar of the climbing-scholar establishment—matched against the appallingly devious son of Sir John Philby?"

After reading le Carré's *The Secret Pilgrim*, Stephen Fry wrote him a laudatory letter and admitted, "The only writer I've ever written to apart from yourself was P. G. Wodehouse, when I was twelve."

Wodehouse biographer Robert McCrum sent le Carré a copy of his presentation "Wodehouse in Wonderland" (*Plum Lines*, Spring 2016). In his talk, McCrum observed, "Here, I submit, is a man, a writer, and a great humorist, with a unique compulsion to pacify the pain of everyday life by living in the Elysium of his imagination. Confronted by the trials of wartime, he simply stayed in character, taking refuge in his own familiar world." Le Carré responded, "Thank you so much for sending me your piece on Wodehouse,

which I found moving and true, and in some ways very personal and relevant to my own defence systems. Like you, I expect, I continue to rely on Wodehouse in ways far deeper than the Master would care to acknowledge. As he found his own escape mechanism, so he provided us with one: or me, at least!"

In a coda at the end of the book, Tim Cornwell notes that "John le Carré, David Cornwell, died on December 12, 2020, in the Royal Cornwall Hospital, of pneumonia. The one book at his bedside, packed hastily for his hospital visit, was *The World of Jeeves* by P. G. Wodehouse."



And John le Carré's Words . . .

IN AN ARTICLE from the October 10, 1971, *Sunday Times* (London), titled "Well Played, Wodehouse," John le Carré himself said, on the occasion of PGW's ninetieth birthday:

We who love him are a masonry. We have never met; we are too numerous, and too ill-assorted. Who would put Evelyn Waugh beside Agatha Christie, Bertrand Russell beside Muggeridge, or Muggeridge beside Bix Beiderbecke? We have no secret handshake, but we can betray ourselves for all that. A choice of adjective, a syntactical construction—and a sudden lightening of the expression reveals the common bond.

There was a man I worked with in the Embassy in Bonn, a prince if ever I knew one, now sadly dead. On summer weekends he wore a Panama hat with a ribbon round it; in all seasons he was a man of sunny courtesy. Like Wodehouse, he was also an exile. His dream of England was Wodehouse's dream: an England before the Fall still, but threatened by unsporting chaps; a lovely Shropshire garden whose tranquillity must be defended by the farcical intrigues of such vigilantes as ourselves.

You can find the article at <https://tinyurl.com/555rkkmc>. Thanks to Marty Wacksman for sending this along!—OM

Gather Ye Olde Dues Rates While Ye May

THIS AUTUMN, there will be a much-needed increase in the dues structure, the first in more than five years. Before this increase takes place, members are invited to renew their dues at current rates for as many as three years. Just go to wodehouse.org and click on “Membership” for current rates and instructions.

Gussie Fink-Nottle the Spy?!

BY DAVID RUEF

IN THE NOVEMBER 28, 2022, *New Yorker* article entitled “Is Mick Herron the Best Spy Novelist of His Generation?” his protagonist, MI5 agent Jackson Lamb, is described as follows: “Lamb owes as much to P. G. Wodehouse as he does to le Carré; he’s got something of the extremity of Gussie Fink-Nottle, Stilton Cheesewright, and Lord Emsworth.” The fact that, elsewhere in the article, Lamb is described as “a disgusting, lumpy, vulgar, chain-smoking Rabelaisian wreck of a man” makes one question the comparison. However, at least Herron’s reference in his novel to a cunning female character is quite Wodehousian: She “wore her authority as she might an ermine gown: it kept her warm, and people noticed it.”

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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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