Plum Lines

The quarterly newsletter of The Wodehouse Society *Vol. 22 No. 1* *Spring 2001*

Two People

By David Landman

David tackles a daunting question here: What could an excellent writer like Wodehouse find to admire in a book that reviewers found mediocre? —OM

"Colossal!" is the word that leapt from Wodehouse's Monarch when describing A. A. Milne's 1931 novel *Two People* which he had read as a serial in the *Daily Mail*. It is, he enthused to his correspondent William Townend, "the sort of book I shall read and re-read every six months or so." His enthusiasm survived both time and the nasty rupture of his friendship with Milne; we find him more than twenty years later (and more than forty re-readings later if Plum was true to his word) writing to Denis Mackail, "I can re-read a thing like *Two People* over and over again and never get tired of it."

Wodehouse was apparently the only person on both sides of the Atlantic who so highly prized the novel. The book did appear on the bestseller list in America, "though perhaps," as Milne's biographer Ann Thwaite says, "most people who bought it were interested mainly in seeing what Christopher Robin's father was up to now." "Wodehouse" she writes, "seemed to be the only person in America who did not think of Milne primarily as a children's writer." The American reviewers reacted with less than plummy rapture. "Mildly entertaining" and "agreeable" were the alpha, "tepid" and "bathetic" the omega of what the *New York Times* and *Time* reviewers could bring forth.

A. A. Milne (1882–1956), pen and ink drawing by P. Evans, c. 1930; in the National Portrait Gallery, London

What was it, then, about this novel which inspired such prolonged enthusiasm from Wodehouse?

For one thing, it mentions his name on page four.

Reginald Wellard, content and snug in his country seat Westaways whose glories include his adoring wife, the supremely lovely Sylvia, and his luxuriant gardens, on a day when "contemplating a ceanothus (Gloria de Versailles) which was climbing up a convolvulus, or being climbed up by it," gets an idea for a story. "It seemed good enough to tell Coleby (of Redding Farm) who knew a man who had played golf with P. G. Wodehouse. Wodehouse could almost make a novel of it . . ." What Wodehouse could "almost" do, Wellard does; he writes a novel which inexplicably becomes a bestseller.

It is Sylvia's lukewarm response, "Fancy!" to Reginald's shy confession that he has written a novel which first starts him thinking that perhaps supernal beauty is not enough in a life's companion. Perhaps a little more intellectual beef and a little less of the Greek goddess stuff might be more to his liking. Sylvia, by the way, is such an eyeful that mere glamourpusses extol her loveliness without a trace of envy and behave toward her without a hint of unpleasantness. She is simply in another league. In fact, one woman who refers to her as merely beautiful raises eyebrows. " 'Sorry,' she apologizes. 'I don't know why I said beautiful. It was stupid of me. Utterly lovely.' "

The success of his novel brings Reginald and Sylvia to London where we are given satiric half-glimpses into the life of publishing and later, when Wellard's novel is being turned into a play, into the life of the theatre. A gallery of London artsy types parades before us—the intellectual who sells out, the fop, the phoney, the philistine moneybags, the unscrupulous publisher, the air-head

ingenue, the man of unmerited reputation, the single-success artist who cannot repeat, plus assorted scamps, neurotics and their long-suffering women. Wellard almost against his will accumulates a string of charmingly intelligent female possibilities, who, while they cannot equal Sylvia's beauty, think he's pretty hot stuff and say so (we are asked to believe) cleverly in what is apparently Milne's forte, the truism which isn't true, the mot which sounds good at first reading, but proves on closer inspection to be either banal, false, or just plain gibberish. Take for example this screwy apothegm laid on Reggie by one of the sophisticates he dallies with: "We're all terrified of being mistaken for what we just missed being, so we pretend to be something which nobody could mistake us for." "Life is very difficult," sighs Reginald in reply. And no wonder when women are blithering rhubarb like that at you. This particular blither was perpetrated by Coral Bell, the actress idol of Reginald's adolescence. Older than he, she retains much of her looks and music hall espieglerie, but, most important, she is witty, sophisticated, and has a brain-pan stuffed with intellectual goodies. She is also married. Wellard toys with the idea of falling in love with her.

Sylvia, for her part, has not gone unnoticed by the men of London and is—because of Reginald's absorption in his vogue and Coral Bell—seen in public without her husband in the company of Baron Ormsby, tabloid magnate and notorious womanizer. Divinely innocent, she has little idea of what this means to her reputation.

Sylvia and Reginald draw apart, fight, and then, suddenly realizing their folly, fly back to Westaways and resume their idyllic billing and cooing. (One critic complained that Sylvia addresses Reginald "as 'darling' in at least every other sentence.") There, when Sylvia says earnestly, "What I think is that marriage without love is much worse than love without marriage," Reginald is "surprised that she had put it so well." He wonders, "Did I really once think that I couldn't talk to Sylvia?" The novel ends with the couple in bed where a regenerate Reginald says, "You're better than clever. You're wise." Reginald has at last attained the higher love he sought, a "spiritual appreciation of physical qualities" in a woman who is wise rather than clever. But Milne, despite his sentimentality, is no fool; he realizes that time must inevitably waste Sylvia's beauty—and then what? Apparently, he felt the following bit of dialogue would satisfy the poser. "Will you ever grow old?" Reginald asks Sylvia. "I'll try not to darling," she says illogically. "I'll put it off as long as I can. You won't mind, will you, if I'm not very clever sometimes. Because all the time I'll be trying to put it off for you." Apparently, the constant effort of remaining young saps one's brainpower. (This may be the only true apothegm in the book.)

We return to our original question: what did Wodehouse find so colossal about this soap-opera mixture of pseudo-insight and sentimentality? Undoubtedly, he would have savored the diamanté prose and playful wit, and we know he found these veddy, veddy British characters, of the sort Nichols and May parodied so brilliantly, fascinating and true to his own experience, for in his letter to Townend he raved, "what a genius he [Milne] is at drawing characters." Wodehouse and Milne were, after all, very much alike in class and culture. Milne's nephew Tony put it like this:

> They were born within three months of each other in respectable middle-class families...and went to public schools, where they were both goodish games players—cricket and football.
>
> Both knew at an early age that writing was the only thing they wanted to do. Alan refused to take a job; Plum agreed with great reluctance and left as soon as his writing income exceeded his salary . . . both aimed at the light and "funny" market. . . .
>
> Both joined a club—the same one.
>
> Both loved the theatre and wrote for it enthusiastically.
>
> They wanted the same kind of life-style, that is, a place to work undisturbed, but both married women who wanted more of a social life than that. . . .
>
> Both made a lot of money but seemed not to care. . . . Neither had expensive tastes—the wives made up for that.
>
> Both loved to play golf. . . .

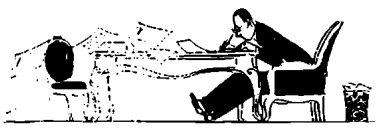
To which I will add that both loved New York City; both evinced, in Ann Thwaite's phrase, a "dislike of any mention of the more exciting activities of the body"; and both made fun of Sir Oswald Mosley. They had so much in common, it is no wonder they were only cool acquaintances and never achieved friendship. Wodehouse wrote to Richard Usborne: "Odd chap, Milne. . . . I loved his writing but never liked him much."

The major difference between them seemed to be politics. Milne was an ardent and active pacifist, largely the result of the horrors he had seen at the Somme in 1916. Wodehouse, though pacifist to the core, gave the impression of being totally at sea in politics. And it was over politics, at least over Milne's hasty, virulent, and inaccurate condemnation of Wodehouse's Berlin broadcasts, that the acquaintance broke apart.

There are other reasons why Wodehouse would have admired *Two People*. For one thing, Reginald is a 45-year-old, slightly less bemused Emsworth. He is inde-

pendently wealthy and loves nothing more (Sylvia excepted) than his estate Westaways (modeled after Milne's beloved Sussex home, Cotchford), where he is content to putter about in his gardens despite the intimidations of not one, but two (!) gardeners. Knowledgable about flowers, he is incompetent when it comes to machinery, domestic economy, and business. (He discovers at one point that he has signed away 150% of his play's film-rights.) He habitually misses trains and inferences. There are no sisters. Sylvia runs the household as quietly and efficiently as Aphrodite runs hers on Olympus. Reginald wonders how she manages to arrange steak-and-kidney pudding with the cook, order coal, call in someone when things go wrong, medicine the pets, and remain radiantly "sweet, pretty, and lovable." It occurs to him that perhaps she merely "thought violets," and the cook decoded the thought into kidneys...thought "lavender," and another half-ton of coke hurried into the shed. Sylvia's main occupation and pleasure in life seems to be catching Reginald's hand as he goes past and "kissing it lightly and suddenly."

Wodehouse would have especially enjoyed Milne's shrewd evocation of an author's mind, pretending indifference to the success of his book, yet avid for praise and assaying the nuance of the slightest mention. When someone congratulates Reginald on "one of the most delightful books I have read for some time," he thinks, why "are people so indefinite when they praise you? . . . why not be definite over some part of it anyway? The most delightful book I have read for such-and-such a time—or, if you prefer it, one of the most delightful books I have ever read. So much more gratifying." Wodehouse would have recognized with a smile the friends who promise to read your book but somehow never get around to it, or those who don't buy books and are still waiting for the lending library to acquire a copy.



He would have, likewise, relished the gentle satiric portraits of London literary life, especially the "usual agreement" which Reginald's venal publisher Pump springs on the neophyte author, giving a "ten per cent royalty to Reginald, and, among other things, a half-share in translation-rights, film-rights, broadcasting-rights, gramophone-rights, and all other possible rights to Mr. Pump. If you ask why these things should be given to Mr. Pump," Milne remarks, "the only answer is that he wanted the money." When Reginald signs the agreement eagerly without demur, Pump watches him "with a sort of wistful remorse, thinking that he might have got off his other customary agreement...by which Mr. Wellard gives Mr. Pump the copyright of the book and £150, and Mr. Pump gives Mr. Wellard six free copies."

Wodehouse would have found as much to delight him in the theatrical portraits such as that of Filby Nixon, the one-play celebrity, for whom "business seemed always on the verge of being put through." "If you went into almost any leading lady's dressing-room on almost any night, you would find Mr. Nixon there. Sometimes the leading lady would be saying, 'Hallo, Phil, darling, when are you going to write me a play?' and sometimes he would be saying, 'Hallo, Mary, thought you'd like to know I've got a play coming for you.' " "Nixon was also among those invariably present at memorial services to stage favorites, where his manner of giving and returning salutes while keeping his thoughts on the dead was particularly correct. This manner was useful to him sometimes at first nights."

Such are the superficial aspects of *Two People* likely to attract Wodehouse, but there was, I believe, a more fundamental sympathy. It is doubtful that he articulated it. None of the critics perceived it. Yet it gives all the idealistic unction of the novel point, seriousness, and richness. It derives from the fact that Milne's novel is a modern version of an ancient form, the pastoral. Westaways with its Hesperidean suggestion and Sylvia with its pastoral suggestion point in this direction. Milne's novel follows a seminal pastoral scenario: drawn from the idyllic pleasures of the plains, a shepherd travels to the city where he witnesses the vanity, vice, and vulgarity of urban life. He returns to the pastures and tells his tale to his simple companions after which, as night falls, they gather their flocks and retire to innocent slumber. Wodehouse would have responded to this; much of the Blandings appeal derives, after all, from the same contrast, though the comic corruption of the city generally infiltrates the pastoral serenity of Blandings. Seen in this light, the radiant beauty, innocence, and lovingness of Sylvia ceases to be adolescent stardust. She is the shepherd's Sylvia, or Phyllis, or Chloe. The pastoral, after all, is not about shepherd's lives as they were lived in actuality, but a form specific for a vitiated age. It is about regions of remembered and potential purity that haunt everyone's consciousness. Taken as a pastoral blent with gentle satire of the city, *Two People* isn't such a bad read after all. Wodehouse probably found in it sympathetic echoes of his own Blandings vision.

> She wrote novels, and that instinct of self-preservation which lurks in every publisher had suggested to him that behind her invitation lay a sinister desire to read these to him one by one.
>
> "Mr. Potter Takes a Rest Cure,"
> *Blandings Castle and Elsewhere*, 1935

Hackers, Handicaps and Hazards

Observations on Historical Golf Motifs in Wodehouse Fiction by an Eminent Golf Collector and High-handicap Player

PETER GEORGIADY's entertaining article demystifies a number of terms that baffle the Great Unwashed, or non-golfing readers of PGW. You are about to find out, for example, how the bogey got its name and what golf balls used to be stuffed with. The article originally appeared in *Golfiana* magazine, October 1987, and appears here by kind permission of the author. Peter points out that this article was written for "a fairly narrow audience" of players who were also collectors of golf memorabilia. I've preserved in the main the distinctive look of the original pages. —OM

NYONE who has read a moderate amount of P. G. Wodehouse has come across at least one of his more than thirty golf short stories. Two collections of purely golfing stories were published—*The Clicking of Cuthbert*, 1922, and *The Heart of a Goof*, 1926—and in more recent years three more collections were brought out—*Wodehouse on Golf*, *The Golf Omnibus*, and *Fore!* Wodehouse's keenness for the game can be deduced from these stories and from many other stories and novels he wrote.

The stories of Mr. Wodehouse, who was a first-class parodist, are pure, unadulterated fun. Compilers of anthologies have not overlooked these works of lighthearted genius.

Beyond the pure pleasure of reading Wodehouse, today's golf collector can gain a better understanding of period golf from the details in these stories; what was important or stylish in accoutrement is interwoven gracefully into the stories' fabric. There are hundreds of anecdotes and motifs contained in the golf stories to interest the collector, of which only a few are cited herein.

Playing the Game

Years ago people approached golf a bit differently than today. Wodehouse always portrays club golf in small villages with a closely knit membership of highly social people. Golfers in those days often took the train into the country for a day or two of golf, but Wodehouse also portrays the local folk whose daily lives revolved around their golf club. It is not unusual that characters, with apparently no visible means of support, had much time on their hands, enough ". . . for a round in the morning and two in the afternoon" ("Jane Gets Off the Fairway").

Several times there is mention of the "little hill of sand" ("Heart of a Goof," etc.). Wood-peg golf tees are an old invention but did not come into general use until the late 1920s. Prior to that, golfers formed a cone-shaped pile of sand with their fingers or a small mold from moist sand "scooped . . . out of the sand box" ("Keeping in with Vosper"). This box of sand, located at every teeing ground, also served as the tee marker and is shown in the drawing on the cover of the 1982 Penguin edition of *Heart of a Goof*.

Another theme found in almost every story is that of match play ("Rodney Fails to Qualify," etc.). Medal or stroke play is now the order of the day, but club golf and much tournament golf of Wodehouse's day was contested under the rules of match play—two players head to head, not totalling strokes but scoring each hole as a point won, lost, or halved. Match play has always been a more British manner of playing the game so it seems natural for Wodehouse to employ it in his stories. Also, in Wodehouse's day, exhibition match play amongst professionals was newsworthy, e.g.: ". . . Ray and Taylor, when they played their exhibition . . ." ("Chester Forgets Himself"). With the lengthy tournament season these days it is no wonder, and highly unfortunate, that the likes of Watson and Nicklaus or Norman cannot get together for a cozy challenge exhibition as Ted Ray and J. H. Taylor did after the turn of the century.

As equipment changed, so did the style of play. When Wodehouse mentions the "St. Andrews swing" ("Heart of a Goof"), he tips his hand on the depth of his interest. The St. Andrews swing was a 19th century practice long gone by the time "Heart of a Goof" was written. And when was the last time you heard anyone in the clubhouse talk of ". . . doing the hole in bogey . . ." ("Chester Forgets Himself")? Players eighty years ago played against

the score of the imaginary Colonel Bogey, bogey being an acceptable score roughly equivalent with today's course rating.

Famous Players of the Day

There has been hero worship for the person who can shoot sub-par golf for as long as the game has been played. Plum shows no exception. He mentions the names of no less than twenty prominent golfers of the day in his stories. It is no coincidence that the three he mentions most often—J. H. Taylor, Harry Vardon, and James Braid—were known as the "Triumvirate" because of their domination of golf for three decades before the First World War. The names of Edward Blackwell ("High Stakes") and George Duncan ("The Magic Plus Fours") are used with authority and reverence, although most today are not familiar with these two heroes of the past.

How many golfers can say they know who won the first Open Championship? In making a character point, P. G. recalls history: ". . . since Willie Park won the first championship at Prestwick in the year 1860 . . ." ("Ordeal by Golf"). He also remarks that Walter J. Travis was nearly forty years old before he touched a golf club ("Purification of Rodney Spelvin"). Ordinary men knew facts about the mundane lives of their golfing heroes as well. "James Braid doesn't dance," says the prospective champion to his girlfriend ("A Mixed Threesome"). It is a provocative point, but Wodehouse used a bit too much license there.

Even on the theme of marriage, so prevalent in the boy-woos-girl stories that Wodehouse writes, a point can be made from the world of golf, for ". . . it was to Old Tom Morris' marriage that the existence of Young Tommy Morris, winner of the British Open four times in succession, could be directly traced" ("Sundered Hearts"). Justly and accurately, P. G. employed the grand old man of golf and his family in this important object lesson.

And the hero worship goes on. Politicians, inventors, and celebrities aside, Vladimir Brusiloff said it best: ". . . your *real* great men—your Arbmishel (Abe Mitchell), your Arreevadon (Harry Vardon) . . ." ("The Clicking of Cuthbert").

Wodehouse had his favorites, too. "Sandy McHoots, the Open Champion" ("The Magic Plus Fours"), rates the most mentions, but Tamms McMickle and Jock Auchtermuchty are worthy competitors. Somehow these names never made it to the record books, only to the Wodehouse short stories.

Golf Books

For the collectors of golf books, and there are many, titles in the area of instruction merit the most mentions, for Wodehouse characters, like their real-life counterparts, were driven to self-improvement on the links. These books fall into three classes: real titles, almost-real titles, and spoofs.

Book collectors will warm to Wodehouse's use of the *Badminton Book* and James Braid's *Advanced Golf*, two well-known and collectible volumes, in "A Woman is Only a Woman."

The collector, however, should not spend too much time looking through used book shops for Vardon's *What Every Young Golfer Should Know* or *The Swing*, for it would be a long search indeed. Along with these two very plausible books, P. G. coyly inserts a raft of other titles which even the experienced collector must double-check for validity. Consider Taylor's *The Chip Shot*, Duncan's *The Divot* or Braid's *The Pivot* (all from "The Rough Stuff"). Identical titles were either used by more than one author or Wodehouse lost track, for his characters are caught reading both Braid and Ray on *Taking of Turf* ("Farewell to Legs" and "The Salvation of George Mackintosh") and Vardon on *The Push Shot*, then Braid with the same title ("The Clicking of Cuthbert" and "The Salvation of George Mackintosh").

By far, the (seemingly) best books are those to which no credence should be given. Wodehouse makes considerable use of creative license by attributing *Casual Water* to Harry Vardon ("The Awakening of Rollo Podmarsh") and *How to Become a Scratch Man Your First Season by Studying Photographs* to the "famous" Sandy McBean ("A Woman is Only a Woman"). What book collector wouldn't love to find a first-edition copy in original dust wrapper of Wodehouse's *The Niblick?* ("Jane Gets Off the Fairway").

Equipment

When Wodehouse turns his attention to the golf equipment of the day, he more than passes muster. As well as understanding the game, one must understand the tools and their use. Wodehouse is not only aware of the latest variations of the weaponry like the new "steel-shafted driver" ("Farewell to Legs") but revels in golf's illustrious history with references to the "feather ball" and then the "rubber-cored ball replacing the dignified guttie" ("Chester Forgets Himself" and "Ordeal by Golf").

Clubs and balls that rated Wodehouse's notice would include:

patent wood-faced cleek	("A Mixed Threesome")
patent Sturgis aluminum, self-adjusting, self-compensating putting cleek	(ibid.)
jigger	("Sundered Hearts")

driving iron	("Ordeal by Golf")
baffy	("High Stakes")
Braid iron	("A Woman is Only a Woman")
niblick	("A Mixed Threesome")
wood-faced driving mashie	("The Magic Plus Fours")
dozen Silvertown balls	("A Mixed Threesome")

Wodehouse's preface to *The Golf Omnibus* exhibits his adamant resistance to change in the game. He extols the romance of using clubs with names instead of those bearing numbers. "I wonder what Tommy Morris . . . would have to say to all this number six iron, number twelve iron, number twenty-eight iron stuff."

Those were also the days when the local club professional didn't just sell clubs but made them himself, as Angus McTavish tells his girlfriend Evangeline: ". . . the finest . . . sets of clubs ever made by the Pro . . ." ("Farewell to Legs"). Wodehouse correctly points out that the finest clubs were "all born in Scotland," since many of the best handcrafted golf clubs were exported to America, England, and the Empire.

Living Golf

When Mortimer Sturgis became engaged to Mabel Somerset ("Sundered Hearts"), she wanted to honeymoon in Italy while he rather thought a trip to Scotland to visit the birthplace of James Braid was more suitable. Maybe that sort of difference of priorities has not changed over the decades. In his infinite wisdom, the venerable Oldest Member, narrator of P. G.'s golf stories, concedes that "nongolfers are entitled to marry" ("Rodney Fails to Qualify").

We are reminded of Wodehouse's era—though his career spanned seventy-five years—when Chester Meredith points out that "no one has ever copped all four [major championships]" ("Chester Forgets Himself"). Later stories, however, carry frequent mentions of the great Bobby Jones, who did cop all four back in 1930. Social attitudes may have been slightly different back then, for the Oldest Member strongly asserts that "the only way of really finding out a man's true character is to play golf with him." It is an adage just as true today, though most of us are not afforded the chance of testing it regularly.

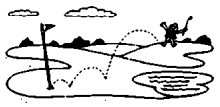
* * * * *

For any collector who has read these stories, the surprise and the gem of the group is "High Stakes." The theme of the story is the gamesmanship practiced by two old rivals throughout their lives, but the motif Wodehouse uses is the collecting of golf relics. Absolutely perfect! How could he have predicted that forty years later hoards of crazy people would be living the same way, vying for the most unusual, most coveted golf memorabilia. It is Wodehouse at his spoofing best; the valuable treasures referred to included Francis Ouimet's trousers, J. H. Taylor's shirt stud, and the baffy that Bobby Jones used to win his first juvenile championship at age four.

Today, golf collectibles have been cleared from attics and cellars and placed in museums. They have been elevated from flea markets and junk stores to antique shops and auction houses. Once, ancient golfing sticks were used as tomato stakes. Now one has to be wary of replicas and forgeries. How could Wodehouse have known?

A key idea is contained in the preface to *The Heart of a Goof*, where P. G. states that "a writer of golf is certainly entitled to be judged by his peers . . .", his definition of peers being those with like playing abilities. I would consider myself his peer not just because we both have handicaps in the neighborhood of 32, but because Wodehouse and I and scores of today's collectors feel that a real golfer gets out of a bunker, not a sand trap, with his niblick, not a wedge (preface from *The Golf Omnibus*). For collectors, historians and serious golfers, a single line from "A Woman is Only a Woman" says it all: "They were golfers, for real golf is a thing of the spirit, not of pure mechanical excellence of stroke."

If P. G. Wodehouse were alive today, he would undoubtedly be out on the links swinging away with some Tom Stewart hickory-shafted niblicks and spade mashies, talking of Old Tom Morris and Braid, taking turf, and living the golf about which he loved to write.



Oops!

Apologies from "Bill Lister" (Neil Midkiff, membership manager) and "Webster" (Shamim "Pongo" Mohamed, webmaster) for an error in coding the inquiry/feedback form at http://www.wodehouse.org/membership/ . Any data sent through the Web site form since about November 1 has been lost. We've fixed and tested the form, and all is working again.

If you sent a change of address to us in this fashion, please send it again, unless it's been confirmed on paper with your membership renewal.

If you passed this web location to friends to have them inquire about membership, ask them to repeat their inquiry. We're sorry to have made necessary this duplication of effort.

Chapters Corner

By Sandy Morris

Despite wintry weather, Plummies have continued to spread sweetness and light wherever they go. Chapters have been busy, busy, busy. Here are the updates on the activities of your cohorts during what has been called, by at least the St. Louis weather forecasters, a "wintry mix."

Chapter One, Philadelphia, gather on a Sunday afternoon approximately once every two months, except in the summer, at the Dickens Inn, Headhouse Square. In January, appropriately enough, the program was winter references in Wodehouse. Though rare compared to spring and especially summer, they are there. Lively quotes ranged from writings about Wodehouse to golf stories such as "Sundered Hearts" and "Farewell to Legs" and the Christmas horrors of Tuppy Glossop. An early poem on a cricketer mourning the loss of summer was followed by a plea for indoor golf, and creatively, the name of the grand butler Blizzard. There was also a brief discussion, and physical description, of newts. A word of wisdom from this group: it is always wise to stay on a newt's good side, since at least one species in the tank is poisonous! In keeping with this advice, the group has collected $65 for the care and feeding of their newts at the Philadelphia Zoo.

The Perfecto-Zizzbaum Motion Picture Corporation, otherwise known as Dottyville-on-the-Pacific, has had a busy fall and winter. They still meet every second Sunday of the month at 12:30 pm at the Pasadena branch of Borders for discussions of PGW's various works. In December, they braved eight-foot snowdrifts to discuss "Jeeves and the Yuletide Spirit." In January, they kicked off the New Year with *Pigs Have Wings*. In February, they honored Valentine's Day with—what else?—golf stories, "A Mixed Threesome" and "Sundered Hearts."

And, in the meantime, they have done much, much more! In October, they scampered off to the Silent Movie Theatre to see Buster Keaton in *Our Hospitality*. On December 27th, they downed sidecars and orange juice and listened to Mora's Modern Rhythmists play the Charleston, the Shag, and other 20s and 30s dance music at the Derby in Loz Feliz. It was an early New Year's and no, they did not get nicked by the rozzers and have to give false names. On January 27th, they returned to the Silent Movie Theatre to see Buster Keaton play his most Bertie Wooster-like role in *The Saphead*. And after the February meeting on the 11th, they adjourned for a potluck tea at a member's house.

Perfecto-Zizzbaum — or rather, the reconstituted PZ-MPC — will celebrate its first anniversary in June. Last May they were only a tiny band of eccentrics; now they are a much larger band of eccentrics with their very own e-mail list. If you want to keep up with their doings, you can add yourself to their list at the following web address: http://www.egroups.com/group/PZMPCo

Plummies have spent the winter months with the works of Wodehouse, undoubtedly the best antidote to cold and ice and snow.

Chapters Calendar

'Twas a busy winter season for Drones, Pdrones, NEWTS, Oysters, and others. The new year is revving up and plots are thickening. If you're planning to be in any of the neighborhoods, do contact the chapter representative and ask about attending a meeting.

Blandings Castle (Bay Area, Northern CA)

Chapter One (Philadelphia, PA)

Drone Rangers (Houston, TX)

Mottled Oyster Club (San Antonio, TX)

NEWTS (Boston, MA)

Northwodes (Minneapolis/St.Paul, MN)

The Pdrones Club (St. Louis, MO)

Sunday, April 8, 2:00 P.M., afternoon tea and swim with optional period dress at the home of Murali Sundaram, St. Louis County.

Sunday, June 3, 2:00 P.M., either golf or cricket with tea afterwards at the home of Barbara Hertenstein, Lebanon, Illinois.

Saturday, September 22, noon, lunch at Llywelyn's Pub, 4747 Mcpherson, St. Louis.

Wednesday, November 14, 6:30 P.M., Eighth Anniversary Dinner, Café de France, 410 Olive, St. Louis. (Reservations required.)

Books and short stories for all events to be determined.

The Perfecto-Zizzbaum Motion Picture Corporation (Los Angeles, CA)

Sunday, March 11, 12:30 pm, Borders, Pasadena, discussion of *Right Ho, Jeeves*.

Dear chapters! Winter is over and spring is soon to be sprung. Do let me know what nonsense you have been up to and what frivolities you have planned. To get into print, contact me via snail mail newsletters or telephone or e-mails. **The next issue deadline is May 1st.**

Ties for Sale

Angus McAllister, once retired from the tie business, has returned to again make available the dashing Drones Club ties that have adorned many a chest at past Wodehousian events. These boldly striped neckpieces—in colors of plum, black, and gold—can be purchased once again from Angus's alter ego, David Mackenzie. The prices are:

Neck ties: $42.00 including all handling and shipping

Bow ties: $35.00 including all handling and shipping (not pre-tied—what else would you expect?)

David writes: These are special order items, manufactured by Ben Silver for TWS only. Being exclusive, of course, has its price. We need a minimum order of 25 ties; for those who insist on bow ties, we need to order them in minimum lots of four. Of course, fans are expected to step forward and order in droves, so these minimums should not be a problem. And, yes, for all you observant folks, this does reflect a price increase since the last round (see, you should have ordered then). The price was held steady for four years but increased this year.

Once the full order is placed with Ben Silver, it will take about two months to weave the silk, cut the ties, make my travel arrangements for Bimini, etc. Order through and make payable to:

David Mackenzie

Auntie writes: These ties are smart, distinctive—and exclusive! David has been good enough to again take on ordering chores due to recent demand, but this will be a one-time-only deal. So order now if you want a semi-official TWS Drones Club tie—as well you should.

CD Launch Concert

Word from Tony Ring is that the concert to launch the Wodehouse CD has been confirmed for the Library of Congress in Washington on June 20 of this year. Hal Cazalet and Sylvia McNair, performers on the CD, will be there in person to show us how live music sounds. (Does anyone remember?) All of us who have been privileged to hear playbacks of these songs while the CD was in preparation are eager to hear the finished product. More in the next issue.

Wayne B. Smith

By Marilyn MacGregor

TWS member Wayne B. Swift died on January 15, 2001, after a brief illness. He was a gentle man with a fine sense of humor, a friend to be treasured. Wayne, a fan of Sherlock Holmes as well as of Wodehouse, joined in the dramatic readings of The Clients of Adrian Mulliner. His most spectacular role was in the Junior Bloodstain at the 2000 Sherlockian festivities. Wayne sported a ferociously large black moustache as Tomás, King of the Gypsies, in Robert L. Fish's double pastiche of Sherlock Holmes and Lord Emsworth. We'll miss you, Tomás!

Another Look at Blandings

By John Fletcher

Renowned far and wide for his eagle eye, John has pointed out a slight error in our last issue of *Plum Lines* and in so doing also provides an interesting challenge to Norman Murphy's contentions regarding the source for Blandings. Not that we normally publish heresy, but all views deserve to be heard—and Norman, of course, had a reply. —AD

With regard to the final installment of the Millennium Tour [*Plum Lines*, Vol. 21, No. 4, page 17] I have one critical note (Corrigenda?) which may provoke a thought or two. I am a little uneasy with the caption to the first photo, "Weston Park in Shropshire." [OM is the guilty party who wrote that caption.] I don't think I said on the web that the house was in Shropshire, because it isn't. It is remarkably close; the outlying parts of the park are in Shropshire, but the house is on the Staffordshire side of the county boundary that goes through the estate. A pedantic point no doubt. Stableford, where PGW lived at the time, is in Shropshire and we may be sure he wasn't conscious of crossing a county boundary to reach the cedar tree. Yet the point has interest.

Start from the fact that everyone knows Blandings Castle is in Shropshire. It is just about the only bit of geography which is not in dispute. Then look at Norman Murphy's analysis: Blandings is based on three sources. That there is more than one source seems evident and not particularly odd, though Corsham has rather a feeble claim. It could be four or more. Is it not strange that Norman's three sources are all from outside Shropshire? Weston Park in Staffordshire, Sudeley Castle in Gloucestershire, Corsham Court in Wiltshire. Is there no contender in Shropshire to add to this list? There is, and its claims have been put on several occasions. It is Apley Park, which I first came across reading "Where is Blandings Castle?" by Ann Wood (of whom I have never heard again) in *P. G. Wodehouse: A Centenary Celebration 1881-1981*. I have followed in her footsteps and am convinced it is worthy of inclusion. But Norman is not a man to change his mind once he's written the book. So Tours do not include it, although they easily could. There's no need to stage a revolution now—but I hope the next Tour includes Apley.

Afternote: Norman Murphy ["Indignant of Tunbridge Wells"] says he looked at Apley Park for an entire afternoon, examined it carefully inside and out, and "it has no claim whatsoever to Blandings." He says he got inside the place by some fast talking, noted it was built in the early 19th century, and also noted that its fake castellations were a common folly fashion of the same century. "There was nothing—absolutely nothing—to give it any resemblance to Blandings except for the fact that it stands as near the River Severn, cliff side, as you can get," he adds. Norman—in that gentle, polite way he has—says he is still horrified that anybody could devote more than five seconds to this heresy. "Like people who say Barribault's Hotel is not Claridge's, they will undoubtedly be eaten by bears."

Weston Park in Staffordshire, with the outlying parts of its park in Shropshire.

—Contrite in Felton

On paper, Blair Eggleston was bold, cold, and ruthless. Like so many of our younger novelists, his whole tone was that of a disillusioned, sardonic philanderer who had drunk the wine-cup of illicit love to its dregs but was always ready to fill up again and have another. There were passages in some of his books, notably *Worm i' the Root* and *Offal*, which simply made you shiver, so stark was their cynicism, so brutal the force with which they tore away the veils and revealed Woman as she is.

Deprived of his fountain-pen, however, Blair was rather timid with women. He had never actually found himself alone in an incense-scented studio with a scantily-clad princess reclining on a tiger skin, but in such a situation he would most certainly have taken a chair as near to the door as possible and talked about the weather. *Hot Water*, 1932

A Shot of the Needful

In which the P. G. Wodehouse newsgroup and its online version of Blandings Castle teach me to play again.

By Emily Jenkins

Emily is the author of *Tongue First: Adventures in Physical Culture* and a picture book, *Five Creatures*. The following article first appeared on January 11, 2000, via the on-line magazine *Salon* and vividly conveys the experience of being Internet-connected to other Wodehousians. —AD

As a child, I was never a fan of anything. I didn't write letters to the Bay City Rollers. I was never a Trekkie or a Deadhead or a collector of Shaun Cassidy posters. But since that morning a couple of years ago when, after reading P. G. Wodehouse's *Jeeves and the Tie that Binds*, I first logged onto alt.fan.wodehouse (AFW), I've been hooked. As Bertie Wooster, the master's most effervescent creation, might say, "the l. has dawned, what?" I am a fan.

Pronounce him "Woodhouse," thank you kindly. He is a humorist without peer. In about 94 books (including 11 novels and countless short stories), not to mention musical comedies galore, his verbal pyrotechnics made me appreciate the possibilities of language long before I ever considered going to graduate school for English literature. At the core of his appeal is the Wodehousian prose style: a mixture of mangled literary references, Edwardian slang, invented slang, ludicrous formality, and remarkable *joie de vivre*.

Here is Bertie on the subject of his friend Boko's troubled love affair:

> Love's silken bonds are not broken just because the female half of the sketch takes umbrage at the loony behavior of the male partner and slips it across him in a series of impassioned speeches. However devoutly a girl may worship the man of her choice, there always comes a time when she feels an irresistible urge to haul off and let him have it in the neck. I suppose if the young lovers I've known in my time were placed end to end . . . they would reach half-way down Piccadilly. And I couldn't think of a single dashed one who hadn't been through what Boko had been through tonight.

The ecstatic, cooing sort of mirth such passages invoke in me is certainly well and good. I'm all for it. But truth be told, the books are not really the point. What I really love is the newsgroup.

AFW is a mix of role-playing, hobbyism, and scholarly inquiry. Whereas newsgroups devoted to canonical authors like Joyce or Kafka tend to maintain an intellectual focus, AFW recreates Blandings Castle, the setting for 14 Wodehouse novels and 34 short stories. Enter the online community, and you arrive at the Shropshire seat of the dotty Lord Emsworth, his faithful butler Beach and his prize-winning pig. Gone are the trials and tribulations of modern life: On AFW, we concern ourselves with acquiring the recipe for Jeeves' famous hangover cure, musing upon the meaning of "boomps-a-daisy" (something like "very well, indeed") and placing virtual bets on whether Boko Fittleworth's forthcoming infant progeny will look more like Winston Churchill—or a squashed prune.

How do you pronounce "Featherstonehaugh"? The answer is "Fanshaw." * We mire ourselves in Wodehouse trivia, along with bibliography, dramatic adaptations of various sorts and musical theater. Since I logged on to AFW, members have also conducted a pumpkin-growing contest online, polled one another to determine favorite cocktails and puddings, and written a large collection of clerihews, most of questionable merit. Together, by submitting numerous nominations via the Web, we briefly managed to put *Only a Factory Girl*—a bestseller written by the entirely fictional novelist Rosie M. Banks, who appears in several Wodehouse stories—on Random House's controversial list of the 100 best novels ever written. It wasn't long, however, before the official chappies caught on, and Banks was replaced by Tolkien.

Each member has a "nom de Plum" and behaves accordingly—infusing every exchange with Plum's signature verbal style. I love playing my part. It's different from the experience of reading a book, both because I become a participant in the fiction-making process rather than a passive reader, and because the fantasy is collaborative

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* But note Dan Garrison's *Who's Who in Wodehouse:* Featherstonehaugh is "pronounced as spelled acc. to Debrett's *Correct Form.*" —OM

rather than experienced in isolation. We are all in it together. "What Ho!" I cry to Beach the Butler, who chose his nom because "there is a certain similarity in build: like Beach I am not fat, but far from svelte. I also have rather a fruity English accent. And I wanted to be in Blandings, or 'heaven' as I tend to think of it." He is likely to respond with typical portly gravity that he trusts my weekend was satisfactory, Madam, and would I care for a cocktail?

The role-playing began in November 1994, according to longtime member Gussie Fink-Nottle. "Aunt Dahlia (then writing as Stiffy) and I started a little in-character cross talk about the proper way to nab [policemen's] helmets," Gussie writes. "That was a grand time indeed. There were ferrets about the place, newts got painted orange and thrown into moats, people got potted, darning needles were bought [for puncturing the hot-water bottles of unsuspecting persons], in fact, everything that could happen in a PGW story happened."

All that was before my time. It was only about three years ago that I became Lotus Blossom, the impetuous redheaded American film star. "On the screen she seemed a wistful, pathetic little thing," wrote Plum in 1935's *The Luck of the Bodkins*, "while off it 'dynamic' was more the word. In private life, Lottie Blossom tended to substitute for wistfulness and pathos a sort of Passed for Adults Only joviality which expressed itself outwardly in a brilliant and challenging smile and inwardly and spiritually in her practice of keeping alligators in wicker-work baskets and asking unsuspecting strangers to lift the lid."

Lottie maintains, in fact, that she has learned virtually all she knows about registering emotion on film by watching people's faces as they first encounter her pet. In my online incarnation, then, I let my alligator loose on occasion (Beach the Butler, if memory serves, had a nasty encounter with him, and the dog MacIntosh was in serious danger). I throw back "shots of the needful" with admirable equanimity, and shrink not from the more controversial questions, such as whether soupy Madeline Bassett believed stars were God's daisy chain or the wee sneezes of fairies.

Now, I do not claim the AFW in-character posts are unique. I know from my '80s experiments with Dungeons and Dragons that role-playing is nothing new. I merely claim that I am playing in a way that I haven't done since my Barbie dolls were packed off to the Salvation Army, or since my friend Becca and I spent one happy summer in Narnia.

This kind of play was a continuous part of my reading life from my first encounter with Pat the Bunny until sometime around puberty. I was Oliver Twist the pickpocket, I was Jo in *Little Women*, I was Peter Pan and Pippi Longstocking, and some little witch whose name I don't remember. With my friends and alone in my bedroom, I made up fresh stories and fantasies based in the fictions I had first encountered on the page. And then, somehow, I stopped. My life as a reader changed. I wasn't Holden Caulfield, Owen Meany, or Lily Bart. I was never anyone again—until I became Lottie Blossom.

What had changed? With no fellow Peter Pans to urge me not to grow up, I had become concerned with my adolescent sense of dignity. I abandoned my series of imaginary characters in favor of fashioning my own identity in the real world. Then came college and graduate school—where reading became a profession. Playing at it became unthinkable.

What ho, Plummies! They came to my rescue when I was mired in the depths of my dissertation, saving me from a life devoted to reading *Types of Ethical Theory* and Spinoza. The newsgroup gave me a sense of membership. They were a supportive group of completely invisible like-minded souls, unconcerned with dignity—just looking about in search of a cocktail or a lost pig. In the safety of the Internet's anonymity, and in the jolly comfort of a shared language, I started playing again.

Offline, I'm not hopping about the apartment in search of my alligator or crying "What ho!" at my husband when he comes home, but Wodehouse's world infiltrates my life in pleasing and comical ways. For example, I prepared mind, body, and soul for writing this essay by eating large gobs of English country lemon curd on toast and drinking tea. To get me in the m., don't you know. Later this evening, perhaps, I will restore the tissues with a drop or two of the needful. A boy who yells loudly in my building's hallway at all hours and then asks me to donate money to his scout troop is no longer an annoyance; he is an excrescence—"as pestilential a stripling as ever wore khaki shorts and went spooring or whatever it is that these Boy Scouts do." Unlike Lotus, I am apt to be quiet in crowds, and to dress more like a janitor than a film star—but something like Lottie's oomph has revealed itself in my recent purchase of some zebra-print shoes and a dress trimmed in feathers.

I probably won't ever become Holden Caulfield or Lily Bart. (Well, who would want to?) But being a fan has changed the way I read. I've shifted from my adult, over-trained intellectualism back to my youthful preoccupation and playfulness. And this way, I think, is better. Or as Plum would say, here I am—all boomps-a-daisy.

> [He] had never acted in his life and couldn't play the pin in *Pinafore*.
>
> *The Luck of the Bodkins*, 1935

The 2001 Convention

By David McDonough

Let us never forget that W. C. Fields (who used the pen name Mahatma Kane Jeeves) once claimed that his tombstone would read "On the whole, I'd rather be in Philadelphia."

Plans for the upcoming convention in Philadelphia, "2001: A Wodehouse Odyssey," October 12-14, continue apace. A select group of the many-headed toured the Sheraton Society Hill Hotel once again prior to the Chapter One January meeting, and all pronounced it A-One—well-suited for games, speakers, and general browsing and sluicing. Chapter One's own Lou Glanzman (aka the Duke of Dunstable) has designed an elegant yet silly poster—just the thing for a gathering of our sort—and is hard at work on a sign for the Angler's Rest, the hotel bar where we will drink Green Swizzles and May Queens.

Congratulations to Anne Cotton of the NEWTS, who is the first Plummie to sign up for the convention! Others followed, thank goodness; we'd hate to think of Anatole's reaction if only one dinner was ordered.

Just a few notes on frequently asked questions:

The speakers have been selected, notified, and have accepted. Many thanks to all those who volunteered to hold forth and could not be accommodated. Do not despair. Keep yourselves ready in case all the speakers attend a rather cheery little supper the night before the convention, and we need someone to step in hastily with "Origins of the song 'Sonny Boy'" or "The Newt as a Religious Symbol." Also, never forget that as of November, the 2003 convention will be looking for speakers.

Will there be a quiz? You bet. The "Who Wants to Survive The Wodehouse New Millennium?" quiz will take place Saturday afternoon, October 13. A preliminary quiz will appear in the Loot Bag that you will get as you sign in (along with some other very cool stuff) and the finalists for the quiz will be selected from those who participate in the prelims. Start reading Tony Ring's concordance now!

Yes, there will be cricket: Friday, October 12. Details to follow.

Yes, there will be skits! From the admirable NEWTS of New England, and the always excellent Blandings Castle chapter of California.

- There will be a website devoted exclusively to the convention. More info as it becomes available, but you can always check out the TWS site, which will have a link: www.wodehouse.org.

- For those who get to Philly a day early, there will be a walking tour of Philadelphia on Thursday, October 11, at 5:30, hosted by a couple of knowledgeable chaps.

- One new thing: We are planning to have a series of Wodehouse experts wandering about during the convention, wearing buttons that say "Ask Me About . . ." followed by a field of expertise, such as "The School Stories" or "Wodehouse's Lyrics" or "Cow-Creamers." Our hope is that interested Plummies roaming about will buttonhole these people and say "You know, I've always wondered. . . ." If you are one of those people of whom fellow Plummies say, "Ask So and So. He KNOWS," and would like to volunteer for the convention, we'd like to hear from you. Contact David McDonough at (609) 737-6981 or MCD245@aol.com or Susan Cohen at blndgscast@aol.com.

To reiterate the cold hard facts:

2001: A Wodehouse Odyssey
October 12-14, 2001

Sheraton Society Hotel
1 Dock St.
Philadelphia PA USA

Reservations 215-238-6000. Ask specifically for in-house reservations, and specify Wodehouse. Rates are $177 per night plus tax.

Convention registration and meal rates are summarized on the registration form enclosed with this issue.

Be there, with your hair in a braid.

> On her face was the unmistakable look of a mother whose daughter has seen the light and will shortly be marrying a deserving young clergyman with a bachelor uncle high up in the shipping business.
>
> "The Go-Getter,"
> *Blandings Castle and Elsewhere*, 1935

McIlvaine Update Update

By Elin Woodger

In the Spring 2000 issue of *Plum Lines* (Volume 21, No. 1, page 16), we reported on a project-in-the-works under the auspices of the International Wodehouse Association—to wit, the update of Elaine McIlvaine's bibliography of the Wodehouse canon. Just to remind folks of what it entails, this will be a supplement to the McIlvaine book that will include up-to-date, comprehensive information on PGW original editions, omnibus volumes, plays, introductions and prefaces, translations, videotapes, records and audiotapes, and much more. For anybody who currently owns a hard-to-come-by McIlvaine, the supplement will be indispensable. For those who don't, the information will still be invaluable if you have even the faintest interest in Wodehouse. Tony Ring has been NCO in charge of the project, and for that reason alone you know it has to be good.

The supplement will be made available in two formats: a limited-edition "premium" version and an unlimited "non-premium" version. The premium version will most likely be the size of *Wooster Sauce* (English A4 paper), with stiff covers and illustrations; page count is currently estimated at 40 or 48. This will be produced on a one-time only basis and sold only to those who order them prior to the Philadelphia convention. Pre-ordered copies may then be picked up at the convention (or will be posted to those buyers not planning to attend).

Because there will be only a limited printing of the premium edition, which is being produced in England, it will be on the expensive side; the current estimate is approximately $25 a copy, although this is not set in concrete. (Note that the price of the premium supplement will cover the cost of production and distribution; no revenue is being generated from this project.) Therefore, it is essential to pre-order this version, as ***none will be available after the convention***. This applies to both U.S. and overseas TWS members. (Ordering information below.)

The non-premium version of the supplement will be plain-paper, non-illustrated sets to be made available at a cost yet to be determined from members who will act as distributors in their respective countries. This version, which will become available after February 2002, will be produced and distributed on demand, and therefore technically available at any time; the hope is to update it twice yearly. Those U.S.-based members who wish to pre-order this version should advise Auntie, as below. Those in other countries will receive word about availability in due course.

Remember: If you want a premium version of the McIlvaine supplement, you must order it now! **Deadline: I must receive your orders for the premium version by July 15, 2001.** Any questions? Just get in touch with Auntie, and she'll set you straight. Please inform me of your intent to order the premium version of the McIlvaine supplement by mail or e-mail: Elin Woodger, 35 Bayview Avenue, Southold NY 11971-1330; ewoodger@aol.com.

Treasurer's Report for 2000

By Tom Wainwright

Balance as of Dec. 31, 1999		$6,732.17
Income: Dues and fees		11,185.00
Expenses:		
Plum Lines production and mailing	$11,382.62	
Correspondence	295.57	
Advanced funds for 2001 Convention	500.00	
Total expenses		12,178.19
Balance as of Dec. 31, 2000		$5,738.98

> Writers through the ages have made a good many derogatory remarks about money, and one gets the impression that it is a thing best steered clear of, but every now and then one finds people who like the stuff and one of these was Jane. It seemed to her to fill a long-felt want.
>
> *The Girl in Blue*, 1970

A Dues Scheme

By Elin Woodger

What's that you say? You want to join the U.K. Wodehouse Society but don't want to go through the fuss of paying for your dues in those nasty pounds? Or is it that you're in England and want to join the U.S. Society but dread going to the bank for a cheque in dollars? Never fear—help is at hand!

Thanks to a reciprocal arrangement recently established between the two groups, it is now possible for members in one country to join the other country's society without having to exchange dollars into pounds or vice versa. How can this be, you ask? Well, follow me closely, and as you do, keep in mind that this applies only to U.S. or U.K. members who want to enroll in the overseas group, and not to memberships in one's own country.

Right, then, here's how it works. If you live in the United States and wish to join or re-enroll in the P. G. Wodehouse Society (U.K.): Simply make out a check for $24 (U.S.), payable to Elin Woodger, and send it to Auntie at 35 Bayview Avenue, Southold NY 11971-1330. Technically this gets you a one-year membership—but wait a minute before you make out that check. First of all, for those who are re-enrolling, wait until you get your notice to do so in your next issue of *Wooster Sauce*, then send your check to Auntie with a note or form specifying that it is for your U.K. membership renewal. Meanwhile, for those who wish to join for the first time, please note: The U.K. Society has an enrollment cycle that lasts from June 1 of one year through May 31 of the following year. Currently they have special arrangement where one can obtain a membership *through May 31, 2002*, simply by tacking on a little extra. Those in the U.S. can take advantage of this by sending Auntie a check for *$30* between now and May 31. As of June 1, the rate will once again be *$24*.

For the computer-literate among us, the process can be simplified by downloading the U.K. Society's membership application form from its web site: www.eclipse.co.uk/wodehouse. Go to "Society Details," then "Click here to see our Membership Application Form." The form will provide all the necessary details about signing up. Filling it out and sending it with your check will also help in maintaining the membership database.

If you live in the United Kingdom and wish to join or re-enroll in the Wodehouse Society (U.S.): You may send your money to our point man in Britain: John Fletcher, 68 Altwood Road, Maidenhead SL6 4PZ. The amount of £15, payable to John, gets you a one-year membership in the U.S. group. Please send your payment to arrive before May 31. For those who wish to renew their current memberships in pounds via this scheme, please follow the instructions on the dues renewal sheet enclosed with this issue of *Plum Lines*. For those members whose renewal date is Summer 2001, we are asking you to pay three-quarters of a year at this time, so that in future all U.K. members will renew their TWS dues in the Spring. This will simplify the process of balancing accounts.

Once a year John and Elin will meet in Bora Bora and spend their ill-gotten gains. No, wait a minute, that's not right. What I meant to say was that on an annual basis there will be a reckoning of the dues collections, and the two societies will settle the finances with each other. Meanwhile, we hope there will be happy members aplenty enjoying their translatlantic subscriptions. Should you have any questions about this arrangement, John and Elin can be e-mailed at JohnAFle@aol.com and Ewoodger@aol.com, respectively.

The Mating Season in Chicago

Daniel Glazer announces: Come one, come all! Chicago's City Lit Theater, renowned far and wide for its masterful productions from the Wodehouse canon, will be performing *The Mating Season* this spring. Here's the blurb from City Lit's website, http://members.aol.com/citlitpage/upcom.html:

The Mating Season by P.G. Wodehouse

Another hilarious installment in the adventures of Bertie and Jeeves. Bertie masquerades as fish-faced, newt-loving pal Gussie (perforce), Gussie masquerades as Bertie (of course), and Jeeves and his uncle Charlie save the day when Bertie gets tangled up with five dragon aunts, three sets of mixed-up lovers, two dogs, and an irate constable.

April 13—June 10
Previews: April 13—15
Opening Night: Monday, April 16, at 7 pm

❦

For information on tickets and directions, visit the City Lit's website, above, or call (773) 293-3682. The address is 1020 W. Bryn Mawr Avenue, Chicago IL 60660.

Earls, "of" and "non of"

I am delighted to report the solution of a half-century-old mystery. In the article "Put Me Among the Earls" (*Punch*, June 9, 1954), Wodehouse confessed his ignorance of a detail of English nomenclature:

> A thing about Earls I have never understood, and never liked to ask anyone for fear of betraying my ignorance, is why one Earl is the Earl of Whoosis and another Earl just Earl Smith. I always think Earl Smith sounds a bit abrupt, almost like a nickname. I have an idea—I may be wrong—that the "of" boys have a slight social edge on the others, like the aristocrats in Germany who are able to call themselves "Von." One can picture the Earl of Brighton being introduced to Earl Hove at a cocktail party. The host says "Oh, Percy, I want you to meet Earl Hove," and hurries away to attend to his other guests. There is a brief interval during which the two agree that this is the rottenest party they were ever at and possibly exchange a remark or two about the weather, then the Earl of Brighton speaks:
>
> "I didn't quite get the name. Earl of Hove, did he say?"
>
> "No, just Earl Hove."
>
> My lord of Brighton blinks as if he had heen struck between the eyes with a wet fish. A coldness creeps into his manner.
>
> "You mean *plain* Earl Hove?"
>
> "That's right."
>
> "No 'of'?"
>
> "No, no 'of'."
>
> "Good God!"
>
> There is a tense silence. You can see the Earl of Brighton's lip curling.
>
> "Ah, well," he says at length, "it takes all sorts to make a world, does it not?" and Earl Hove slinks off with his ears pinned back and drinks far too many sherries in the hope of restoring his self-respect. Practically all the Earls who are thrown sobbing out of cocktail parties are non-ofs. They can't take it, poor devils.

For years I have asked myself why there are there ofs and non-ofs. Now I have found the answer. In the book *Titles and Forms of Address: A Guide to Correct Use*, Twentieth Edition, 1997, by A. & C. Black, London, we find on page seven the general statement:

> All peerages have still, as in their origin, a territorial basis, which is expressed in the Letters Patent creating a new peerage, as Baron Smith, of (a place with which the new Baron has connections) in the County of . . . .

And at the beginning of the chapter titled "The Peerage: Earls and Countesses" we find:

> This grade is sometimes territorial, sometimes taken from the family name. In the former case the preposition "of" is generally used, and in the latter case it is not, although there are numerous exception to both rules.

Thus Earl Spencer has the family name Spencer, while Frederick Altamont Cornwallis Twistleton, fifth Earl of Ickenham, is beyond all doubt a territorial, or superior, earl. The ninth Earl of Emsworth, ignoring his of, seems to have pushed the "Off" button.

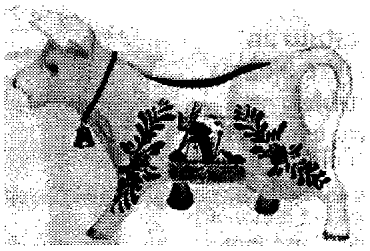
The first quote surely explains that slight social edge Plum referred to: *Every* peer has, somewhere in the title, an of connoting ancient territoriality. The more fortunate are buoyed up by their explicit ofs.* The others, their ofs sunk into oblivion, are thrown sobbing out of cocktail parties.

—OM

* This goes far to explain Uncle Fred's bobbishness.

Cow Creamer, Anyone?

Maria Kane found this ceramic cow creamer in The Vermont Country Store catalog. Sorry, it's not silver, and alas, it's modern Dutch—sort of: "A hand-painted Delft-blue design," reads the description. If this is the object of your desire, you can lapse into satiety for only $9.95 and, probably, postage and handling. Try P.O. Box 3300, Manchester Cntr., VT 05355, or (802) 362-8470 for details.



"I See by Your Outfit"[1]: Out West with Uncle Fred

By Stu Shiffman

In a recent issue Stu showed how real were the New York gangs depicted in *Psmith Journalist*. Here he shows that Plum's references to Uncle Fred's early life in the Wild West were firmly based on the lives of many young Englishmen of the time. Stu, incidentally, is an editor's dream: he not only provides the article, but the illustrations to go with it. Now if I can just get him to do the layout, the printing, the envelopes . . . . —OM

We all have our favorites among the multitudinous cast of the published works of Wodehouse. One of my favorites is that astonishing combination of Psmith and Galahad Threepwood, Pongo Twistleton-Twistleton's Uncle Fred.

Frederick Altamont Cornwallis Twistleton, fifth Earl of Ickenham, is an astonishing power usually kept bottled up in the secure care and ceaseless vigilance of his countess, Pongo's Aunt Jane, in his country seat, Ickenham Hall, Bishop's Ickenham, Hants. One imagines that the eldritch powers of the Solomon Seal and pentagram must be involved, as well as the liberal use of the fourth dimension, in order for Jane to keep him under control. When released from this durance vile (or merely durance domestic), Uncle Fred has a tendency to explode into the custody of his nephew Pongo in London and environs. Uncle Fred's preference for serial imposture, meddling, and general prevarication, with the recruitment of Pongo into perhaps criminal activity, drives his nephew to distraction.

Excess is what is usually committed by Uncle Fred, while on the loose, without a second thought.

We know that Uncle Fred spent much time in America in the days before his inheriting the title. It is not entirely clear whether he was commanded to go away or did it of his own volition. In *Cocktail Time* we are told that "His, in the years before he had succeeded to the title and was an impecunious younger son scratching for a living in New York, Arizona, and elsewhere, had been a varied and interesting career." We are told, at various times, that he pursued the occupations of cowpuncher, soda-jerker, journalist, and prospector. This belted earl still revels in his perhaps self-bestowed nickname of "Old Sureshot" and supposed status "in the sporting world as England's answer to Annie Oakley."[2] One rather imagines him occasionally bursting into some Western town, having decided while on the train to be "Federal Marshal Lem Jarvis" on the track of the Tumbleweeds Kid or "Colonel Beauregard T. (for Tiberius) Sandhurst" of the Cornpone & Topeka Railroad Company.

I imagine that he would find much in common with Bret and Bart Maverick, those gamblers and con men of the small screen Wild West[3].

Uncle Fred, fondly remembering. Drawing by Stu Shiffman.

It seems likely that quite a few cowboys and gamblers would regret getting into a game of Persian Monarchs or a session of drinking May Queens with young Fred. Fred in that period had his then more age-appropriate outlook of the slightly inebriated undergraduate ready for any mischief. Remember what he says while speaking to Pongo of Mustard Pott in *Uncle Fred in the Springtime:*

> "Though what Nature intended him to be, I have always felt, was a confidence-trick man. Which, by the way, is a thing I've wanted a shot at all my life, but never seemed able to get round to somehow."
>
> "What rot."
>
> "It isn't rot. You shouldn't mock at an old man's daydreams. Every time I read one of those bits in the paper about Another Victim of the Confidence Trick, I yearn to try it for myself, because I simply cannot bring myself to believe that there are people in the world mugs enough to fall for it."

Here's the young Uncle Fred, soda-jerking like nobody's business and delighting a winsome creature at the same time. Drawing by Stu Shiffman.

With Uncle Fred's eye for the ladies and the untold tales of his adventures in America, one wonders what memories he must have left among the distaff side of the Western sketch. Did young Fred have a border romance with a dark-eyed senorita? Was a shapely young Eastern schoolmarm crushed in his arms while he whispered "My mate!"? Considering the childless status of Uncle Fred and Aunt Jane, I suspect that Fred left nothing but memories behind him. Pongo is sure to be the next Earl of Ickenham.

The odd thing is that Uncle Fred's real life and fictional inspirations make him seem much less far-fetched. Strange destinies don't just show up in dime novels and thrilling pulp magazines. Real men and women can be caught up in the unforeseen meshes of fate and happenstance. As an old song had it:

> Now the boat on the ocean tossed like a cork,
> Then one fine morning they sighted New York.
> He stood on the gangplank and breathed in the air.
> "Hello land of plenty, I've come for my share."[4]

The effete English aristocrat or Eastern dude who comes Out West and is redeemed by hard work, adventure, and the broad Western landscape was a popular figure in the fiction and early silent films of the twentieth century. Douglas Fairbanks portrayed this character in several films before hitting his swashbuckling stride, most notably in the now lost film *The Knickerbocker Buckaroo*[5] of 1919. This six-reeler was distributed under its Artcraft "brand" by Famous Players-Lasky Corporation[6], the company that later became Paramount. Fairbanks plays Teddy Drake, an idle clubman and drone who wakes up to the fact that he's been incredibly selfish. He wants to see what he's really made of, so he heads Out West where presumably Men are Men.

Perhaps Drake had been reading Owen Wister's best-selling *The Virginian*, or had seen the films of Bronco Billy Anderson or William S. Hart.

On the train going westward, Drake exchanges clothes with Lopez, a suspicious character who claims to be going home to see his poor sick mother. Lopez is actually an owlhoot* on the lam from a corrupt sheriff for whom he screwed up a job. Fairbanks as Drake is pushed to the limit of his resources, but rescues a beautiful girl and her brother who have refused to disclose the whereabouts of a treasure to the sinister sheriff, and through daring-do and elaborate stuntwork beats the bad guy and wins the girl.

In October 2000, Greg Manning Auctions (Sale #706) included a one-sheet from *Knickerbocker Buckaroo* in its Lot 2516. This rare rotogravure silent one-sheet realized a final price of $1,092.

One real-life model for Uncle Fred was Theodore Roosevelt, who by force of will transformed himself from a puny asthmatic scion of an elite New York family into a Western he-man and hero, albeit one with pince-nez, a

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* Stu says an owlhoot is "an ol' western-type slang phrase referring to wanted outlaws. The 'owlhoot trail' is the outlaw life."

squeaky voice, and a posh Hahvahd accent. Roosevelt's tale has been chronicled in his own writings and in biographies such as David McCullough's *Mornings on Horseback* and in fiction like Brian Garfield's excellent *Manifest Destiny: A True Romantic Saga of Young Theodore Roosevelt*[7].

The latter book follows the adventures of the young Theodore Roosevelt in the Dakota Badlands as seen through the eyes of the locals, his activities as deputy sheriff, and his confrontations with the French aristocrat who sought to make his fortune raising cattle for the Eastern market, Antoine-Amédée-Marie-Vincent Manca de Vallombrosa, the Marquis de Mores.

The Marquis de Mores wasn't the only European who sought his fortune in America and its cattle industry. Many Britons also did so, like the uncles of Winston Churchill, Moreton and Richard Frewen, who managed to help build the western beef industry and lose millions in their efforts in stock-raising in Wyoming. Two very fine books take a serious look at the experience and impact of British gentlemen on the development of the West in the United States and Canada: *Marmalade and Whiskey: British Remittance Men in the West* by Lee Olson[8] and *British Gentlemen in the Wild West: The Era of the Intensely English Cowboy* by Lawrence M. Woods[9]. The British remittance men achieved iconic status for their parts in building the West and as humorous stereotypes. In Colorado, the Wet Mountain Valley was home to so many young Englishmen that at one time it was dubbed "The Valley of the Second Sons." Some of these younger scions of the gentry and noble houses came for their health or to ranch and farm, but not a few were remittance men, whose families sent them allowances, or remittances, to make sure they sowed their wild oats out of the view of society back home. British expatriates out west founded private clubs like the Cheyenne[10] in Wyoming, the Garry in Winnipeg, and the Ranchman's in Calgary. Funds that should have been invested in stock and equipment were frittered away in riotous parties. The Drones would have been quite at home.

Is this starting to sound a bit like the case of the young Honorable Fred? He wasn't the only son of an earl, as witness Lyulph Ogilvy, son of the ninth Earl of Airlie, who managed a ranch north of Denver. His family settled him in Colorado, where he attended a sort of "training ranch" for aristocratic prospective cowboys and ranchowners. There were many of these institutions of equine education and bovine management in both the United States and Canada. Many of them were just mills for the processing of remittance checks. Ogilvy busted broncos, dug ditches, got into plenty of barroom brawls, and managed to run through over $300,000 of family funds before he was finished.

Lyulph Ogilvy, like Fred, eventually drifted on to other positions, including one in journalism as farm reporter for the *Denver Post*, which inaccurately billed him as "Lord Ogilvy."

It was the Earl of Dunraven who purchased the whole of what is now Estes Park in Colorado in order to take advantage of its natural "fence" of mountain peaks for his holdings. And the unfortunate Earl of Aylesford fled the scandal of his wife's affair in England to ranch and consume massive quantities of whiskey.

Lee Olson, in *Marmalade & Whiskey*, quotes from *Powder River, Let 'er Buck* by Struthers Burt[11]:

> There came to the ranch house on foot, a tall, dusty Englishman, under his arm a little sewing machine. He asked for work.
>
> "Ranch work?" asked the owner.
>
> "No," said the Englishman, "I'm rather tired of that. Sewing is what I want. I'm rather good at sewing. I'll keep all your clothes, and saddles and things, and everybody else's in order."
>
> And he did [but] at the end of five years he turned up for supper one night and said, "Sorry! I got a letter this afternoon and I'm afraid I'll have to be going. My father's dead, and I suppose I'm in for a title or something."

In a similar way, Fred Twistleton went from being a nobody in the estimation of his beloved Jane's family, to a someone welcome in their home after his succession to the Ickenham title.

Happy trails, Uncle Fred.

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[1] Although many know the song as humorously revised though the folk process via the Kingston Trio and the Smothers Brothers, this quotation is from "The Streets of Laredo":

> As I walked out in the streets of Laredo,
> As I walked out in Laredo one day,
> I spied a young cow-boy all wrapped in white linen,
> All wrapped in white linen and cold as the clay.
>
> "I see by your outfit that you are a cowboy,"
> These words he did say as I boldly stepped by;
> "Come sit down beside me and hear my sad story,
> I was shot in the breast and I know I must die."

[2] One of the most famous characters of the Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show was Annie Oakley, who joined the show as "Little Sure Shot" in 1884 and remained with the

cast until 1901. Oakley's real name was Phoebe Ann Oakley Moses. Annie Oakley acquired her British and European fame on the tour that brought Colonel William Cody and company to Earl's Court, London in May of 1887. It formed part of the American exhibition at Queen Victoria's Jubilee in London. The show made regular tours to Europe until 1906.

[3] *Maverick* (ABC, 1957-1962) was created by Roy Huggins, who told typical Western stories from the rather cockeyed point of view of the plausible Bret Maverick (James Garner, who left the show in 1960), his younger brother Bart (Jack Kelly), cousin Beau (Roger Moore), and younger brother Brent (Robert Colbert). The names may differ, but essentially they all expressed the same character. They were by trade gamblers and laid-back flim-flam men who knew that you couldn't cheat an honest man, and thank the Lord for the rest of humanity. Maverick was a character who preferred the genteel pleasures and preferred thinking his way out of mischief rather than using unnecessary roughness. Unlike the usual Western hero, he was not particularly interested in saving damsels in distress or exposing corrupt politicians unless there was something in it for him. Maverick thought that chaos was inherently more amusing and profitable, and had no interest in staring down the barrel of a gun at high noon.

There were a couple of pertinent episodes of *Maverick*, including number 31, "The Belcastle Brand," a script borrowing heavily from James Barrie's *The Admirable Crichton* with Bret Maverick in the role of Crichton. Bret agrees to take three eccentric Britishers on a bear hunt to pay off a gambling debt, where they are ambushed by Indians and left horseless to die in the desert. Episode 80, "The Bundle from Britain," introduces Roger Moore as the English-educated cousin Beau, who is tricked into impersonating Freddie Bognor, the weaselly son of the Marquis of Bognor who has been sent to work on a Wyoming ranch for six months.

Maverick *is* the legend of the West.

[4] From "Slip Jigs and Reels" (© Steve Tilston, Runriver Publishing), as recorded by Fairport Convention on their *Jewel in the Crown* (Green Linnet, 1995). This song tells the story of a young Briton who comes to America to seek his fortune (with a ten-shilling note sewn into his grandfather's coat), but who is distracted by his eye for the ladies on the dance floor, flash company, gambling, and a murder:

> There's talk of a pistol and some say a knife,
> But all are agreed there was somebody's wife.
> A dreadful commotion, a terrible fight,
> He left a man dead and ran into the night.

It all ends with an ambush by Mescalero Apaches near Santa Fe.

[5] *Lost Films: Important Movies that Disappeared*, by Frank Thompson (Carol Publishing Group, for Citadel Press, 1996). Similar concepts lay behind Bob Hope's *Paleface and Son of Paleface* or even Jack Benny's *Buck Benny Rides Again*.

[6] Not Perfecto-Zizzbaum?

[7] *Mornings on Horseback* by David McCullough (Simon & Schuster, 1981) and *Manifest Destiny: A True Romantic Saga of Young Theodore Roosevelt* by Brian Garfield (Penzler Books, 1989)

[8] Fulcrum Press, 1993

[9] Lawrence M. Woods, Free Press, 1989

[10] Misrepresented in the film *The Cheyenne Social Club*

[11] Farrar & Rinehart, 1938

The Ukridge Art Gallery and Tea Rooms

Murray Hedgcock recently sent us a note saying that there is a "Ukridge Art Gallery and Tea Rooms" located in Virden (population 3,000), in Manitoba, just 105 km north of the U.S. border. He was curious to know why that name was chosen. Murray provided a phone number, (204) 562-3662, and said that the owners are Maureen Schwanke and her husband Dieter.

I couldn't pass up a lead like that, so I called and had a delightful conversation with Maureen. She and Dieter live on their farm near the very small town of Arrow River ("about six houses") near Virden. Dieter is a collector of Wodehouse stories and decided to name the place "Ukridge Farm" in honor of the Ukridge scheme to make millions by starting a farm to raise cats that ate rats that ate cats and so on. When Maureen opened her art gallery and tea rooms in their small house on the farm, she realized there could be no name but "Ukridge" for her establishment. We wish her every success. I encourage all TWS members to patronize her tea rooms and buy armloads of art at every possible opportunity, and I earnestly hope that her schemes for getting rich from art and tea are vastly more successful than those of Stanley Featherstonehaugh Ukridge. —OM

Wodehouse Widows

or, The Bluffer's Guide to P. G. Wodehouse

By Elaine Ring

Be warned, this article is not for YOU. Any member of this august society will know it all anyway. Rather, it is for you to leave prominently on a nonchalant coffee table for your nearest and dearest, who do not share your passion. And to those chaps who find it, Wodehouse widowers perhaps, who object to the sexist title, my apologies, but hang it all, if you are even contemplating reading this, you are not going to be interested in political correctness. Are you?

You may be wondering about the author's qualifications for writing such a piece. I am a Wodehousian by marriage, and after more than thirty years of it to the cove who has spent the best part of a decade compiling the *Millennium Concordance*, I must have picked up a few pointers; I regularly proof-read *Wooster Sauce* (the UK Society's journal); and I have bluffed my way through four Wodehouse Society conventions and the recent UK Millennium Tour and emerged relatively unscathed despite having read only a little Wodehouse (no, let's be honest, a *very* little Wodehouse). If you follow my advice and learn a few of the following facts, believe me, you will fool quite a lot of the people quite a lot of the time.

Jeeves (you can really show off by knowing that his first name is Reginald) was valet or gentleman's personal gentleman to Bertie Wooster. Under no circumstances should you call him a butler, a mistake commonly made by journalists. To do so is to commit the first cardinal sin, punishable by divorce. Jeeves had a noteworthy head, housing a formidable brain capable of formulating plans for extricating young idiots from all conceivable scrapes and romantic entanglements. He liked shrimping holidays, reading Spinoza, and eating fish. He did *not* like purple socks, Old Etonian spats, and white mess jackets with brass buttons.

Bertie, on the other hand, had a less than formidable brain, capable of landing him in all conceivable scrapes and romantic entanglements with the likes of the hearty Honoria Glossop, the sappy Madeline Bassett, and the intellectual ice-maiden Lady Florence Craye. He often considered himself capable of outthinking Jeeves, but despite his educational advantages—various preparatory schools, Eton, and Oxford—he proved himself sadly mistaken. Bertie *liked* purple socks, Old Etonian spats, and white mess jackets with you-know-whats. Contrary to popular myth, there is no real evidence that he ever sported a monocle. He enjoyed puerile pastimes with the chaps at the Drones Club, pinching policemen's helmets on Boat Race night, and the culinary wizardry of Anatole, chef to his Aunt Dahlia.

Aunt D was his good-egg aunt, editor of the weekly journal *Milady's Boudoir*, and was married to Uncle Tom Travers (a renowned collector of silver cow-creamers and reluctant contributor to the coffers of the income tax authorities). She actually bossed Bertie as much as or more than Aunt Agatha, whose mere name filled him with profound fear and trepidation since she wore barbed wire next to the skin and conducted human sacrifices by the light of the full moon.

Next, you must familiarise yourself with the ancestral pile, Blandings Castle, where Clarence, ninth Earl of Emsworth, liked nothing better than tending his roses, his pumpkins, and his much-loved, prize-winning sow, the Empress of Blandings. Do not be fooled into picturing the stereotypical portly pink porcine, for that is the second cardinal sin. The Empress was a Berkshire and, by definition, that means BLACK. Lord Emsworth was a kindly but untidy and forgetful sort of peer, a widower totally under the sway of his domineering sisters, especially the terrifying Lady Constance, and the occasional secretary such as the odious Baxter who, to your other half's great satisfaction, met his comeuppance at the end of Lord E's airgun. Clarence's brother, the Hon Galahad Threepwood, bachelor and some-time man-about-town, frightened the life out of many an acquaintance by threatening to publish his memoirs.

Meanwhile, Mr. Mulliner sat in the Anglers' Rest, surrounded by its many regular customers, nameless and distinguishable only by such favorite tipples as Rum and Milk, Small Bass, and Whiskey and Splash. He related the adventures of members of his family, so numerous as to be virtually indistinguishable, one from another, except by sex.

The Oldest Member could well be described as the Mr. Mulliner of the golf club, having a fund of stories for the numerous young people seeking his wise counsel on problems ranging from the state of their game to the state of their love lives. For those of you who socialize with the golfing fraternity, it may be worth your while to dip into PGW's golf stories. You will be able to recognise your friends' characters, and can astound them with your knowledge of the brassie and the mashie-niblick, not to mention the havoc that may be wreaked (or wrought) by the uproar of the butterflies in adjoining meadows.

We bluffers will undoubtedly give the game away if we do not familiarise ourselves with some idiosyncratic Wodehousian pronunciations. Bertie was Worcester, as in the sauce; in Psmith, the "P" is silent, as in pshrimp and ptarmigian; Stanley Featherstonehaugh Ukridge is

Stanley Fanshaw* Ewe-kridge; Barmy Fotheringay-Phipps is Barmy Fungy-Fipps; and Archie Moffam is Archie Moom, to rhyme with Bluffinghame.

Finally, the name of the man himself. Pelham Grenville Wodehouse was contracted and known by his loved ones as Plum. And Wodehouse? Forget that blue stuff with which the Ancient Britons smeared themselves to scare the living daylights out of the Emperor Claudius and his cohorts and think instead of the sturdy oaks of England. Or, to put it into American terms, remember that a roadhouse is not a good house unless it is a wood house.

❦

* While this American would be the last to correct a Briton on British pronunciation, I refer you to the footnote on page 10. —OM

The Luminescent Rabbit

It should come as no surprise that once again Wodehouse has anticipated reality. The *Boston Globe* (September 1, 2000) reported that Eduardo Kec, a Chicago-based artist, abetted by a team of French genetic researchers, produced as a piece of performance art a rabbit whose DNA had been combined with that of a phosphorescent jellyfish. Alba the rabbit "appears normal, but, when illuminated with the kind of black lights used in nightclubs, she gives off an otherworldly green glow from every cell in her body: her paws, her whiskers, and especially her eyes."

Kec, who was criticized by the scientific community and animal rights activists for frivolous use of the powerful tools of biotechnology, weakly argued that his aim was to create a creature at once loveable and alien that society must confront. Bertie, whose Luminescent Rabbit when inserted into country house bedrooms served the stern moral purpose of striking pity and terror into the bosoms of various blots upon the landscape, had a far nobler purpose. —SS

We were unable to obtain a photograph of the luminescent rabbit under black light. We present here the next best thing: a photograph of an ordinary rabbit under black light.

The Baffy, the Cleek, the Jigger . . . .

I've often wondered, when I read the golf stories of PGW or golf articles such as Peter Georgiady's (page 4), what a baffy is, or a cleek, to say nothing of the jigger and the mashie-niblick. At last, about to crack under the strain of curiosity, I looked up a few of these words. Here are their definitions in the *OED*, Second Edition, 1989:

Baffie, from baffing-spoon. Scotch. A wooden-headed club. The name is derived from baff, "to beat or strike; specifically in Golf to strike the ground with the sole of the club-head in making a stroke." Quotes 1859-1890.

Cleek. "Chiefly Scotch, an iron-headed club with a straight narrow face and a long shaft." Quotes 1829–1909.

Iron. "A golf-club having an iron head which is more or less laid back in order to loft the ball." Quotes 1857–1894.

Jigger. "A short iron-headed club used for approaching shots." Quotes 1893–1970.

Mashie. "An iron club." Quotes 1881–1891.

Mashie-niblick. "An iron club combining the features of the mashie and the niblick, now called the number 7 iron." Quotes 1907–1972, one from PGW.

Spoon. "A wooden golfing club having a slightly concave head." Quotes 1790-1971.

Well, there are the definitions from the world's best dictionary, and I must say they don't help me understand where these implements fit into the Great Chain of Being or the Great Scheme of Things, probably because I don't play golf. Still, if you can find a chance to drop into a conversation a line like, "Well, Sotheby's auctioned my great-great-grandfather's 1829 cleek the other day for £27,000," it will be pretty sure to get you some attention—of what kind, I am not prepared to say. —OM

> I saw that Anastasia had buried her head in her hands, while William, with brotherly solicitude, stood scratching the top of her head with the number three iron, no doubt in a well-meant effort to comfort and console.
>
> "Rodney Has a Relapse," *Nothing Serious*, 1950

Wodehousia Online

By Sushila Peterson

Better known as Hypatia to her online comrades, Sushila has taken on the pleasurable task of sharing with *Plum Lines* readers some memorable contributions from the forums alt.fan.wodehouse and PGW-Net. —AD

"But isn't it worth an owl or two to be de-Bassetted?" *(Posted by Bob Houk, aka George Finch, as a response to an alt.fan.wodehouse message thread.)*

Such is the nature of online Wodehousian consciousness. Online Wodehousia is where personal reflections evolve into knowledgeable exchanges and participants are gathered toward that secured mirth and matchless scholarship from which concord abounds. These forums have become touchstones from which the following selections have recently been harvested.

❧

Posting in reply to a query about Eggs, Beans, and Crumpets: . . . we come to the conclusion that a Good Egg is one you can put the bite on, a Bean is one who you can spin a yarn or joke with, and a Crumpet is the person you go to for advice. Using this logic therefore, a "pieface" is one who prefers his own company and not exactly a social hound.

—Pillingshot (Charles Stone-Tolcher)

❧

Query: Why is Ukridge so often referred to as the (or that) "man of wrath"? He has never seemed particularly wrathful to me.

—Piccadilly Jim (James Robinson III)

Response: Sir Richard Burton used the phrase "a man of wrath" in his translation of "Abu Kir the Dyer and Abu Sir the Barber" in Arabian Nights. It also appears in Dickens' *The Pickwick Papers*. The phrase appears to have been first used by Homer; the name "Odysseus" means "a man of wrath." What is Ukridge to Odysseus, or he to Ukridge? The Merriam-Webster dictionary gives this as the first meaning (dating from 1889) of "odyssey": "a long wandering or voyage usually marked by many changes of fortune."

—Mr. Mulliner (Tom Kreitzberg)

❧

Posting: We find the Old Etonian avoiding writing his thesis by skimming P. G. Wodehouse auctions on eBay. Some chap has placed his entire stash of the Master on the block, claiming they are first editions. Upon closer inspection, we find they may well be first editions, but first editions translated into Albanian, thence into Sanskrit, and back into English by way of early Chinese. Some of the titles which most amused me are (and I insist that I am not embellishing them):

Carry On Sleeves
The Put Hunters
The Ice In The Bid Room
The Bust Of Wodehouse In Golf
Woodehouse On War
Bachelas Annoymos
The Little Warre
The Clicking Of Cubert
The Brinkmanship Of Galhad And Three Wood
Brinkle Manor
Lord Emsnorth And Others

"Bachelas Annoymos" is my favorite title. Gives me the image of that grapes-and-wine Greek chap staggering about as drunk as a lemur at the Drones Club.

—The Old Etonian (Michael Evans)

Current PGW Theater

In addition to *The Mating Season* in Chicago (page 14), we have word that the non-profit Main Street Theater Co. in Waterbury, Connecticut, is offering *The Jeeves Chronicles* on two weekends in March. The chronicles consist of three vignettes: *Jeeves Takes Charge*, *Jeeves in New York*, and *Jeeves and the Song of Songs*. In a telephone conversation with Robin Frome, Artistic Director, we learned that Robin himself had adapted these short stories for the stage. We are pleased that he has given Bertie narrative (which he speaks directly to the audience) as well as dialogue. This sort of additional material was a major contributor to our enjoyment of Edward Duke's excellent presentations years ago. Performances will be given on two weekends, March 17, 18, 24, and 25, at 7:30 P.M. on Saturdays and 4:00 P.M. on Sundays. Tickets are $12, and further information can be obtained by calling (203) 263-5107, ext. 4. We urge all TWS members within hollering distance to attend and provide deafening applause—we can't have too much Wodehouse!

Tony Ring, Jan Kaufman, and Marilyn MacGregor report that Andrew Lloyd Webber's *By Jeeves* recently ended a run in Pittsburgh, "from where, given a fair wind, it may transfer to Broadway," says Tony.

A Few Quick Ones

Alistair Cooke's *Memories of the Great & the Good* includes brief personality profiles of twenty-three people, including P. G. Wodehouse. Not one of those other twenty-two equalled this quote from Plum: "There was a ban on me in Hungary for a while, which is just as mysterious as their reading me at all."

Joel Brattin found this allusion to Jeeves in Chapter Eight of 24-year-old Londoner Zadie Smith's fine first novel, *White Teeth*. Archie Jones and Samad Iqbal converse in a restaurant, and Smith alludes to the opening pages of *The Code of the Woosters*: "When Archie returned to table eight, Samad was like Jeeves: if not exactly disgruntled, then some way from being gruntled." (The novel was published by Random House in 2000.)

Nancy Cuddling found this tribute by John Mortimer in his book *Clinging to the Wreckage*. He writes: "When my father told me the adventures of Jeeves and Bertie Wooster he would stand on the mountain path dabbling at his streaming eyes and almost choking with laughter. I enjoyed these stories so much that it was my ambition to become a butler when I grew up."

On the bookshelves now is a book by H. W. Crocker III called *The Old Limey*, which excited a lot of discussion on alt.fan.wodehouse recently. Kathleen Ball e-mailed a list of excerpts from critics' and authors' reviews, with the headline: "If you like P. G. Wodehouse as much as I do, then you'll love *The Old Limey*!" Robin Moore, author of *The French Connection*, wrote of Crocker: "A latter day P. G. Wodehouse with more than a dash of stiff-upper-lipped Walter Mitty day-dreaming thrown in." Steven F. Hayward, author of *Churchill on Leadership*, weighed in with this opinion: "If P. G. Wodehouse had written *The Dirty Dozen*, he might have come up with something like *The Old Limey*. Hilarious good fun." Reviews on alt.fan.wodehouse, meanwhile, were mixed.

Walter Nelson recently informed PGW-Net: "The Southern California Chapter of the Wodehouse Society, the Perfecto-Zizzbaum Motion Picture Corporation, announces the launching of its new website. Its primary purpose is to help people find us and find our meetings. It has a certain restrained sense of style, but very little substance—but if Jeeves has taught us anything at all, it is that style has a substance all its own. The website is located at http://www.lahacal.org/wodehouse.html." Should your chapter also set up its own website, please inform Sandy Morris so she can share the news (see Chapters Corner) and the TWS webmaster, Webster at pongo@drone.com, so that he can provide a link to your site from our Society's site (www.wodehouse.org).

Jim Goodrich has sent notice about a recently published book called *Vanity Fair's Hollywood*, edited by Graydon Carter and David Friend (publisher Viking Studios). The book features 14 essays by such writers as Clare Boothe Luce, Peter Biskind—and P. G. Wodehouse. The title and nature of Plum's essay is not revealed in the clipping Jim sent, but perhaps if you splurge for the $60 cost of the book, you can let us know.

Susan Cohen sent along a copy of an article by Andrew Ferguson that appeared in *The Weekly Standard* of December 4, 2000, entitled "Divine Comedy: P.G. Wodehouse's Perfect Pitch." There are some factual errors, and Auntie takes issue with Mr. Ferguson's contention that Frances Donaldson wrote a good biography of Plum, but as a respectful tribute to the Master, the article (written to acknowledge Overlook's reissuance of the canon), serves very well.

Pauline Blanc found this little author-to-author appreciation from Helen Fielding, author of *Cause Celeb* (Viking): "I love Wodehouse—I think he's a genius and it's the best possible thing to put you in a genial and jolly state of mind with an amused perspective on life. Also, he's the best plotter ever."

Marilyn MacGregor, our far-flung newt correspondent, reports with secret delight that a colony of great crested newts has brought mighty Jaguar to its knees—or axles. Her copy of the *Times* of London reported on January 16 that the site of a planned Jaguar factory was unexpectedly populated by the little critters. Jaguar is planning to move them elsewhere, but in the meantime the mighty wheels of industry are stilled. Score: Newts 1, Jaguar 0!

Aunt Dahlia Society Spice The Oldest Member

Reading Lyrics

Ann Nicolson and Lucian Endicott found, in a recent *New York Times Book Review*, a notice of a book many of us might enjoy: *Reading Lyrics*, edited by Gottlieb and Kimball, Pantheon Books, New York. It's a collection, with narrative and commentary, of the best lyrics of American musicals from Cohan to Sondheim. Broadway lyricists had to break away from the Vienna-operetta and W. S. Gilbert legacy and develop an American style before they could produce lyrics of comparable worth. The reviewer, David Yezzi, notes the transition:

> Curiously it was the Englishman P. G. Wodehouse who originated this home-grown style. For years, George M. Cohan had been belting out his Yankee Doodle dandy-isms to great acclaim, but Wodehouse possessed the keener ear for American speech:
>
> She gave those poor Egyptian ginks
> Something else to watch beside the Sphinx.
> Marc Antony admitted
> That what first made him skid
> Was the wibbely wobbely wiggley dance
> That Cleopatterer did!
>
> Lyricists before Wodehouse dutifully translating from European songs would never have thought of including "ginks," let alone "wibbely wobbely." What Gottleib and Kimball call Wodehouse's "relaxed vernacular" and jazzy metrics made for snazzy new songs.
>
> —OM

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Marilyn MacGregor

Dues payments, changes in name, address, phone, and e-mail information
Neil Midkiff

midkiff@netcom.com
http://www.wodehouse.org/membership/

Original contributions to *Plum Lines*
David Landman, SS

Other contributions to *Plum Lines*
Ed Ratcliffe, OM Elin Woodger, AD

Dues are $20 per year, payable to the Wodehouse Society.