



Plum Lines

The quarterly newsletter of The Wodehouse Society

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A THIRD PLAQUE FOR PLUM

by Norman Murphy

THE county of Hampshire is to be found in the south of England. The small town of Emsworth is to be found on the south coast of Hampshire. The quiet thoroughfare of Record Road may be found running off the road to Havant, and Threepwood, a typical late 19th century town house, is to be found some fifty yards down Record Road on the left.

At 10.30 on the 18th of August, 1995, Record Road basked in hot sunshine, but was deserted except for the author and Tony Ring, who had driven more than one hundred miles to be there. There is a plaque to P. G. Wodehouse on the house where he was born at Guildford, and another on his London house in Dunraven Street. We had come to represent the Wodehouse Society at the unveiling by Ian Carmichael of a third plaque—on the wall of Threepwood, the house where Plum lived before the First World War and which gave its name to a dynasty.

Record Road is a quiet spot. All that happened in our first ten minutes was the passing of a couple of elderly ladies doing their shopping and the slow stately progress of another on an ancient bicycle that was certainly older than I was.

But by a quarter to eleven, it was clear that great events were afoot. I don't suppose Record Road had seen such excitement since the end of the last war. Mothers had started to congregate with their prams, cars were

disgorging elderly gentlemen in Panama hats even more battered than that worn by Lord Emsworth, and Tony and I listened with interest to the comments around us.

It became clear that the local TV and radio programmes had announced the event and, since Ian Carmichael is a very well-known name, a large proportion of the assembled company had come along to collect his autograph. For those who may not know of him, Ian Carmichael is the actor who played Bertie Wooster in 'The World of Wooster,' an excellent BBC television series back in the 1960s with Denis Price in the part of Jeeves.

A sizeable section had come along out of curiosity or just to support the Emsworth Maritime and Historical Trust which had organized the affair, but it was another memorial to Wodehouse, and that was what mattered.

By five minutes to eleven, Ian Carmichael had arrived and was chatting to Strahan Soames and other members of the Trust; a crowd of eighty people had gathered around the gates of Threepwood and the Mayor of Havant drove up in his mayoral limousine to complete the official party.

Strahan Soames spoke first and reminded the audience of Wodehouse's importance as a writer, his years at Emsworth living in Threepwood, and his use of local place names in his stories for the next twenty years. He was followed by the



Threepwood House in Emsworth, Hampshire

Mayor of Havant, who got a good-humoured cry of 'Shame!' from the audience when she admitted she had never read any Wodehouse. Nevertheless she knew him as a great writer, was proud that Havant had provided the funds for the plaque, and she concluded by asking Ian Carmichael to carry out the unveiling.

He gave an excellent speech, beginning with the comment that he was not surprised that the Mayor had not read any Wodehouse. He had noted over the years that Wodehouse was more popular with men and with women. He felt this was so because so many of Wodehouse's women were either dreadful aunts or brainless girls. Tony and I sucked our teeth at bit at this but it went down well with the audience.

Ian Carmichael went on to say that he had thoroughly enjoyed playing Bertie and, more recently, the part of Gally in the radio series of Blandings Castle stories. Although he had played hundreds of parts, he reckoned that when he died he would be remembered for three of them — *I'm All Right, Jack* (a brilliant satire on the Trade Unions), Bertie Wooster, and the five series in which he had played Lord Peter Wimsey.

He was proud of all of them and there had been agreeable unforeseen consequences. Some time ago he had been asked to unveil a plaque on the house where Dorothy L. Sayers had lived, and now here he was in Emsworth, doing the same thing to commemorate P. G. Wodehouse, a task he was honoured to fulfill.

As he cut the ribbon as a symbolic unveiling of the plaque above his head, we all clapped, the Press photographers took more pictures, and the ceremony was over.

Tony Ring and I were invited to celebratory drinks in the Emsworth Museum afterwards, where we admired the Wodehouse exhibition. There were dozens of his books on display including some signed copies, a pamphlet on Wodehouse's connection with Emsworth and an excellent series of photographs from the turn of the century of King-Hall's school (Emsworth House School) which Wodehouse described so well in *The Little Nugget*.

While others grabbed Ian Carmichael to get his autograph or tell him what a fine actor he was, Tony Ring and I had no time for such frivolities. We had far more important matters to raise with him, including the vital questions: had the 'World of Wooster' series ever been put on tape and, if so, how could we and other members of the Society get hold of it?

Unfortunately, Ian Carmichael had hoped we might be able to give him the answer to the same question! All he could tell us was that he had heard rumours of the series being seen in Australia. (Australian members please note and advise.) He gave the author a possible

lead and that was the best he could do.

Finally we all made our respective ways home, glad to have seen another proper commemoration of our beloved Wodehouse.

A BRIEF MEMOIR

by John A. Witham

The author of the following account wrote it in response to the ceremony described by Norman Murphy in the preceding article. Mr. Witham sent his story to the Emsworth Historical and Maritime Trust, which forwarded a copy to Tony Ring, who in turn sent it to me. We are grateful to Mr. Witham.

THE recent placing of a plaque on 'Threepwood' in Record Road, Emsworth, to record that P.G. Wodehouse once lived there, has revived memories of my early days as a pupil at Emsworth House School. There must be very few of us who remember the visits by P.G. Wodehouse to Emsworth House as the guest of Baldwin King-Hall in the early 1920s.

I recall that he appeared to keep very much to himself, and seldom spoke to the boys, but he moved freely around the School, and sometimes watched us as we played cricket. Although he may have taught the boys to play cricket in earlier days, he had never been a master there. He gave me the impression of keenly observing everything in his own quiet way but was not the jovial man one might have expected from reading his comic novels. This may have been due to an inherent reserve.

I well remember a day in November 1925 seeing him sitting on the large wooden table in the centre of the kitchen watching the boys as we filed past him, each taking his turn at stirring the Christmas pudding, which was mixed in an iron cauldron. These pleasant proceedings were presided over by Ma Brown, the motherly cook, who knew us all by our Christian names.

'Plum' Wodehouse adopted local names for some of the characters in his novels, such as Lord Emsworth, and his 'silly ass' son, the Honourable Freddie Threepwood, whose aunt was Lady Ann Warblington (sister of Lord Emsworth). Lord Bosham and Lord Stockheath also appear in the novels.

The last occasion on which I saw P.G. Wodehouse was when he attended Baldwin King-Hall's funeral at Warblington in November 1929.

LETTER FROM ELIN

My account of the Boston convention in the last issue spoke highly of Elin Woodger as the prime mover, but for reasons of space mentioned almost no one else. I'm glad to print Elin's letter, spreading the glory around to a number of others who richly deserve it. —OM

Dear Ed,

YOUR wonderful account of Convention '95 in the last issue of *Plum Lines* had me clapping my hands with girlish delight. Many thanks, old bean, for all your kind words.

I am gratified to have been the recipient of high praise from all over, and greatly appreciate all the pats on the back I've received (not to mention the wonderful first edition of *Bring on the Girls* I was given at the convention, which I will always treasure). However, I wish to point out that however much effort one person puts into something, the success of any event is dependent on the efforts of *many* people. I couldn't have done anything without the help and support and hard work of an incredibly long list of individuals who put their heart and soul into Convention '95. While I understand your difficulty in publishing 22 names and all their contributions, I don't feel quite right in hogging all the glory.

Therefore, may I at least bring to your attention the following few people who deserve to be singled out for all they did: Nancy Burkett; Randall Burkett; Bill Claghorn; Anne Cotton; John Fahey; Elizabeth Hamilton; Kate Harmon; Sean Harmon; John Kareores; Elizabeth Landman; Max Pokrivchak; Jean Tillson; and David Landman, who served in so many capacities it's a wonder he made it through the convention alive.

Alas, there isn't room enough to describe all the ways in which these remarkable few made their mark. Suffice to say that the amount of time, energy and talent they contributed went above and beyond the call of duty. And there were more besides these who made contributions from designing labels to manning the registration table to judging the costumes to doing whatever was asked of them. The fact that twenty-two NEWTS took part in ways both large and small says it all, I think. And I

haven't begun to mention the number of people from outside the NEWTS who gave us support and assistance, chief among these being Charles Bishop.

Finally, Toni Rudersdorf deserves acknowledgment for having selected Boston as the 1995 convention site and inviting an outstanding roster of speakers, as well as providing other support. We are indebted to Toni in ways we can't begin to express.

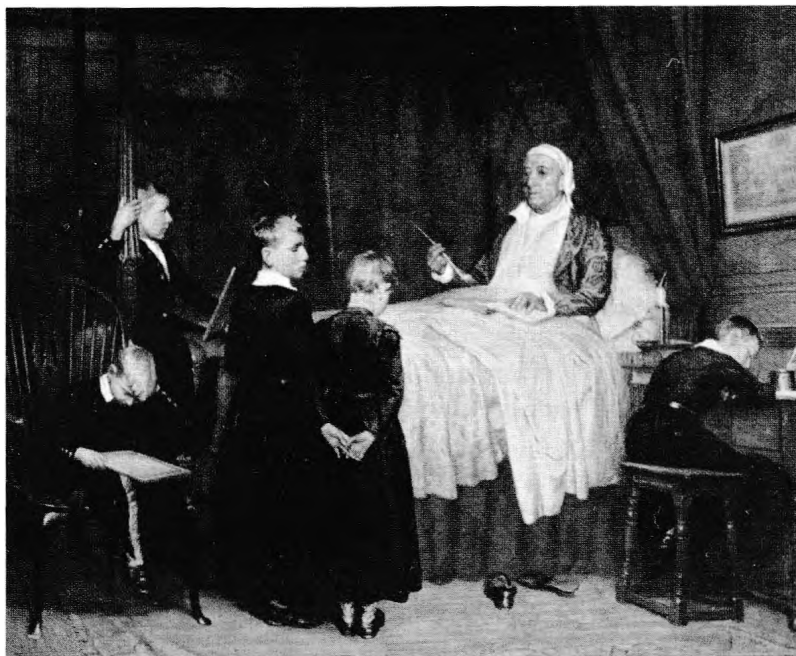
So you see that as much as I appreciate the praise, there are many more besides me who deserve kudos for their outstanding efforts. To all those people, I extend my deepest appreciation and heartiest thanks for a job well done.

And now it's Ho for Chicago in 1997!

Toodle-pip,

Elin

DULWICH TUITION, 1828



THE title of this picture is *Old-Time Tuition at Dulwich College*. It's from the cover of a greeting card kindly sent to me by Joan and Alex Hemming. (Alex is an Old Alleynian.) A note says the picture is 'From a painting by W. C. Horsley hung in the Master's Study at Dulwich College.' It was painted in 1828 and I think — though I can't be sure — that teaching methods at Dulwich have changed since then.

PLUM PUDDING IN OLD BRANDY: WODEHOUSE AND THE EPIC SIMILE

by Dan Garrison

A talk delivered at the Boston Wodehouse convention, October 1995

Note: Dan is head of the Classics Department at Northwestern University.
He isn't just making this up, you know!

His Muse gave quick service, and this time he saw at once that she had rung the bell and delivered the goods.

—“The Fiery Wooing of Mordred” (1934)

THE fabled plain style of P. G. Wodehouse was the art that hides art. The idiom grew perhaps out of the medium in which he worked first: the magazines for boys such as *Pearson's* and *The Captain*, then the popular fiction magazines in the U. S. and England, like *The Saturday Evening Post* and *The Strand*. It was a language in which he had been thoroughly steeped as a young reader, and it came to him as naturally as he avoided the fancy style of authors such as Booth Tarkington. Evelyn Waugh put it well when he wrote ‘His exquisite diction, as natural as birdsong, is a case of genuine poetic inspiration. I don’t believe Mr. Wodehouse knows where it came from, or how.’ Another admirer was Hilaire Belloc: ‘In all the various departments of his skill Mr. Wodehouse is unique for simplicity and exactitude, which is as much as to say that he is unique for an avoidance of all frills.’ These were the very qualities that had been promoted in America by Mark Twain and Dean Howells, and later by Benchley, Thurber, and E. B. White. Since the robust street Latin of Plautus, the plain style has been the natural language of comedy, and it grew like a flower in the hands of Wodehouse, who became one of its greatest masters.

The plain style works best when it dishes up something complicated. It is no wonder that Wodehouse found his *métier* writing about simple people like Bertie Wooster and Lord Emsworth confronting unasked-for complexity. The plots were hard labor, but the language came easily, setting off the complicated story lines and colorful characters that Plum’s readers love. But such writing needs something else to deliver the pleasure we get from vintage Wodehouse: the startling flashes of wit that explode with his comic similes.

Like the plain style, comic similes came naturally to Wodehouse. ‘One has to regard a man as a Master who can produce on average three uniquely brilliant and entirely original similes to every page.’ That’s Waugh again. Plum’s originality was not, of course, the gift of an untutored Muse. Besides the popular magazines that the young Wodehouse wolfed down when he should have been doing his maths at Dulwich, there was the compulsory reading that he did to avoid *The Wrath*. Among these necessary evils were Plautus and Terence in Latin, and plenty of Homer in Greek (one of his few academic distinctions was his knack for writing Greek verse, which gave him a perverse satisfaction later in life). It would be preposterous to argue that Wodehouse learned his art as a young blot reading ancient authors. Once free of his schoolmasters, he formed a bond with his readers by ridiculing freely and often the Classical curriculum to which they were subjected. But it is safe to say that reading Cicero taught him how not to write, and his plots bear a significant similarity to what we find in Roman comedy (supplemented by what he saw on the musical stage in London and New York).

BUT hark you yet a little longer. The young, you will recall, have a natural love for the absurd and the irrelevant, and are not above finding a certain beauty in such things. Even Homer, who must at some distant time have been a young blot himself, found a certain beauty in similes that had not a great deal to do with the business at hand, and he made these a notable part of his epic style. Here, for example, is the way he describes the goddess Athene deflecting Pandarus’ arrow from Menelaus in the *Iliad*:

She brushed it away from his skin as lightly as when a mother brushes away a fly from her child when it is lying in sweet sleep.

—and here is Teucer plying his bow under the protection of his friend Ajax:

The archer would run back again, like a child to the arms of its mother.

Think now of the way Wodehouse describes James Schoonmaker's mint juleps in *Fish Preferred*:

They creep up to you like a baby sister and slide their little hands into yours, and the next thing you know the judge is telling you to pay the clerk of the court fifty dollars.

Besides their irrelevance, Homer's similes have a certain penchant for long-windedness. In this example, he describes a mob of Trojans giving Odysseus the raspberry:

As when closing about a wild boar the hounds and the lusty young men rush him, and he comes out of his lair in the deep of a thicket grinding to an edge the white fangs in the crook of his jawbones, and these sweep in all about him, and the vaunt of his teeth uprises as they await him, terrible though he is, without wavering; so closing on Odysseus ... the Trojans rushed him.

Now much as The Master deplored warfare and blood sports, he loved spirited confrontations and was not above using battle similes to give them the bite they required. Here is Clarence Threepwood's sister Lady Constance lacing into her brother in 'Uncle Fred Flits By':

I don't know if you have ever seen a Bull-terrier embarking on a scrap with an Airedale and just as it was getting down nicely to its work suddenly having an unexpected Kerry Blue sneak up behind it and bite it in the hind quarters. When this happens, it lets go of the Airedale and swivels round and fixes the butting-in animal with a pretty nasty eye. It was exactly the same with the woman Connie when Lord Ickenham spoke these words.

THE art of irrelevance in the Homeric simile requires the poet to compare great things to small. Thus your typical battle scene (of which you will find no shortage in the *Iliad*) is best relieved by a simile comparing some gruesome piece of action to a little ruckus back on the farm. So when a party of Trojans is making things hot for Ajax, we are led away to this vignette of a donkey caught red-handed by some boys in a cornfield:

As when a donkey, stubborn and hard to move, goes into a cornfield in despite of boys, and many sticks have been broken upon him, but he gets in and goes on eating the deep grain, and the

children beat him with sticks, but their strength is infantile; yet at last by hard work they drive him out when he is glutted with eating, so the high-hearted Trojans [set upon Ajax].

Not to be outdone, young Wodehouse resorted to this egregiously irrelevant and rambling simile in 1911 to describe Eve Hendrie's shock in 'The Best Sauce' when she realizes she is about to win a game of cards that she was meant to lose to her employer:

Not long ago, in Westport, Connecticut, U.S.A., a young man named Harold Sperry, a telephone worker, was boring a hole in the wall of a house with a view to passing a wire through it. He whistled joyously as he worked. He did not know that he had selected for purposes of perforation the exact spot where there lay, nestling in the brickwork, a large leaden water-pipe. The first intimation he had of the fact was when a jet of water suddenly knocked him fifteen feet into a rosebush.

As Harold felt then, so did Eve now, when, examining her hand once more to make certain that she had no clubs, she discovered the ace of that ilk peeping coyly out from behind the seven of spades.

'His exquisite diction, as natural as birdsong, is a case of genuine poetic inspiration. I don't believe Mr. Wodehouse knows where it came from, or how'

When reading Homer, we need to make allowances. Give or take a siege here or a raid there, his world was pretty much the same old stuff from one generation to the next, with none of the modern thrills made possible by technical advancements like pressurized water pipes and atomic bombs. When Sarpedon bites the dust in the *Iliad*, nothing more exciting than a tree cut down in the mountains can come to the poet's aid. But when the headmaster of Market Snodsbury Grammar School contemplates Gussie Fink-Nottle with the shock of recognition in *Right-Ho, Jeeves*, The Master is there with what it takes from the dawn of the Atomic Age:

I was reading in the paper the other day about those birds who are trying to split the atom, the nub being that they haven't the foggiest as to what will happen if they do. It may be all right. And pretty silly a chap would feel, no doubt, if, having split the atom, he suddenly found the house going up in smoke and himself torn limb from limb.

So with the bearded bloke. Whether he was abreast of the inside facts in Gussie's case, I don't know, but it was obvious to him by this time that he had run into something pretty hot.

Every author has favorite similes that keep running out on stage like ill-governed juvenile extras. For Homer, starved for novelty as he was, it was snow. If

you spend as much of your time as you can in a warm climate and avoid the frozen steppes of Russia or Illinois (as it is believed Homer did), snow is a hot item in the novelty market and nobody is going to care very much how relevant it is or raise the eyebrow when snow is trotted out to dress up a sagging scene. So when Antenor remembers a speech given long ago by the fast-talking Odysseus (who was an early attempt at a Ukridge), he recalls 'The words came drifting down like the winter snows,' and when the Trojans are pelting the Greeks 'The flung stones dropped to the ground like snowflakes.' Homer's most audacious snow walk-on comes in *Iliad* 13 where he describes Hector going off to battle after delivering a pretty ripe parting remark: 'So he spoke, and went on his way like a snowy mountain.' What are we supposed to make of *that*?

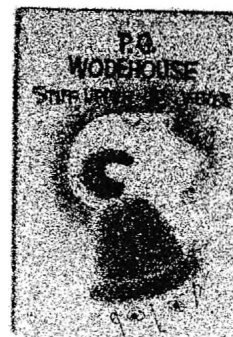
FOR his part, Wodehouse had a special affection for caterpillars, and for fish that have had a hard life. Caterpillars are not strong on personality, but they are quite effective in salads when discovered by persons of unquestioned dignity. In *A Pelican at Blandings*, Lady Constance winces at the sight of Lord Emsworth 'like a Greek goddess finding a caterpillar in her salad.' This is a replay of the simile Plum had used forty years earlier, in *Fish Preferred*, when Emsworth's niece Millicent fires off the Retort Chilly 'rather in the tone of voice which Schopenhauer would have used when announcing the discovery of a caterpillar in his salad.'

But it is your fish that catches the brass ring for walk-ons (if we may use this expression with respect to fish) in Wodehouse's metaphoric bestiary. Think first of Ronnie Fish and his mother Lady Julia Fish in *Fish Preferred*, both with encore roles in *Heavy Weather*. Then remember Esmond Haddock, son of Haddock's Headache Hokies in *The Mating Season*, whose personal headache is five beaky aunts, and recall two Trouts (unrelated), first the American playboy Wilbur J. Trout who marries Vanessa Polk in *A Pelican at Blandings*, then Ephraim Trout who falls in love with Amelia Bingham in *Bachelors Anonymous*. Fish do it. Passing over some sixteen Bassetts, Bassingers, and



Bassington-Bassingtons, consider the golf champion Wilberforce Bream. Forget the American tycoon J. Chichester Clam (who is only a bivalve), but bear in mind young Fry, the incompetent head of West's at Wrykyn in 'Educating Aubrey' (1911), take note of rabbit-faced Clarence Grayling, Ruth Bannister's rejected suitor in *The White Hope*, and remember Reginald 'Kipper'

Herring, who is engaged to Bobbie Wickham in *How Right You Are, Jeeves*. Add Frederick Mullett, the reformed inside burglar who waits on George Finch in *The Small Bachelor* (a fish working for a bird?), and three Pykes (George Alexander, Laura, Roderick), the first of these being most prominent, the publishing tycoon better known as Lord Tilbury. Finally, Sir Roderick Glossop, the Harley Street looney-doctor, spies on Willie Cream in *How Right You Are, Jeeves* disguised as a substitute butler named Swordfish.



So much for the names. It is hard to generalize about the characters who bear them. Some, like Fry, Grayling, and Roderick Pyke (who published a book on the prose of Walter Pater at his own expense), are guffins marked for failure. Kipper Herring's deluded engagement to Bobbie Wickham speaks for itself, but Esmond Haddock and Ronnie Fish are successful suitors of perfect girls, and some are handsomely fixed for pelf.

The actual fish are a different story entirely. Some are deeply offended: Bertie Wooster returns to his flat in *The Inimitable Jeeves* to find 'the head of a whacking great fish, lying on the carpet and staring up at me in a rather austere way, as if it wanted an explanation and an apology.' A character in *Stiff Upper Lip, Jeeves* takes umbrage and looks 'like a halibut that's taken offense at a rude remark from another halibut.' Another, in 'The Word In Season,' has a fishy glitter in his eye that makes him look 'like a halibut which has just been asked by another halibut to lend it a couple of quid till next Wednesday.'

Other fish are too far gone to take offense. In *Big Money* (1931), we are told of a downcast character 'His eyes were like the eyes of a fish not in the best of health.' Three years later in *Right Ho, Jeeves*, Wodehouse improved on his earlier simile: 'He had been looking like a dead fish. He now looked like a deader fish, one of last year's, cast up on some lonely beach and left there at the mercy of the wind and tides.'

IF fish are the most eloquent victims of life's shocks, women are at the other end of Wodehouse's great chain of being. Life is a matriarchy, if not in the real world then at least in the canonical world defined by Wodehouse. When the love light is not in their eyes, hell hath no fury like their wrath. This is not all novelty, and its comic side goes back to Homer. In the *Iliad*, Aeneas refuses to trade insults with Achilles

as if we were two wives
who when they have fallen upon a heart-perishing quarrel go

out into the street and say abusive things to each other, much true, and much that is not, and it is their rage which drives them.

Here is an aroused Agnes Flack in 'Feet of Clay' (1950):

Her eyes, which were large and dark and lustrous, like those of some inscrutable priestess of a strange old religion, focused themselves on him as she spoke, and seemed to go through him in much the same way as a couple of red-hot bullets would go through a pound of butter. He rocked back on his feet, feeling as if someone had stirred up his interior organs with an egg beater.

What we miss in Wodehouse's imagery in this instance is the concentration on a single vignette. We get instead a volley of three similes that come too fast for us to get the full pleasure of any. If Homer can nod, Wodehouse can stagger.

THROUGHOUT his career, Wodehouse entertained his readers with similes that repaid in full the considerable inconvenience of their Classical education. Like classical cartoons that are a standard offering in magazines, they are less a tribute than an exploitation of cultural clichés for quick laughs:

He groaned slightly and winced, like Prometheus watching his vulture dropping in for lunch.

—*Big Money* (1931)

The next one comes to us from North's Plutarch by way of Shakespeare's Julius Caesar:

I retired to an arm-chair and put my feet up, sipping the mixture with carefree enjoyment, rather like Caesar having one in his tent the day he overcame the Nervii.

—*Right Ho, Jeeves* (1934)

Several exploit the standard clichés about gladiators and Christians in the Roman amphitheater:

Mr. Pott disappeared feet foremost, like a used gladiator being cleared away from the arena.

—*Uncle Fred in the Springtime* (1939)

And, giving me the sort of weak smile Roman gladiators used to give the Emperor before entering the arena, Gussie trickled off.

—*Right Ho, Jeeves* (1934)

Prudence made a tired gesture, like a Christian martyr who has got a bit fed up with lions.

—*Full Moon* (1947)

This one, still playing the clichés, takes us from the Colosseum to the race track:

Elation and triumph in her handsome eyes, she was looking like a Roman matron who has unexpectedly backed the winning

chariot at the Circus Maximus

—*Quick Service* (1940)

Here is Wodehouse's backhanded tribute to Bulwer-Lytton's *The Last Days of Pompeii*, probably the worst book ever written about the ancient world:

On his face was the sort of look which might have been worn by a survivor of the last days of Pompeii.

—'Feet of Clay' (1950)

My last and best example is not so much a standard vignette from the cartoonist's workshop as an allusion to Cicero's *Pro Caelio* that The Master, then very much in his chrysalis stage, had been forced to read a quarter century earlier:

Ukridge drew the mackintosh ... more closely around him. There was in the action something suggestive of a member of the Roman Senate about to denounce an enemy of the state. In just such a manner must Cicero have swished his toga as he took a deep breath preparatory to assailing Clodius.

—'Ukridge's Accident Syndicate' (1923)

Except for the pleasure that Wodehouse got composing Greek verse (much of it, no doubt, parody and pastiche like his admirer A. E. Housman's 'Fragment of a Greek Tragedy'), there is little evidence that Wodehouse enjoyed the Classical part of his education at Dulwich College. But having gone to all that trouble, he found that making fun of it created a bond with readers who had gone through similar ordeals in England and America. In the end, it seems that reading the ancient authors was not a complete waste of his time, nor did it permanently damage his brain. Better yet, the art of simile that Homer immortalized in battle scenes of the *Iliad* gave Wodehouse's plain style the extra dash that makes him the last grand master of comic writing in the Classical tradition.

Notes:

All translations from Homer are those of Richard Lattimore.

This article is also appearing in the Spring 1996 issue of the *Kent Quarterly*.

I remember Jeeves saying to me once, apropos of how you never can tell what the weather's going to do, that full many a glorious morning had he seen flatter the mountain tops with sovereign eye and then turn into a rather nasty afternoon.

The Code of the Woosters, 1938

"OH LADY! LADY!!"

CHAPTER One of Philadelphia displayed unique greeting cards at the Boston Convention: Wodehouse cards specially designed by the chapter and produced for Wodehouse fans. The front of one of these cards is shown here, full size. It reproduces the cover of the sheet music for a song in the 1918 show "Oh, Lady! Lady!!". The background rectangle and the flourish above it are in red, with the remainder in black and shades of gray.

The back of the card quotes the well known verse beginning 'This is the trio of musical fame,' written on the occasion of the opening of the play at the Princess Theater in New York City. The note goes on to say:

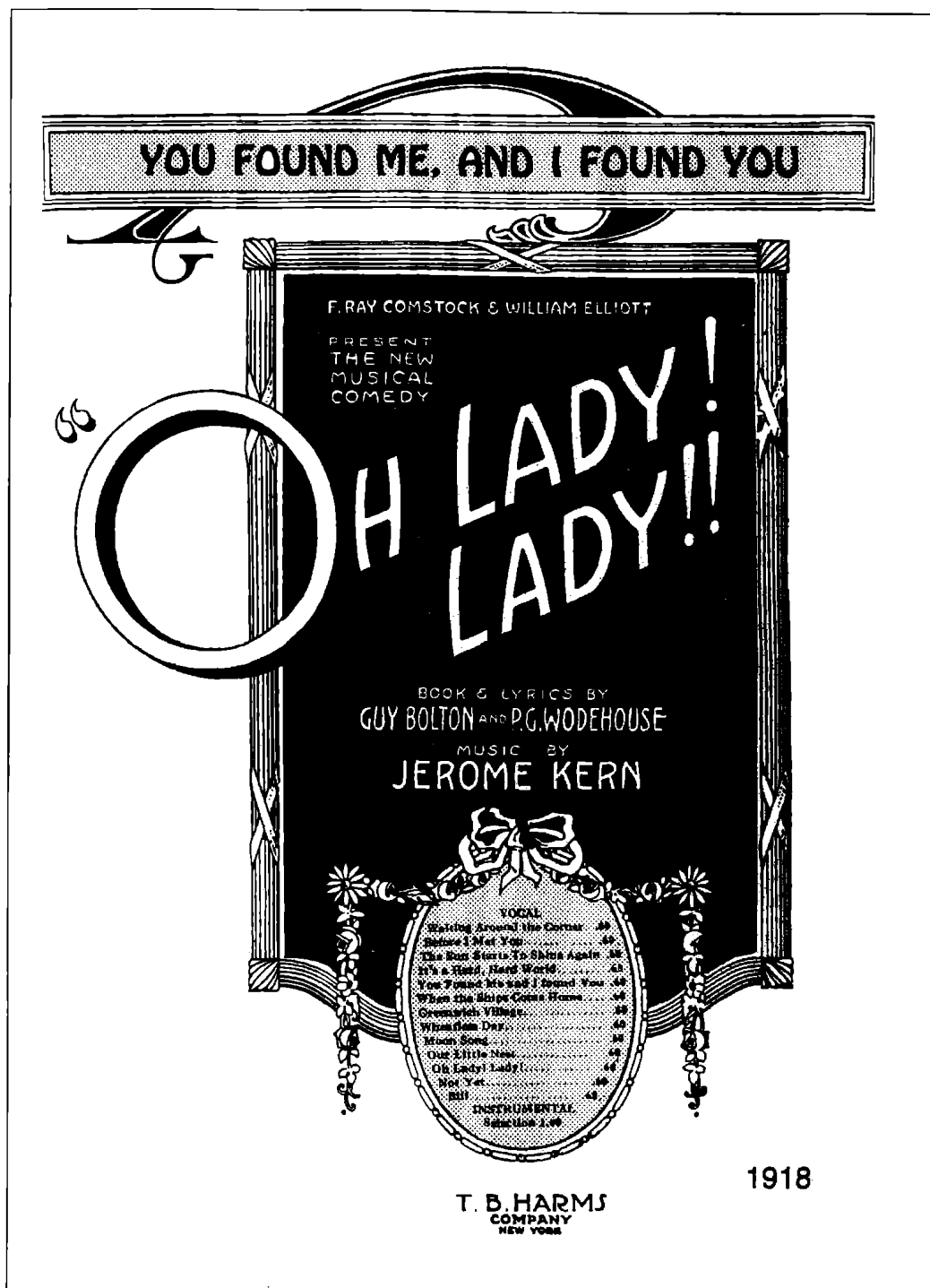
The show was an instant hit, and ran 219 performances, a long run for those days. It was the eighth of an eventual ten shows in which Bolton, Wodehouse, and Kern were to collaborate. Wodehouse liked the show so much that he later used it as the basis for his novel *The*

Small Bachelor. The song 'Bill,' listed on the cover of the sheet music, was written for the show's star Vivienne Segal, but was dropped from the show during the out of town tryout. Nine years passed before the song found a home in *Show Boat*.

The members of Chapter One in Philadelphia are pleased to bring you this card in honor of our original member, Captain William Blood, founder of the Wodehouse Society.

The inside of the card is blank. The price is \$10 for ten cards and envelopes, with postage and handling free. A discount on larger orders can be arranged. Send orders to Susan Cohen, 877 Hand Avenue, Cape May Court House, NJ 08210.

The card is unique, as far as I know, in reproducing a cover page of Wodehouse sheet music on a greeting card.



I HAVE A STALWART VALET

by Sue Marra Byham

THERE'S something about the first spring weather that makes me want to DO things. I was thinking, for instance, there ought to be a 'Drone's Garden of Verses.' With apologies to P. G. Wodehouse and R. L. Stevenson, of course. It could start out something like:

The world is so dashed full of schemers and thieves
Hurrah for the Drones Club! Thank heavens for Jeeves!

And maybe:

I have a stalwart valet who goes in and out with me,
And how I'd ever cope alone is more than I can see.
He is very, very brainy (comes of eating lots of fish),
And all his schemes are corkers, though not always just my dish.

He is dreadfully particular in matters of attire.
My attempts to wear the dog inevitably hang fire.
My alpine hat, my cummerbund, my natty purple socks,
All fleeting as the stuff of dreams; he's crazy like a fox.

And yet when Bertram lays as dead,
With fogged and throbbing morning head,
He brings volcanoes on a tray
To melt my sorrows all away. . .

Life is earnest, life is tough.
Bulldog courage ain't enough.
When care wants knitting raveled sleeves,
I shoot my cuffs and ring for Jeeves!

Or maybe:

How do you like to go home at the end,
The bally end of a country house stay?
We Woosters think it the merriest thing,
That finally speeding away!

Speeding away with a two-seater roar
(though sometimes the milk train is best).
Escaping by topping alibi or
By window. (Eluding arrest.)

Taking the tide at its flood, so to speak!
Shedding false names and disguises!
Hiding the stuff one acquires in a week!
Fleeing before the sun rises!

Well, maybe not.

THANK YOU, JEEVES

by Joe Pixler

Dan Garrison found this review of *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit* in the *Chicago Tribune* of January 3, 1996. The play was presented to enthusiastic audiences by the City Lit Theater Company of Chicago during the Christmas season. City Lit specializes in bringing literature to life on stage. We are grateful to the company for bringing Wodehouse humor and Wodehouse innocence to a world badly in need of both.

SIR Pelham Grenville Wodehouse. The very name causes china to clink and prompts the 'Masterpiece Theatre' fanfare to trumpet from the telly.

The old man could write. He gleefully tapped out 93 novels [about 93 *books* including 74 novels—OM] and 300 stories in his 93 years, primarily making light of England's idle rich.

Somehow, decades later, those twits and their dead society still live in the hearts of many in Chicago.

Daniel Garrison of Northwestern University's classics department takes a moment to ponder this evergreen affection. He knows Wodehouse well; he has read all of his works, several times. He waxes professorial about Wodehouse's 'mastery of language' and his 'terrific sense of ironic style.'

Then he hits upon a simple truth: 'Wodehouse has a great sense of humor.'

Maybe a college prof who specializes in Latin and Greek literature wouldn't be your go-to guy for hilarity, but Lord love a duck, Garrison is right about 'Plum.'

Plum is how fans refer to P. G. Wodehouse. 'That's *Woodhouse*,' Garrison politely instructs.

Garrison isn't always reading Wodehouse in his spare moments, of course. Sometimes he writes about him (*Who's Who in Wodehouse*, published by IPL International). Or he'll take a break and go to the theater and write about that. His favorable review of *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit*, a dish of Plum pudding brought to the stage by City Lit Theater, will run in the next issue of *Plum Lines*, the quarterly journal of The Wodehouse Society.

'They really deliver the great sense of irony,' says Garrison, a member of the society's new Chicago chapter.

This marks the fourth rendering of Wodehouse for City Lit, a small troupe that specializes in bringing literature to life. In 1986-87, Michael Salvador and Mark Richard created *Tea, Bertie & Jeeves*. The comedy was actually served with tea as a modestly conceived matinee series at the Three Arts Club.

'We liked the material and we knew it suited us,' Richard recalls with a shrug. [Mark Richard has adapted all the Wodehouse productions at City Lit—OM] 'And we knew there was an audience for this sort of genteel, "Masterpiece Theatre"-y, comedy-of-manners-in-the-afternoon.'

As Bertie would say, right ho!

'In fact,' Richard says, 'we tapped into this motherlode of Wodehousemania that we didn't know anything about.'

Unfortunately, theater rights to Wodehouse material weren't available again until 1993, when Richard adapted *Right Ho, Jeeves* for a full-blown December production at the Chicago Cultural Center. That success was followed last winter by *The Code of the Woosters*. And now, with *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit* drawing crowds to the Ivanhoe Theater mainstage [through January 28, 1996], City Lit appears to have a happy holiday tradition.

Richard, as always, plays the befuddled Bertie, shifting his eyes at every ghastly imbroglio and arching his brow at each occasional thought. Through it all, he maintains the dialogue's snappy rhythm as dizzy women with floral names flutter their fingers under their



Mark Richard (left) and Page Hearn are Bertie and Jeeves in City Lit's *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit*.

chins and blowhards with canine nicknames bluster about.

Through it all, Jeeves (played by Page Hearn) is the picture of wise propriety, parceling out his words like lumps of sugar into tea.

The characters are well known archetypes. Richard notes: 'The silly master/clever servant routine goes back to the dark of time.' But the well-worn Wodehouse formula veers from the venal twists of Restoration comedy's version of the routine.

'There's a benevolence of spirit that animates the Wodehouse formula. Things get screwed up, it's like low vaudeville. But in the end, all is well.'

The formula doesn't leave much room for theatrical goodies like profound character growth. City Lit toils to keep the annual tradition fresh by changing the cast, the director (this year it's Sandra Grand) and designers every year.

But to change Bertie would be to destroy him, so the characters and formula never vary.

'One thing that keeps it all fresh is how positively audiences look forward to being there. They are primed,' Richard says. 'Even though jokes are repeated over and over, people don't say, "Oh, I heard that one last year." They come back and they bring new people. There's a sort of warm familiarity, like going to see your family every year.'

Bertie tries to describe the whirl of plot complications directly to the audience, often referring back—or forward, in some cases—to other stories in the series. And when he says 'You might recall from *The Code of the Woosters*...', heads in the audience nod.

Two of those heads belong to Mike and Susan Fellers, who drive in from Burr Ridge for City Lit's annual Wodehouse family gathering. They have seen all three of City Lit's fully staged adaptations.

'We like the shows because they're pulled right out of the books,' Mike explains. 'Nothing really ever happens. But the way it doesn't happen is so funny.'

Richard loves the fantasy of it all: 'This is like a fairy tale. It's Bertie and his personal genie, constantly coming to his aid and making the world all right.'

Yet questions persist. Wodehouse dialogue is cluttered with elusive references to arcane poetry British school kids apparently had to memorize—'I haven't a clue what some of them are,' Richard cheerily admits.

And what exactly is the feudal spirit?

Garrison probably could clear up these matters, but there's some entertainment value in stumbling through the fog. There's a bit of Bertie in all of us.

A WODEHOUSE STAMP?

OUR President Elliott Milstein has begun a campaign to persuade the U. S. Postal Service to print a P. G. Wodehouse commemorative stamp. 'Pursuant to the resolution passed at the convention,' he writes, 'and with the direct coaching and shameless guidance of Susan Cohen, I have sent the enclosed letter to the Federal Government, invoking all the awful majesty of my position as Pres of TWS.'

The letter, addressed to 'The Stamp Advisory Committee, c/o the Honorable Michael Forbes, 502 Cannon HOB, Washington DC 20515,' makes several points: Plum's early fascination with America, his many visits followed by long residences, his important contributions to American musical comedy, the many Americans who are central characters in his stories, his Hollywood period, and his final long residence in America to the end of his life. Elliott also points to our august literary society (chiefly American) as evidence of Plum's dedicated following. It's a persuasive letter and if I were the Honorable Michael I'd be rummaging around for a picture of Plum this very minute.

Numbers make a difference. If you'd like to see our beloved P. G. Wodehouse on an American stamp, write to the above address and tell why. You might also mention that Wodehouse became an American citizen late in his life and actually spent more time in America than in Britain. Butterflies have already been honored with U. S. postage stamps. Plum ranks right up there with the best of the butterflies—so write!

I was in musical comedy. I used to sing in the chorus, till they found out where the noise was coming from. And then I went to Hollywood. You would like Hollywood, you know. Everybody does. Girdled by the everlasting hills, bathed in eternal sunshine. And if you aren't getting divorced yourself, there's always one of your friends who is, and that gives you something to chat about in the long evenings. And it isn't half such a crazy place as they make out. I know two-three people in Hollywood that are part sane.

The Luck of the Bodkins, 1935

FROM PUMPKINS TO PIGS

Tony Ring has just sent me a most remarkable document. It is an article from a provincial English newspaper, dated April 1, 1925, describing an untoward incident at the Shropshire Agricultural Show of the previous summer. This document, if genuine, clears up an enduring mystery in the Threepwood family: Why did Lord Emsworth, who had been obsessed with pumpkins in previous years, abruptly switch his obsession to pigs? I had hoped to provide a photocopy of the article to give you a flavor of the times, but the seventy-one-year-old newsprint proved too fragile for any but the most delicate handling. I have therefore provided a faithful transcription. Tony's packet, containing the article and a letter of explanation, was postmarked April 1, 1996. The coincidence of dates is curious but surely of no significance. —OM

The Bridgnorth, Shifnal and Albrighton Argus

(with which is incorporated the *Wheat Grower's Intelligencer and Stock Breeder's Gazeteer*)

1 April, 1925

EMBARRASSMENT of LORD EMSWORTH and son FREDERICK

His lordship can't tell a pig from a pumpkin

There was considerable amusement at the Goat and Feathers public house, Market Blandings, last night. The Hon Frederick Threepwood, younger son of the ninth Earl of Emsworth, was celebrating securing a contract for the sale of dog biscuits to the Salop News Hounds, under the mistaken impression that this informal club of local reporters was actually a troupe of working dogs.

After the Hon Frederick had transferred the contents of four magnums of champagne to the glasses of the assembled multitude the landlord, who should have known better, let the truth slip out. The young man's joy at his apparent success soon turned to a mood of melancholy, and then of morbidity.

It was while he was complaining about the futility of trying to sell Donaldson's Dog-Joy, the biscuit manufactured in the United States of America by his father-in-law Mr Donaldson, to traditionalists such as Masters of Hounds, who preferred to stick to the appalling Petersen's Pup Food with which he said they had been poisoning their charges for years, that he told those present, of which your reporter was one, that nothing mattered any more. He said candidly that everything seemed to be for the worst in this worst of all possible

worlds.

"Why," he said, "even the guv'nor's pottiness has reached new heights. Or should it be depths?" he added. Your reporter scented a story, and with an open shorthand notebook was able to take down the Hon Frederick's tale, almost word for word.

Blind as a bat

"You will probably remember," he started, "that for about the first time ever the sun didn't shine on Shropshire's Agricultural Show last year. Instead it rained like the dickens. The old guv'nor meant to be at the show in time for the judging of the pumpkins because he and McAllister, his head gardener, had produced something pretty impressive and confidently expected to win the gold medal.

"The rain had left some pretty big puddles on the road from Blandings and of course the car got stuck. Voules, the chauffeur, said something about the exhaust being under water, and they were held up for a couple of hours. I'd gone on with my wife Aggie, and only caught up with them later.

"When they arrived at the show it was still raining. The guv'nor seems to have managed to drop his glasses into a puddle while getting out of the car. His secretary, an awful chap called Baxter, tried to hold an umbrella over him to keep him dry, but trod on the specs and fell over into the puddle. I wish," said the Hon Frederick wistfully, brightening up for a second, "that I'd been there to see it. Anyway the silly ass had got so wet he had to go off and try to find something dry to change into. So it was left to McAllister to take the guv'nor off to the judge's tent.

"Well of course by this time all the judging had been done and there was no-one around. McAllister told the guv'nor that the pumpkins were outside the tent next to the roses, and was then sent off to find the Chairman of the panel of judges. The guv'nor must have been restless because he decided to go for a walk round outside the tent. It had more or less stopped raining and I expect he had caught the whiff of the roses. But of course without his specs he's blind as a bat, and after passing by the roses, which he judged by smell, he found himself in front of two enormous, round, blurred orangey sort of shapes, and on one of these there seemed to be the hint of a blue rosette."

McAllister is sacked

"McAllister had bumped into me by this time, and we were just getting back to the tent when we heard a shout.

"McAllister! McAllister! Is that my pumpkin? With the blue rosette?"

"No, your lorrudsheep," said the head gardener, who was by now wetter than a turkish bath attendant.

"It has a rosette, McAllister."

"Yes, your lorrudsheep."

"Is it bigger than *my* pumpkin?"

"Yes, your lorrudsheep."

"McAllister. I employ you as my head gardener to make my pumpkin win first prize. Why has it not done so, McAllister?"

"Weel, your lorrudsheep ..."

"Speak up, McAllister."

"Weel, your lorrudsheep. Yon's ..."

"That's enough, McAllister. You leave my employment instantly."

"But your lorrudsheep ..."

"Instantly, McAllister."

"Very good, your lorrudsheep. But what I was trying to say was ..."

"Enough, McAllister."

"*Misterr* McAlister, your lorrudsheep, if you please, as I am no longer in your employment. Yon's not a pumpkin with the rosette, its a pig!"

"What do you mean, a pig? What pig? Whose pig? How can a pig win first prize in a fat pumpkin competition? Tell me that, Mr McAllister, if you please."

"Yon pig is Mistress of Matchingam, Sir Gregory Parsloe-Parsloe's Tamworth sow. It won firrst prrize in the fat pigs class. It is next to my...your, pumpkin, which won first prize in the fat pumpkins class."

"What? So I won the prize for pumpkins?"

"Yes, your lorrudsheep."

"McAllister, you're re-engaged!"

"No, your lorrudsheep. I have been invited by Mr Donaldson to work for him on Long Island. I am going to go to America for a year. Perrhaps, your lorrudsheep, if there is a vacancy when I returnn ...?"

"Yes, yes, of course. But what will I do without you? How shall I win the prize next year?"

"May I suggest, your lorrudsheep, that you grrow pigs, instead. Think how it would annoy Sir Gregory if you could beat him at that as well!"

"And so," said the Hon Frederick, "the guv'nor gave up pumpkins and took up pigs. He's got an enormous porker called the Empress of Blandings which he plans to enter in next year's show. And do you know what?" he added.

"No, what?" I asked.

"He won't feed it on Donaldson's Dog-Joy," said the Honourable, wryly.

A FEW QUICK ONES

I'M blushing all over the place at my mistakes in the last issue. In the picture at the bottom of page 5 the 'slinky vamp Bertie wouldn't have dared take home to Aunt Agatha' is not Anne, but **Cathy Oliveri**. In the same picture, it's not Nancy but **Francine Kitts**. And on page 3 the only **Lellenberg** is **Jon**. My most abject apologies to these and any other victims of my carelessness. I won't even mention the other errors, except to apologize to **Cole Ballamy**, a professional photographer and a NEWT, who took several of the pictures I credited to Jan Kaufman.

Several members—**Pete Barnsley**, **William Hardwick**, **Francine Kitts**, and **Helen Murphy**—have pointed out an oddity in the publishing world that is just worth mention in passing: Faber has recently brought out *The Faber Book of Treachery*. It's by Nigel West and includes sections about some of the better-known traitors of our time—and P. G. Wodehouse. His innocent, humorous wartime broadcasts from Berlin are the reason for his inclusion. The broadcast texts are reprinted in the book. Norman Murphy had the best response, quoted in *Newsweek*: 'A pathetic attempt to increase sales.'

Confess it—you've been looking for a monocle lately and haven't been able to find one. Well, **Susan Cohen** has come to your rescue. A recent J. Peterman catalog offers monocles. Each nickel-silver frame is twenty-two karat gold plated and has its own black silk neck cord and velour-lined carrying case. Made, of course, in England. All for only \$90 a whack. (There is no truth to the rumor that they are available in matched pairs, one for the left eye, one for the right.) Be the first kid on your block to call (800) 231-7841 and give your neighborhood an imitation of Psmith.

Jon Lellenberg says plans are already underway for our 1997 convention. Bear firmly in mind the date and place: October 4-6, 1997, at the Inter-Continental Hotel, Chicago. See you there!

Jon also told me he has just received (from a friend in Norway) a two-cassette audio production of *Uncle Dynamite*—the BBC Radio 4 broadcast of 1995. A good cast, running time two hours thirty-five minutes, and it's commercially available: ISBN 0-563-39074-3. I don't have the name of a source for it.

The Oldest Member

WODEHOUSE IN THE PAVILION, PART 2

by Tony Ring

A talk delivered at the Boston Wodehouse Convention, October 1995

The first part of Tony's talk, dealing with Plum's playing of cricket, appeared in the last issue of *Plum Lines*. This part discusses Plum's writings about cricket.

I think it is now time to look more closely at his cricketing literary output. Not surprisingly, the bulk of this was written before 1920. Norman Murphy has demonstrated how Wodehouse liked to write about the topics and situations which he had experienced personally, and this is reflected in his cricket writing. His two cricket novels, *A Prefect's Uncle* and *Mike at Wrykyn*, were school stories written in 1903 and 1907; of his twenty-two short stories principally about cricket only one dates from after 1910; his six cricket poems and his fourteen articles on cricket all pre-date the First World War. So one is considering the immature work of Wodehouse as one looks back on his cricket writings.

Until maybe a dozen years ago, the cricket ethic was very similar to the public school code. In the early days of cricket, the game was largely played and the rules formulated by the better-educated and wealthy, i. e., the former public schoolboys. 'It's not cricket' meant that an action, while possibly technically within the law or the rules, would be looked on by all right-thinking people as unsporting and unethical. It was 'not done,' for example, to challenge the umpire's decision, however crass the offended party — perhaps a budding John McEnroe — thought it, and players just didn't do it.

The concept of the undisputed authority of the umpire was investigated in 'The Odd Trick,' one of the Tales of St Austin's. Philip St H Harrison, having been punished for ragging by Tony Graham, a prefect, got revenge when called upon to umpire in a house cricket match by giving the batsman not out three times in three balls when Graham was bowling. On each occasion the decision was so palpably bad that without the ethics of cricket, no little furor would have resulted. But the bowler, a cricketer and public schoolboy, obeyed the ethical code and accepted the umpire's decision.

You have already listened to one of his poems; another, simply entitled 'The Umpire' and published in the UK *Pearson's* in July 1906, emphasises this ethical principle, and also bears recitation:

THE UMPIRE

BY P. G. WODEHOUSE

I'm monarch of all I survey.
There isn't a ruler today,
Not sultan or Tsar
Of a country afar
Who can boast of a similar sway.
There's always a something that checks them
No matter how great they may be.
They've got armies and such
But their power's not much
If you only compare 'em with me.

For I'm the infallible umpire,
The strict, indispensable umpire,
And you've got to abide
By what I decide:
It isn't a matter for doubt.
If you're peer or you're peasant
You've got to look pleasant
And go when I tell you you're out!

There once was a time when I played;
But those days won't return, I'm afraid,
For alas, I must own
That I reached eighteen stone
And a quarter when last I was weighed.
I was once good at saving the single,
My limbs were so lissom and free,
But when bulkiness came
I abandoned the game
As a little too active for me.

And now I am simply the umpire,
The massive and dignified umpire.
My eyes are as keen
As they ever have been,
For your sight doesn't fail though you're stout.
If you're leg before wicket,
Or caught when you snick it,
I see it, and tell you you're out.

[The headline and sketches are reproductions of the 1906 originals. — OM]



His twenty-two cricket short stories can be classified broadly into several categories. Nine were set in schools: four at St Austin's, four at Wrykyn, and one, alternatively titled 'Playing the Game' and 'Scott's Sister,' featured St Austin's characters but was set in a school called Locksley.

When writing the 1906 story called 'The Pro,' Wodehouse hit upon emotional blackmail as a fruitful source

of plot, and he applied it in the context of four sports at least five times in six years.

Essentially, the hero is a young man, inevitably in love with the sweetest girl in the world, who is frustrated in his hopes by the opposition of the popsy's father. How is he to overcome the blaggard's resistance? In 'The Pro,' a young cricketer made it clear that he would not bowl well in a particular match which a Mr. Bond considered important unless he agree to let him marry his daughter. As Mr. Bond had swindled the young man's father out of substantial wealth, the reader sees nothing wrong with the moral blackmail involved.

'The Pro' was published in the same month as *Love Among the Chickens*, in which Jeremy Garnet has been prevented from marrying Phyllis Derrick principally through Ukridge's bungling. Again one sympathises with the blackmailer as, at the last hole in the final of a golf tournament in which Phyllis's father has finished second two years in a row, he threatens to consign him to the runners-up position for the third time unless he gets his gal. Incidentally, this chapter from the novel was rewritten separately as a short story entitled 'The Eighteenth Hole' for the American monthly, *Vanity Fair*.

Then, in 1910, he rewrote 'The Pro' with an American accent as 'The Pitcher and the Plutocrat,' with a young man (whose father had, surprise, surprise, been ruined by the popsy's father), refusing to pitch well in a baseball match without receiving prior consent to her hand. This was the story in which Wodehouse seems to first hit on the idea of backing one's own sporting aspirations with material goods of considerable perceived value—in this case baseball mementos—which he used again in a golf context in the story 'High Stakes.' The souvenirs are of course regarded by their wealthy owners as having a monetary value of no more than a few million dollars.

Realising that the full profit potential of the main theme of 'The Pro' had not yet been reached, the Plutocrat version of the story was translated into English as a soccer tale, 'The Goalkeeper and the Plutocrat,' the young man this time implying that his goalkeeping skills might have an off-day in the cup final, which would result in, amongst other disasters, the loss of a Bloomer boot which had been staked against a Meredith ball.

By 1907 he had already experimented with work for the stage, and wrote a sketch with Herbert Westbrook, simply called 'Cricketing.' There is circumstantial evidence that this was written for the great music-hall artist Harry Tate, but possibly because it required a cast of nine for a ten minute sketch, does not appear to have been produced.



OF his cricket stories principally concerning adults, four were narrated by Joan Romney, who also told one story about rugby football. Wodehouse rarely used female narrators, the only other examples I can recall being the short story 'At Geisenheimer's' in *The Man with Two Left Feet*, and parts of *Not George Washington*. Joan Romney told of behind-the-scene intrigues at cricket matches involving her family circle, for she lived in a house which hosted annual summer cricket weeks. A further four were tales of the Weary Willies, a wandering team of cricketers, including a little-known one written in 1906 for *Stage and Sport*. One of these, 'Blenkinsop's Benefit,' was written retrospectively, about an incident in Blenkinsop's schooldays at Beckford many years beforehand.

Another two cricket stories proved to be prototypes for stories rewritten in later years with a golfing background. 'Reginald's Record Knock' of 1909 was adapted significantly to become 'Archibald's Benefit' in *The Man Upstairs* of 1914, and the plot device in 'Tom, Dick, and Harry'—two protagonists, competing in a cricket match for the right to first crack at the girl they both loved, found that she was already engaged to a third party—was revived in 'The Long Hole' (in *The Clicking of Cuthbert* or *Golf Without Tears*).

The cricket short story which cannot be properly categorised is 'How's That, Umpire?' One of the few short stories not to appear in a magazine, it was first published in the 1950 collection *Nothing Serious*, and concerns a young Englishman and an American girl each of whom dislikes cricket. The story mildly satirises the MCC and the perceived boring trend of conversation among the aged aficionados, who have nothing to talk about while watching their favourite sport other than the relative styles and statistical achievements of Bodger of Kent, Codger of Sussex, Hodger of Middlesex, and D. C. L.

Wodger of Gloucestershire. But a brief look at the statistical tables supporting the baseball results in any American paper shows that it could have been faithfully turned into a baseball story with even greater impact!

On a number of occasions Wodehouse placed a character at a cricket match as a technical way of explaining his absence, or permitting the introduction of a critical

twist to the plot. He used the Eton and Harrow match at Lord's in *Cocktail Time* for a scene between Uncle Fred Ickenham and Beefy Bastable. Mr. Bickersteth's cardinal sin—walking in front of the sight screen behind the bowler's arm—was the catalyst for his antagonism to Mike Jackson, without which *Psmith in the City* could not have been written, and it was Mike's decision to leave the bank to play county cricket without consent from his superior that provided the dénouement. Shortly afterwards, Mike's inclusion on a cricket tour to the US provided Psmith with a reason to be in America at the start of *Psmith, Journalist*.

One of the historically more interesting references to a cricket match appeared in *Piccadilly Jim*, when the American, Peter Pett, was in the middle of a programme prepared by his ambitious wife, Nesta Ford Pitt, to cultivate English habits and the appreciation of all good things, such as cricket. He is sent to Lord's to watch a match between Surrey and Kent, two county teams in the cricket league. A number of critics have wondered whether placing Peter Pett's match at Lord's was an error, as Lord's is the home ground of Middlesex, not Surrey. But in August 1914, less than two years before *Piccadilly Jim* first appeared, Surrey did indeed play Kent at Lord's. It was a unique match, played for the benefit for Sir Jack Hobbs, one of the greatest batsmen ever to play the game, and was played at Lord's because Surrey's home ground, the Oval, had been requisitioned by the Army for the use of troops at the start of the war. A curse, therefore, on the editors of later editions of the book, such as the Penguins, who thought they knew better than Wodehouse, and erroneously amended the text to the Oval.

This book also featured the greatest put-down in Wodehouse fiction. When told that Hayward of Surrey had scored sixty-seven runs in one game, Peter Pett exclaimed to Bayliss, the butler, that not even Home-Run Baker could have done it. Then, using crockery and other implements, he demonstrated with great enthusiasm to Bayliss how to play baseball, only to receive the following response:

'Quite an interesting game,' said Bayliss, 'but I find, now that you have explained it to me, sir, that it is familiar to me, though I have always known it under another name. It is played a great deal in this country. It is known in England as rounders, sir. Children play it with a soft ball and a racket, and derive considerable enjoyment from it. I have never heard of it before as a pastime for adults.'

Another example of his use of a cricket scene appears in 'The Swoop,' when Mike Jackson's misfortune is foretold as the whole Russian Army walks in front of the sight-screen, causing the Surrey batsman Tom



Hayward to be bowled for a duck.

A duck? Sorry. A technical term, meaning no runs. Derived from the fact that a nought written in a scorebook looks like a duck's egg. No, I don't know why it is not called a hen.

In 'The Luck Stone' the aristocratic Indian, to preserve whose future the whole adventure took place, made a century for Cambridge University against Oxford; in *The Prince and Betty* John Maude was able to sympathise with Della Morrison that her American background had caused her not to be an enthusiast on the first day of a Test Match; in 'Ukridge and the Home from Home' the professional drainage engineer Wapshott was watching cricket at the Oval when the bogus impersonator declared the drains at The Cedars to be faulty; in *A Man of Means*, had Roland Blake not wanted to see how the Test Match was progressing, Dermot Windleband might have succeeded with the second part of his swindle; and so it goes on. But have you noticed that virtually all these incidents are in stories written before 1920 and that few of them come from his more popular series.

Cricket has been the source of many words and phrases in the English language, and most of them are understood even by non-cricketers. In *If I Were You* Tony asks whether an attempt to discourage Syd Price from pursuing his claim to the title is cricket. When Lady Lydia answers 'Of course it isn't cricket. It's something much more serious,' one has two immediate reactions. First, you understand precisely the sentiment underlying Tony's question. And secondly, if you have been inclining towards sympathy for Lydia, at a stroke her credibility has been shattered. There is **NOTHING** more serious than cricket.

Wodehouse used a number of these expressions in novels and short stories and indeed, they represent virtually his sole cricket references in later years. A few more examples should suffice. 'Sticky Wicket at Blandings' was the title of a story included in *Plum Pie* in the middle 1960s. A sticky wicket is created when heavy rain is succeeded by hot sun, and the wet turf is given a thin crust of baked earth while remaining soft underneath. The hard cricket ball is unpredictable in its behavior after bouncing and becomes almost impossible to play. The allusion fitted the story perfectly. In *Much Obligated, Jeeves*, Bertie Wooster describes Ma McCorquodale as looking like Aunt Agatha listening to the boy Wooster trying to explain away a drawing room window broken by a cricket ball. Why not a baseball?

In 'Jeeves and the Old School Chum,' from *Very Good, Jeeves*, one of Jeeves's sentences contains six words of three syllables or more and Bertie's response is

'Once again, Jeeves?' I said, trying to grab it as it came off the bat, but missing it by several yards.

This is a reference to the fumbling attempts of those fielders standing about fifteen yards behind the bat, next to the catcher, trying to catch edged shots flying at up to ninety miles an hour which in baseball would be foul hits.

In *Leave It to Psmith* the great man admitted that perhaps he did put a bit of top-spin on the words 'Across the pale parabola of joy.' When asked to amplify, he explained that it meant that the expression was obscure. The disconcerting effects of top-spin are by no means unique to cricket and I am sure you can appreciate the sense of Psmith's reply.

In *Laughing Gas*, a transformed Reggie Havershot despaired of his own physical frame with its puny appendages, and described his arm as that of a bowler of slow leg theory, nature's long hops. A long hop, roughly translated, is a ball from which a good batsman should score four or six runs, and even the worst batsman should be able to avoid getting out.

And perhaps the most heartfelt of all comments was that from *Mike at Wrykyn*, after Mike's brother Bob had dropped an easy catch off the bowling of Burgess, his friend and captain, and received a cold stare in return.

There would have been trouble between David and Jonathan if either had persisted in dropping catches off the other's bowling.

I have not sought to refer to all PGW's allusions to cricket, as this would be an impossible task, but I would like to mention a couple of real-life individuals. You may remember his reference to H. G. Wells's initial comment at their first meeting: 'My father was a professional cricketer,' to which Wodehouse could find no immediate reply. You are less likely to have seen the endorsement of Flesho, the slimming specific, which he attributed to Warwick Armstrong in the Strand original of 'The Heel of Achilles.' Armstrong was a very substantially built captain of the Australian cricket team. By dint of the judicious polishing for which Wodehouse was renowned, we find the name of the sponsor changed to the equally corpulent G. K. Chesterton when the story appeared in *The Clicking of Cuthbert*.

Before closing, I would just like to mention three other amusing references. In her biography of Wodehouse, Lady Donaldson referred to an item about cricket which he wrote for *Punch* in 1902, and in which he referred to a player by the name of Larwood. Harold Larwood, who died just three months ago, was prob-

ably the most controversial fast bowler ever to play for England, but unfortunately for Lady D's credibility, he played in the 1930s; her typesetters should have printed Lockwood. They corrected the error in the paperback edition, but I regret to say the recent reprint of the book has reverted to the incorrect original.

I referred briefly to Percy Jeeves, the Warwickshire cricketer who gave his name to the immortal gentleman's personal gentleman. In an interview in the *New Yorker* in 1971, Wodehouse said that the Warwickshire Cricket Club tie—which I just happen to be wearing—was his favourite. In its museum, the Warwickshire Cricket Club has a number of items relating to Percy Jeeves, including an inscribed cricket ball, his cap, and a copy of a letter from PGW confirming that he was the inspiration for the name Jeeves.

The Club has asked me to pass on a message of goodwill, and to encourage you to visit their ground in Birmingham if you are in the area. Rowland Ryder has recently produced a book, published by Faber and Faber, entitled *Cricket Calling*, containing a chapter entitled 'The Unplayable Jeeves,' which tells a little more of his story.

And last, the most international reference of all. Cricket commentaries have an international radio audience which is the envy of any station, every ball of each five day Test Match being described live. In fact commentary on virtually the whole of the last match of the recent test series between England and the West Indies was transmitted to a New York radio station. The producer of Test Match Special, as it is called, for the BBC is Peter Baxter, and on the first day of March, 1993 his Indian colleague, covering a one-day international with him from Jamshedpur, said as an on-air aside, 'Peter, you are the second best-known Baxter in India—behind Lord Emsworth's secretary!'

Perhaps I should end by referring you to the views of the American commentators during the baseball strike. They concluded that the effect of introducing cricket in the US would be dramatic:

If genteel time-consuming cricket could fill the niche left by baseball, the death rate might drop as citizens lay down their rifles and studied cricket statistics. Psychoanalyst's bills would be virtually eliminated as a kinder, gentler nation emerges.

In a new introduction to *Mike at Wrykyn*, written solely for the American market, P. G. Wodehouse suggested towards the end of his life that he preferred baseball to cricket. But even if there were not merely written for the benefit of his relevant market, does this conclusion, as expressed by red-blooded Americans, not tie in so completely with Wodehouse's philosophy of life that he would have been the first to endorse it?

DOROTHY DICKSON DIES

Jan Kaufman, David McDonough, and William Hardwick found newspaper notices last September about the death of Dorothy Dickson, an American-born singer who became a musical comedy star in Britain. She captivated British audiences in the 20s and 30s with her singing and dancing, and remained in Britain the rest of her life. She died in



Dorothy Dickson

London at the age of 102. Her first appearance was as a featured dancer in the Bolton-Wodehouse-Kern Princess show *Oh Boy!* She starred in the London version of their *Sally* and *Cabaret Girl* as well as a number of other plays, and became a member of the country's theatrical elite. Plum wrote thus about her to Leonora in describing the 1922 opening night of *Cabaret Girl*: 'As for Dorothy Dickson, she came right out and knocked them cold.'

During the run of that musical she began a lasting friendship with Lady Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon, now the Queen Mother. At a Dorothy Dickson birthday lunch in 1980 the Queen Mother demonstrated her own musical-comedy talents by singing a tune from *Cabaret Girl*.

TURF NOTES

William Hardwick, our racing correspondent, reports the recent modest efforts of our stable of English race horses:

Laughing Gas: First once, second twice, third twice.

Plum First: Third twice, nine races nowhere.

Winsome Wooster: Second once, six races nowhere.

Twenty-three races and only eight in the money. These horses need some serious advice from Jeeves.

CRACKING THE CODE OF THE WOOSTERS

by Charles E. Gould, Jr.

A talk delivered at the Boston Wodehouse Convention, October 1995.

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Wodehouse Society:

THANK you for this welcome to Boston, a place where I have always been happy, a place once described by Jeeves as a “very interesting and respectable centre,” though I can’t recall any character in Wodehouse who ever went to Boston except Wilmot, Lord Pershore, who, as you know, actually didn’t: he went to prison instead. Your time, and the space which the Copley Plaza may soon require for other purposes, not to mention the boundless limits of my inability to remember much or synthesize the rest, compel me here to abbreviate the full study of my topic which I made in August when, like the crimes of Hamlet’s father, it was full-blown, as flush as May...even if at the time there was ‘some slight friction threatening in the Balkans.’ But I want to keep it simple, lest you leave this stately palace, this broad-blown canopy, saying, like the Queen of Sheba when she saw Solomon and his joint, festooned with his numerous cucumbers—if that’s the word I want—‘The half was not told unto me, and I knew the other half already, so what was it all about?’ In this litigious age, you may apply to Elin Woodger for your money back on this portion of the festival, hosted by the New England Wodehouse Thingummy Society, acronymically known as NEWTS. I gather that there is now a Newt in Washington; and I may say that the recognition of any newt, even if the tail is not wagging, is an honor which it shall ever be my study to deserve.

It needs no ghost come from the grave—though I don’t take unkindly to your regarding me as such—to reaffirm P.G. Wodehouse’s stature as a novelist, and I am certainly not here to evaluate his literary art. So doing is like ordering a double Scotch in the Pump Room, or sending Seppings out to ask Anatole for a soupçon of jam for the fish. We agree that his achievement is unique, setting aside the dusty clichés of Darby Nock and Northrop Frye (though like all clichés, these were not clichés at their birth) that Wodehouse was simply working in the traditions of Conan Doyle, Plautus and Terence and, for that matter, Homer who, when you think about it, was himself just a beginner. Elsewhere I have facetiously suggested that after Wo-

dehouse wrote *If I Were You*, there was no need for Dostoyevsky. I’m not sure that there was ever a need for Dostoyevsky, but in that dark novel of mis-shapen identities, malformed attractions, superstition and death of witless vision—scraping darkest moss from the walls of the Moated Grange and the blackest mud from the locker-room shoe—Wodehouse fulfilled that putative need once and for all time. In the Jeeves and Bertie novels, however, I suggest not quite so facetiously, he accomplished something more important, soaring as with the wings of a dove to the top of the cupboard in the boudoir of the manor house of English literature, leaving predecessors, contemporaries and followers snapping like the futile Aberdeen Terrier who had been snoozing under the bed. After Henry Fielding wrote *Tom Jones* in 1741, there was no need for another novel—except the Jeeves and Bertie novels. You may thoughtlessly think, therefore, that Wodehouse needed to write only one; but the glad fact that he wrote several is attributable to one feature of those narratives: the Code of the Woosters.

Tom Jones ... wins Sophia...and there we have every significant novel in English since 1741, until we get to Wodehouse.

When the English novel was in its infancy, in the middle of the 18th century, drooling out of the corner of its mouth and (in Shakespeare’s swinish phrase) muling and puking in the arms of its father (or, as some said, its nurse) Samuel Richardson and its godfather Henry Fielding, it, like most babies, wasn’t altogether sure who it was. It knew it was fiction, but wasn’t sure it ought to be, since respectable people liked history and essays and even sermons better than mere stories; it knew, especially under Fielding’s tutelage, that it owed something to Homer: the concept of potential

progress along a more or less epic or heroic journey, and the idea that to get home—safe, sound and self-aware—you have to leave home at some point. It thought it might be a kind of history; and acting on the example of its wizened forebears Defoe and Swift, it went on trying to look like history, just as the narratives of Bertie Wooster do, deceiving even Barry Phelps to the point of his discussing, in a serious monograph, the author Bertram Wooster as diarist. Even Wodehouse embraced the idea:

Mine, I protest, are historical novels. Nobody objects when an author writes the sort of things that begin, 'More skilled though I am at wielding the broadsword than the pen, I will set down for all to read the tale of how I, plain Sir John Blunt, did follow my dear liege to the wars' Then why am I not to be allowed to set down for all to read the tale of how the Hon. John Blunt got fined five pounds by the Beak at Bosher Street for disorderly conduct on Boat Race Night?

He is allowed, in the tradition of the first long prose fictional narrative involving a single character in a series of related events leading to a conclusion, which Fielding wrote in *Tom Jones*, really the first English novel, whose conclusion, of course, is marriage, and whose events are related by two threads so closely intertwined as to become a single strand: the quest of the young hero to discover, literally, his orphaned identity, and to realize, figuratively, that identity in marriage to Sophia, the embodiment of wisdom. That she is also the embodiment of more curves than a scenic railway is not irrelevant, nor is it irrelevant that her father is a squire, a magistrate and a pest—in short, a Sir Watkyn Bassett. To win her, Tom must be moulded into the kind of man she'd marry and her father would approve, and he must achieve figuratively the self-knowledge that discovering his true parentage ultimately represents. Motivated by a normal sex-drive and the need to survive after he's left his adopted home, Tom Jones after about eight hundred pages of vicissitudes wins through, and he also wins Sophia. His wisdom is experiential, but so is she; and there we have every significant novel in English since 1741, until we get to Wodehouse.

Now, there are learned people in this audience, and I must take a moment of their valuable, or invaluable, time to deflate their jeers, the beating of whose wings is just becoming audible. I once taught a confiding sort of girl who told me her roommate's gloss on my teaching. 'Gould is a pretty good teacher,' she had said.

'He hasn't read much, but what he has read he's read so well that he can make it apply to almost anything.' My pedagogical confidence is nourished also by recalling the mother who told her daughter, 'You should listen carefully to Mr. Gould, Cordelia' (or Hepzibah or Mabel, or whatever her name was) 'because, after all, he gave up the opportunity for a successful career to come here and help girls like you.' So, before I proceed, will the academic costermongers in cloth caps at the back of the hall kindly check their fruits and vegetables at the front desk.

IN the Jeeves and Bertie novels, Wodehouse inverts the pattern established by Fielding, sustained after him in various ways. Jane Austen's Mr. Darcy is quite literally, though against his initial will, moulded by Eliza Bennet. *Northanger Abbey* is a spoof, but Henry Tilney fits the pattern as he disobeys his father to pursue Catherine Morland and, in effect, the truth. Heathcliff is pathologically governed by Catherine Earnshaw in *Wuthering Heights*, just as numerous Dickens characters are governed by women they love:

David Copperfield by Dora and Agnes, Pip by Estella, Eugene Wrayburn and Bradley Headstone by Lizzie Hexam, and—Bertie's own hero—Sidney Carton by Lucy Manette. Wodehouse himself works well within the Fielding pattern in some of his earlier novels, for one of its elements is that the young hero must prove his worthiness—a notion derived from the mythic and folkloric concept of The Task, which Bertie refers to as 'the old dragon gag.' We see this archetype throughout the Wooster canon, Bertie repeatedly set tasks by Aunt Dahlia and Stiffy Byng and others which he undertakes because of his Code; but when successful completion of the task would put him

in good with Aunt Agatha or fulfill her wish that he marry, he invariably fails. Here we see Bertie not as an anti-hero or non-hero, but rather as a hero whose identifying quality is that he is, as Jeeves says, 'one of nature's bachelors.' Naturally we don't want to see Bertie in the good graces of Aunt Agatha or marrying somebody who'd mould him, or who'd come down to breakfast, wrap her hands around his morning head and say 'Guess who.' But that's just what the hero of Wodehouse's more conventional novels would want: Ashe Marson, John Carroll, Berry Conway; but notice, as like a slinking snake I approach my thesis, that we see such protagonists only once: at the ends of their novels,



there's nothing more to write. Bertie, however, goes on; as Aunt Dahlia reminds him, he has faith in his star; and his star decrees that he'll never complete the task.

ONE reason we like Bertie so much is that by the standards set in the tradition of English literature his failure is heroic. Hats off—Alpine and the Whitehouse Wonder, not to mention the Broadway Special—to Wooster, Bertram Wilberforce. In failing—to master, for example, Spindrift or Ruskin or *Types of Ethical Theory*—he becomes the true hero of these books. Jeeves can handle all that stuff, and in the earlier stories the focus is on Jeeves as the mastermind who can save the young master from marriage—sometimes desired, sometimes not, both in 'Jeeves and the Impending Doom'; but never in the novels does Bertie want to marry, and that is where the Code makes him vulnerable to a threat earlier formed by a designing girl, Aunt Agatha, or his own susceptibility to oomph and espieglerie. When Bertram Wooster fails a task, he defeats the foul purpose behind it, and by so doing becomes the man of men like Odysseus, the boy of boys like Tom Jones: the person, thoroughly aware of his identity who without regard to age or sex knows precisely who he is, specifically, the 'wretched piefaced wambler' we all mostly are and all dream of being allowed with impunity to be.

Indeed, Bertie's capacity for disingenuous self-parody in those wonderful sentences beginning 'Those who know Bertram Wooster best' and 'It has been well said of Bertram Wooster that...' derives, as disingenuous self-parody always does, from genuine self-knowledge. Though Bertie is miffed—as who would not be?—to hear Jeeves describe him as 'mentally negligible,' he later characterizes himself without any self-parody at all:

I mean to say, I know perfectly well that I've got, roughly speaking, half the amount of brain a normal bloke ought to possess. And when a girl comes along who has about twice the regular allowance, she too often makes a bee-line for me with the love light in her eyes. I don't know how to account for it, but it is so.

Jeeves's response, 'It may be Nature's provision for maintaining the balance of the species, sir,' wins our laughter; but it is really Wodehouse's way of maintaining the balance of the narrative voice. After all, the latter part of what Bertie says is true: it accounts for the attraction he held for Honoria Glossop, Florence Craye and Heloise Pringle (in *The Mating Season*, for which novel, incidentally, "Without the Option," a story twenty four years earlier, is bit for bit an outline). It is the Bertie of the short stories, selfanalytical and self-

aware, who becomes the heroic figure of the novels, the man of chilled steel who, looking down from lazy eyelids, plucks invisible specks of dust from the irreproachable Mechlin lace at his wrists; or who, on the other hand, having put his shoulder to the plough does not pause to pick daisies or, if you understand the expression, to pluck the gowans fine. As the pages about him begin to add up to the pages about Tom Jones (many more than the eleven or eighteen pages in the Junior Ganymede Club Book), Bertie Wooster emerges as a man with the purpose of every other hero in English fiction: to preserve his identity, his head bloody but unbowed. To do so, he can take the 2:45 Ack Emma Milk Train up from King's Deverill without crying over the spilled milk. Look at Tom Jones after his night at the Inn at Upton, 'of exceeding good repute, whither Irish ladies of strict virtue, and many northern lasses of the same predicament, were accustomed to resort on their way to Bath,' add your recollections of Odysseus within reach of Circe and earshot of the Sirens, and you see Bertram Wooster in the presence of Hilda Gudgeon and Madeline Bassett as breakfast is readying at The Larches, Wimbledon Common.

When he arrives at The Larches, Bertie has been posturing at King's Deverill as Gussie Fink-Nottle (just as in 'Without the Option' he has been posing as Oliver 'Sippy' Sipperly); Bertie always knows who he is, even when aunts are baying and we may well have forgotten his imposturing. His identity does not hang on a rod in his closet or repose in a dresser drawer; we recall the scarlet cummerbund, the Old Etonian Spats, the white mess-jacket, the socks Jeeves gave to the lift attendant, the soft silk shirts for evening wear, the blue suit with the invisible red stripe as opposed to Jeeves's selection of the brown, and the Alpine Hat. Different from other protagonists, Bertie may not know much about art, but he knows what he's like.

In *Thank You, Jeeves*, the first of the Jeeves novels, Bertie might for a moment have looked like Tom Jones, having got engaged to Pauline Stoker while he was in New York in flight from Aunt Agatha; but a telephone call from Sir Roderick Glossop put the bee on that; and, unlike later ones, this novel does not turn on Bertie's susceptibility to the girl's having him back—though perhaps Pauline is the only girl who ever said that actually she wouldn't mind being married to him. (In *Joy In The Morning*, Nobby Hopwood says that Florence Craye always thought she might have rejected him too hastily, but the difference is that Pauline genuinely likes him.) Boy has lost girl, and both are glad; the plot turns on old Pop Stoker's not realizing that. Wodehouse reworked this in *Aunts Aren't Gentle-*

men, but the Code is not called into play in either novel, partly because Pauline and Vanessa Cook are girls whose independent style would not invoke it, partly because they love, respectively, Chuffy and Orlo Potter anyway, mainly because Wodehouse's plot doesn't need it: he has kept Bertie out of wedlock by the simple expedient of engaging him to a girl who didn't really want him and found somebody else fast. (Pauline has a later, Vanessa an earlier parallel in Corky Pirbright.) *Thank You, Jeeves* is practically inverted by novels yet to come, while *Aunts Aren't Gentlemen* is a return to that initial format: in both novels, Bertie is a victim, first for his devotion to the banjolele, then for his desire to get that cat placed right, and in both for his willingness to help Pauline win Chuffy and Vanessa Orlo, but he is not vulnerable to the marriage threat: though Pop Stoker and Pop Cook think they would, their daughters would not—if you'll pardon the expression—marry Bertie with a ten-foot pole, and the Code of the Woosters is not an issue.

It is, however, in the intermediate novels, first mentioned as such and defined in Chapter 13 of *The Code of the Woosters*, when Stiffy Byng says:

'Bertie, you aren't going to be difficult about this? You're much too good a sport. Didn't you tell me once that the Code of the Woosters was "Never let a pal down"?'

She had found the talking point. People who appeal to the Code of the Woosters rarely fail to touch a chord in Bertram. My iron front begins to crumble.

As Professor Garrison puts it, besides that commandment the code includes numerous other prohibitions, the most important being that, 'a preux chevalier, he will never demur when a girl in a passing fit of despair declares that she will marry him.' Professor Garrison is being funny here: 'passing fit of despair' does not precisely describe either Florence's or Madeline's motive, nor the motive of their great original, Honoria Glossop, from whom Florence's wish to mould and Madeline's mistaken idea of Bertie's wish to marry her are both derived. But his idea is just right, the preux chevalier feature of the Code being my subject here.

Kristin Thompson notes that the only earlier use of the word 'code' is in 'Jeeves and the Song of Songs,' where it is not capitalized, and she goes on to say, 'The Code arises from Bertie's immaturity, for it is basically a schoolboy notion of honor.' Here I think she is going too fast. Ms. Thompson has just said on the previous page that 'Balancing Bertie's timidity are his generosity, idealism and chivalry.' Now, in 1995, I think we must agree that none of these qualities is remarkable as a trait of the ordinary schoolboy; indeed, many of my

pupils would be unable to define 'timidity' and 'chivalry,' and most would laugh themselves silly at the suggestion that they should or would ever have been generous or idealistic. They stick together, and I respect them; but generous and idealistic they're not. Ms. Thompson has in mind the schoolboy of Wodehouse's Dulwich days—as makes perfect sense; but she overlooks that for Wodehouse the schoolboy notion of honor is not synonymous with immaturity; nor is it for Bertie; nor is it, really, for us, is it? At fifty-one I may still be obviously trying to outgrow timidity; but generosity, idealism and chivalry on the scale of the Woosters are goals still which I have but precious little time to reach.

On the same hand, what's wrong with immaturity, if it means the g., i. and c. Ms. Thompson credits Bertie with? To the extent that he embodies those traits, Bertie is a dynamic character: he may not change in the usual sense, but he can certainly bend, bow, break and make him new, or whatever it was that the poet Donne said God had done to him; and that is in part because of the Code or, to use Stiffy Byng's telling phrase, because he is a 'good sport.' Really being a 'good sport' is not something you achieve until you're along in years: adolescents are not good sports in the sense Bertie is, spending their teens shoving oars in a river and pulling them out again, working up an almighty sweat from which they emerge almightily irked if they haven't done it faster than the good sports in the next boat. It's happening on the Charles River even as Charles Gould speaks, just over there. But Bertie, whose attitude toward Henley and the Head of the Charles I have just paraphrased, is a good sport. But we have slipped away from the *res*—or *rem*, I suppose it should be, shouldn't it, Dan? If you're still in the room We are making a critical *faux pas* or (if you'll pardon my French) f. u. of magnitude: we are discussing Bertie Wooster as if he were a real person. He is real, and we are fond of him; but he is not a real person; and his Code comes not from his character but from his creator. As R. B. D. French says:

There is a temptation to follow an endearing fictitious character beyond the printed page and read significance into an author's slips. It should be resisted No good will come of approaching Bertie and his man as real persons made up of what has been recorded about them.

That is why we needn't bother about Wodehouse's errors, such as having Pop Stoker say in *Thank You, Jeeves* that he has only one daughter, when in *Stiff Upper Lip, Jeeves* his other daughter Emerald is eloping with Gussie Fink-Nottle, or his calling Aubrey Upjohn Arnold Abney in *Much Obligated, Jeeves*. It's akin to

Constable Dobbs's wondering where Cain's wife came from, or Thomas Hardy's joke about the eremite who wondered who wore the first pants in the Bible. It is similarly a critical mistake to put much weight on the Code of the Woosters as a feature of Bertie's character. It is an important feature of the novels, indeed, but the novels are not after all about Bertie's character—not in the way that *Tom Jones* is about Tom Jones's.

WE may not all agree on just what the novels are about. I do not agree with Tom Sharpe, quoted by Kristin Thompson as saying that readers would be 'mental to start' if they are looking for profundity in PGW. Bertie's attitudes toward marriage are just as profound as Tom Jones's or Fitzwilliam Darcy's, in fact far more abstract and less governed by what Lionel Trilling termed 'the illusion which snobbery generates,' but his attitudes toward marriage are not what the novels are about. R. B. D. French refers to Bertie as 'a great comic figure,' adding (with Richard Usborne in mind) that 'all this talk about Bertie as nature's idiot can be overdone'; but the novels are not about Bertie's intelligence. Corky Pirbright refers to 'Bertram Wooster, the great London comic,' but they're not about that, either. But the novels are about the relationship between a certain kind of man and women; and to the extent that it's difficult to think of an important novel that isn't, even though they are funny they are not only original but profound and important—important in that whereas the function of the novel as Professor Trilling defined it was 'to record the illusion which snobbery generates,' these novels dispel it without troubling to mock it. Even if, as he said they were, the Jeeves and Bertie books are ultimately just a way for Wodehouse to have pleasure and keep out of the public houses, that is their achievement.

When the Code of the Woosters is an element of character rather than a device of plot, it springs a leak, in the metaphor of Catsmeat Potter-Pirbright in *The Mating Season*:

I was firm.

'No, Catsmeat. The Code of the Woosters restrains me. The Code of the Woosters is more rigid than the Code of the Catsmeats. A Wooster cannot open a telegram addressed to another, even if for a moment he is that other, if you see what I mean. I'll have to submit them to Gussie.'

The hour was then three-forty-five, and Bertie contin-

ues firm until about five minutes to four:

The catch about the Code of the Woosters is that if you start examining it with a couple of telegrams staring you in the face, one of them almost certainly containing news of vital import, you find yourself beginning to wonder if it's really so hot after all. I mean to say, the thought creeps in that maybe, if one did but know, the Woosters are priceless asses to let themselves be governed by a code like that.

Similarly, later in the same novel when Bertie remarks that 'one has one's code' when it comes to getting 'the right word in the right place and to avoid fobbing the customers off with something weak and inexpressive when they have a right to expect the telling phrase,' it is a mistake to make the quest for *le mot juste* an integral part of Bertie's character. The voice here is Wodehouse's: Bertie doesn't know an odalisque from an aunt, or a widowed aunt from a derelict. He's the one who, when Madeline Bassett says, 'You know your Shelley,' replies, 'Oh, am I?'

The essence of the Code of the Woosters is that it's a device of plot: if Bertie ever marries, there won't be any more stories about him. In the early short stories, Jeeves embodies this narrative essential, saving Bertie from both his amorousness and his malleability; but there is a limit to the times Bertie can fall for a Bobbie Wickham or a Gwladys Pendlebury, or be set up by Aunt Agatha for an Honoria Glossop or Aline Hemmingway. But the enduring threats to his freedom, Florence and Madeline (characters emerging from Honoria Glossop in *The Inimitable Jeeves* who, like Madeline, first misunderstands his pressing the suit of another and who, like Florence, wants to iron out the wrinkles in his soul), can go on and on.

There is no limit to the times Wodehouse can put one or the other, or both, back in the ring and invoke the Code of the Preux Chevalier. Jeeves plays his old role, and the inverted quest—for bachelorhood—remains the same; but like Homer's Troy and Ithaca, like Virgil's Italy and Fielding's Sophia, it's the gleam of Wodehouse's Code of the Woosters that gives him his narrative scope. In the first chapter of Book XVIII, the last of *Tom Jones*, Fielding writes:

The variety of matter, indeed, which I shall be obliged to cram into this book, will afford no room for any of those ludicrous observations which I have elsewhere made, and which may, sometimes, perhaps, have prevented thee from taking a nap when it was beginning to steal upon thee. In this last book thou



wilt find nothing (or at most very little) of that nature. All will be plain narrative only; and indeed, when thou hast perused the many great events which this book will produce, thou wilt think the number of pages in it scarce sufficient to tell the story.

In this Farewell to the Reader, Fielding may well have reached Wodehouse's own creed: plain narrative only, in pages seemingly scarce sufficient to tell the story. In their consummate artistry, these writers never seem aware that they've made jokes or been funny. In the preface to *Very Good, Jeeves*, Wodehouse says:

The question of how long an author is to be allowed to go on recording the adventures of any given character is one that has frequently engaged the attention of thinking men.

In the novels we've been discussing, it is the Code of the Woosters that at last answers that question; and, durable as it proves to be, the Code of the Woosters is the Code of Wodehouse after all.

October 13, 1995

THE DURABLE MASTER

David McDonough writes:

I came across an Oxford University Press publication recently, circa 1995, entitled *A Reader's Guide to the Twentieth Century Novel*, edited by Peter Parker. Naturally, I turned to the index, and there was Plum, nestled quizzically between Jeanette Winterson and Thomas Wolfe.

The book includes essays on four Wodehouse novels: *Psmith In The City*, *Uneasy Money* (an odd choice, perhaps), *Carry On, Jeeves* (in which essay mention is made of Gussie's speech at Market Snodsbury. I quote: 'One of the greatest scenes in all comic writing.'), and *Galahad at Blandings*.

The astonishing thing is that there is a 55 year gap between *Psmith* and *Galahad*. Surely no other writer could be cited as having published a major work in both 1910 and 1965.

'Others abide our question. Thou art the bee's rollerskates,' about sums it up.

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