



Plum Lines

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The First Screen Jeeves

By Brian Taves

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At the end of 1935, 20th Century-Fox bought the film rights to *Thank You, Jeeves* (along with a one-year option on the other stories) and the right to make other films centered around Jeeves. Looking for potentially prolific—and profitable—properties, the studio was interested in any character who seemed to have the potential to lure filmgoers to film after film, no less than a modern television series. Earlier in the year, Fox's merger with 20th Century had enhanced the studio's status, and a "B" unit was organized under Sol Wurtzel, who had a \$6,000,000 annual budget for 24 "Bs" per year. These pictures averaged between \$150,000 and \$200,000 apiece in cost, involved two to three months of preparation and three weeks of shooting, with access to the top equipment, sound stages, and technical personnel shared with the studio's biggest budget films. Although "Bs" were typically intended for screening on the bottom half of double bills, many of the series "Bs" focused on a character, had especially high production standards, and were reliable attractions for moviegoers. Fox had notable success with its Charlie Chan series, bringing to the screen the late Earl Derr Biggers's



A studio photo of the three principals in the first Jeeves film: David Niven, Virginia Field, and Arthur Treacher.

detective, and Chan was the studio's most popular "star" after Shirley Temple.

Like Chan, Jeeves had been brought to the notice of the American reading public in *The Saturday Evening Post*. The Jeeves film series seems to have been launched on what was perceived as a sure bet, casting Arthur Treacher, known for playing butler roles, as the famous literary butler. However, while the Chan series was cast and presented in a manner consonant with Biggers's literary creation, the Jeeves

films revealed no sense of the situations and character patterns that had made Jeeves successful in magazine stories and books.

There was scarcely a mistake that was not made in the 56-minute opening movie, *Thank You, Jeeves*. In dispensing with the plot of the novel, and any other Jeeves story, screenwriters Joseph Hoffman and Stephen Gross substituted a bizarre combination of incidents interspersed in an incredibly unlikely account of Bertie and Jeeves becoming involved with espionage. The attempts at humor were either forced, or, in the case of a few lines that might have been amusing, were presented in such a

way as to conceal any comedic potential. Even worse was the lackluster, unimaginative direction of Arthur Greville Collins, who was seemingly wholly unaware of the demands of a comedic presentation. *Thank You, Jeeves* so utterly fails in its essential purpose that it is easy to watch the whole picture without so much as cracking a smile.

Only the opening, as Bertie loudly plays the drums to the accompaniment of music on the radio, recalled the milieu of the Wodehouse stories. Subsequently, a mystery woman, Marjorie Lowman (Virginia Field), who is followed by agents, knocks at the door. Bertie, proud of his chivalrous ancestors and hoping to emulate them, offers her shelter, but she disappears in the night. Jeeves, after threatening to give notice, persuades the bored Bertie that he should take a vacation in the country, and he

knows just the place—Mooring Manor Inn. By the logic of Hollywood, this hotel is, of course, the headquarters of the spies and just the place Marjorie will turn up next. When the spies introduce themselves to Bertie as men from Scotland Yard, he accepts them at face value, surrendering Marjorie (an actual crime-fighter) to them. In the final scene of fisticuffs in the hotel basement, Bertie fights by using medieval artifacts lying about while Jeeves reveals himself to be a former amateur boxing champion. Making amends for his earlier errors, Bertie finally has become worthy of Marjorie's love, although Jeeves must accept that Bertie's new bride has other plans for a gentleman's gentleman.

The most lamentable addition to *Thank You, Jeeves* is the black comedian Willie Best as the saxophone-playing "Drowzy," a wandering minstrel performer. Best was sometimes billed as "Sleep 'n' Eat" and his role was strongly reminiscent of Stepin Fetchit, a popular comedian who was under contract at Fox. Today these scenes recall the worst type of Hollywood racial humor during the 1930s. In one dreadful scene, Jeeves tries to teach Best a British march, which Best turns into swing. The mutual pounding of their feet breaks through a trap door into the basement where Bertie and Marjorie are held prisoner.

Treacher is appropriately cast, and his Jeeves, according to publicity suggestions in the American pressbook, is intended as a model of social grace who is appalled by any breach of etiquette or improper behavior. However, on screen he is excessively irritable and petulant, lacking the adaptability of the Wodehouse creation. More important, there is none of Jeeves's trademark Machiavellian cleverness in the Treacher characterization, simply an annoyingly starched and stuffy, standard-issue English butler.

David Niven made an acceptable Bertie, effectively capturing his comic perplexity. Niven later wrote of how, at the time, he was getting together "a whole repertory of looks that passed for acting, from boggling my eyes to furrowing my brow." Although Niven was only given third billing, after both Treacher and Field, *Thank You, Jeeves* was one of several pictures at the time that helped to raise Niven toward star status. He was then under contract to Samuel Goldwyn, who typically loaned Niven out only for a single picture. Hence, obtaining Niven for a return engagement as Bertie would have been a problematic and expensive proposition. In marrying Bertie, *Thank You, Jeeves* not only makes it possible not to hire Niven for subsequent movies



Samples of posters and other displays offered to theater owners for *Thank You, Jeeves*. Note the emphasis on Jeeves, rather than Bertie.

in the series, but also seems to be part of a strategy to eliminate half of the Wodehouse team in adapting the stories to the screen, judging Bertie to be a dispensable character.

Niven would later make an important contribution to Wodehouse on the screen when he proved an ideal Uncle Fred in two television versions of "Uncle Fred Flits By" in 1953 (for *Hollywood Opening Night* and *Four Star Playhouse*). The latter survives, and is one of the most successful transpositions of Wodehouse to the screen, which Niven produced with Roy Kellino directing.

The incidents of the short story provide a perfect amount of plot for a half-hour small screen presentation, and each member of the little-known supporting cast was ideal. The segment fully captured the zaniness of the original while maintaining fidelity to the source, with the teleplay by Oscar Millard using much of the Wodehouse dialogue.

Thank You, Jeeves, a 1936 release, was followed the next year by *Step Lively, Jeeves*, which is not ostensibly based on any Wodehouse work, and admits to being an original creation. (*Thank You, Jeeves* was retitled *Thank You, Mr. Jeeves* when it was re-edited for television release in 1955 as a 45 minute episode of the series *TV Hour of the Stars*, hosted by John Conte.) While critics were unaccountably kind to *Thank You, Jeeves*, they were too harsh on the sequel. The first picture in the series had been so bad that ironically the second was an improvement; there was nowhere to go but up. Although *Step Lively, Jeeves* is a screwball comedy far from the Wodehouse tone, it at least remains predominantly humorous, unlike the mix of espionage that had marred *Thank You, Jeeves*.

There is no consistency in characterization between the two pictures. *Step Lively, Jeeves* reflects a new concept of the whole idea of a Jeeves series, rather than a logical follow-up to *Thank You, Jeeves*. Bertie is nowhere mentioned in *Step Lively, Jeeves*, and indeed the butler's former employer is mentioned as Lord Fenton.

Overall *Step Lively, Jeeves* is much more intriguingly scripted (and nearly a quarter-hour longer), and better realized under director Eugene Forde. The result is a pleasant, if thoroughly undistinguished, movie that does contain a few mild, brief

laughs—modest achievements, but significant improvements over *Thank You, Jeeves*. However, *Step Lively, Jeeves* was still far from the necessary quality to sustain a series.

Whereas Treacher's Jeeves in *Thank You, Jeeves* had been a fussy, schoolmarm-type figure, in *Step Lively, Jeeves* he is naive, with the brain of Bertie Wooster. Indeed, the "Rupert Hedgewick" (not Wodehouse's "Reginald") Jeeves of *Step Lively, Jeeves* is almost the result of a merger of Bertie and Jeeves. The Jeeves name and figure remain, but he has the Wooster brain, perpetually befuddled and confused.

Unlike *Thank You, Jeeves*, in *Step Lively, Jeeves* there are a few incidents from the stories. Jeeves scolds another butler for his poor choice of clothes for his master, making far wiser suggestions for color and design coordination. After joining a celebration, going on a bender, and traveling by bicycle, Jeeves awakes with a hangover. He is given a pick-me-up: a scene perfectly bringing to life the before, during, and after of the drink, vividly showing its effect—except that its larger purpose is gone. Whereas the pick-me-up was in Wodehouse's world a demonstration of its inventor's knowledge, as Jeeves administered it to Bertie, in *Step Lively, Jeeves* the concoction is the brainchild of a minor character.

Jeeves has far less time on screen than he had in *Thank You, Jeeves*, and the idea for *Step Lively, Jeeves* seems to have been conceived less as a Jeeves vehicle than a comedy in which any one of many characters could have portrayed the central dupe. The original story by Frances Hyland,

as scripted by Frank Fenton and Lynn Root, concerns two con artists who develop a scheme to promote a supposed direct descendant of Sir Francis Drake—an actual racket practiced in America for years, according to the trade journal *Variety*. Indeed it resembles the plot described in chapter 17 of *Bring on the Girls*, in which the last in a long line of pawnbrokers discovers that his ancestor loaned money to Queen Isabella to finance Columbus and that he now owns 10% of America.

Even Bertie Wooster would have trouble falling for this obvious, transparent line, but the Jeeves of *Step Lively, Jeeves* proves easily persuaded that Drake was his ancestor, qualifying him for the title of the Earl of Braddock, poised to inherit millions accu-



Dust wrapper of the first American edition of the novel, 1934.

mulated over the centuries in interest. While the narratives of both *Thank You, Jeeves* and *Step Lively, Jeeves* combine crime and humor, *Step Lively, Jeeves* is far more consistent, constructing its gangsters and con men as amusing characters unlike the conventional criminals of *Thank You, Jeeves*.

In *Step Lively, Jeeves*, the compulsory love subplot is provided by a ne'er-do-well and one of the ubiquitous female reporters of 1930s cinema, who combine forces to expose the Drake swindle and the underworld connections of its supposed investors. Although the couple expose the shenanigans of con men and gangsters alike during a costume party, they convince the gangsters not to take out their disappointment in a shower of bullets, since their primary aim had been merely to use the "Earl" to crash society. Jeeves is only mildly disillusioned, and he is poised to begin life anew in the service of the couple, played by Patricia Ellis and Robert Kent.

The short-lived Jeeves series was canceled at 20th Century-Fox in the summer of 1937. While certainly there were fewer "B" comedy series than "B" mystery series, there was no reason from the outset why the Fox series should have failed so miserably. Given the proper material, a long-running Niven-Treacher pairing could have succeeded. Nor is the fact that both Jeeves films abandoned their original sources surprising. Perhaps contractual reasons compelled an early Niven exit from the series, but then another appropriate actor could have been obtained; it is difficult to imagine producers believing Treacher had the star power to carry a series on his own. More likely, American audiences were regarded as unlikely to accept a series positing a sagacious English butler, instead seeing such a figure purely as a source of comedy, meaning that the rights to the Wodehouse stories were bought for the name only, not the narratives. As it happened, however, the Jeeves series became one of the worst executed ideas under Sol Wurtzel's Fox "B" unit, one which fully justified the aphorism about Fox "Bs"—"from bad to Wurtzel."

In a 1937 radio broadcast, Hedda Hopper interviewed Wodehouse and spoke as if the pictures had never been made.

Hopper: You know, Mr. Wodehouse, I don't believe Jeeves would be very popular in Hollywood. He's much too bright. Why heavens, he might even know what's wrong with pictures. And that would never do.

Wodehouse: Well, Hedda, perhaps we had better leave Jeeves back in London with Bertie.

Hopper: You're right, Plumey.

Only in the 1960s, and later again in the 1990s, would the memory of the Treacher series be erased when the

Jeeves stories (with Bertie) were successfully transferred to the new medium of television.

Nonetheless, the plot idea of the adaptation of *Thank You, Jeeves* was perhaps remembered by Wodehouse. When, some twenty years later, he began to contemplate a play to be titled *Betting on Bertie*, he would use the picture's device of a true romance that will finally end in a Wooster wedding and the departure of Jeeves. Similarly, the idea of a solo Jeeves story, without Bertie's participation, as portrayed in *Step Lively, Jeeves*, would reappear in the early 1950s. Wodehouse and Guy Bolton co-authored *Come on, Jeeves*, the only Jeeves play which Wodehouse was to see produced (although only in outlying English provinces); it was rewritten in novel form as *The Return of Jeeves* (*Ring for Jeeves* in the UK). However, while Jeeves is surrounded by characters with different names, they are simply variations on Bertie and his friends, and the intellectual integrity of Jeeves remains. Only in the notion of Jeeves persuading his temporary master to become a bookie, and serving him in that capacity (all of which is presented in the past tense rather than directly portrayed), is there a distant echo of the plot of *Step Lively, Jeeves*. As dissimilar as the Fox Jeeves films were from the tone of Wodehouse works at the time, they did provide the first examples of experiments with the formula that Wodehouse himself would later attempt.

Author's Query

Bill Horn sent along this little paragraph from *The New York Times Book Review* of Sunday, May 6, 2001, with the comment: "About 20 years ago Frances Donaldson ran exactly the same ad."

Author's Query

For a new life of P. G. Wodehouse, jointly commissioned by the trustees of the estate and W. W. Norton with Penguin Books, I would appreciate hearing from anyone who has recollections, letters or photographs.

ROBERT MCCRUM

The End is in Sight: The Wodehouse CD

A six year project approaches fruition

By Tony Ring

The following article is reprinted, by permission, from *Wooster Sauce*, the journal of the UK Wodehouse Society.

It was some six years ago that the first serious discussion took place about making a new recording of Wodehouse lyrics to celebrate his place in American musical comedy history. Hal Cazalet, PGW's great-grandson and professional singer, adopted the project enthusiastically, and the result, a 16-track CD entitled *The Land Where the Good Songs Go*, should appear on the shelves in May or June.

The songs (see the list below) have been selected from a variety of shows and reflect numerous styles. They are sung with exceptional clarity by Hal Cazalet and the much-loved American soprano Sylvia McNair, whilst the piano of the brilliant Steven Blier stands out in the deliberately understated accompaniment. Lara Cazalet, Hal's sister, makes a welcome guest appearance with the original, 1917, version of *Bill* from *Oh, Lady! Lady!!*

With sixteen gems to choose from, it is invidious to select any for special mention, but I would like to draw your attention to two standards from *Anything Goes*: the title song and *You're the Top*. These two recordings have used the lyrics from the 1935 UK stage show, which were substantially modified by PGW from Cole Porter's originals.



Steven Blier, Sylvia McNair, and Hal Cazalet

The booklet accompanying the CD will feature an introduction by Sir Tim Rice, context notes by Tony Ring, and a transcript of the lyrics. And for those likely to be in the vicinity of Washington DC on Wednesday, June 20, Hal and Sylvia, with Steven, will be performing songs from the CD at a concert taking place at the Library of Congress. The concert will be presented by the New York Festival of Song at 8:00 p.m. For further information, see <http://www.loc.gov/rr/perform/concert/00-2001.html>.

Song

You Can't Make Love By Wireless
Tell Me All Your Troubles, Cutie
You Never Knew About Me
If I Ever Lost You
Go Little Boat
The Land Where the Good Songs Go
Oh Gee, Oh Joy
The Enchanted Train
Bill
Anything Goes
You're the Top
My Castle in the Air
Sir Galahad
Rolled into One
Non-Stop Dancing

Show

The Beauty Prize
Miss 1917
Oh, Boy!
The Golden Moth
Miss 1917
Miss 1917
Rosalie
Sitting Pretty
Oh, Lady! Lady!!
Anything Goes
Anything Goes
Miss Springtime
Leave It to Jane
Oh, Boy!
The Beauty Prize

Sung by

Hal and Sylvia
Sylvia
Hal and Sylvia
Hal and Sylvia
Sylvia
Hal
Hal and Sylvia
Hal and Sylvia
Lara
Hal and Sylvia
Hal and Sylvia
Hal
Hal and Sylvia
Sylvia
Hal and Sylvia

Gunga Plum

The Head Cashier's Song

Written by Transoceanic Committee

"the bank's managers in the Far East lived in great style" — Barry Phelps

You may dream of old school tie
At the 'ong Kong an' Shang'ai;
When your job is lickin' stamps—don't never doubt it;
But the dream on which you feast
Is a snug berth in the East
When you're in the Cash Department—an' without it.
Now in London's foggy clime
Where I us'ter spend my time
Awaitin' for the postin' that would come,
Of all the bowlered crew
The coolest man I knew
Was a pale young clerk, the blister known as Plum.
It was Plum, Plum, Plum,
You perishin' no-'oper, Gunga Plum.
For 'e didn't give a rap,
Read the *Pink-Un* on his lap;
That cheeky young dogsbody, Gunga Plum.

Lord! I shan't forget the day
On my road to Mandalay
When I opened up a bran' new Ledger free
Of mildew, stain, or blot,
But, By Gawd!, the thing was not,
And I lost all 'ope of sippin' g an' t*
In an Orient saloon
Somewhere east of old Rangoon,
An' I'm stuck forever now in Lombard Street;
All my dreams went up in smoke
'Cos some imbecilic bloke
Went an' cut a bloomin' page out nice an' neat!
It was Plum, Plum, Plum
Who blew the whole d—d book to Kingdom Come.
Now there'll be 'ell to pay!
Get that waster right away!
For gawd's sake get that waster known as Plum!

Well, we asked 'im in a rage
Why 'e tore the bloomin' page.
(For the Manager condemned 'im a priori.)
But 'e wasn't too distressed;
Lit 'is pipe, an' then confessed
To 'aving wrote on it a ruddy comic story.
So the Guv' gives 'im the sack;
Tells 'im never to come back,
For we don't like clerks who go 'round actin' shirty;
An' lately—so I've 'card—
He gets 'ARF-A-CROWN a word!
Writin' stories 'bout some toffs named Jeeves and Bertie.
So then, Plum, Plum, Plum,
Give me credit for the corker you've become;
For I knew the Bank delayed you.
I'm the livin' bloke that made you.
Don't you owe me a commission, Gunga Plum?

Coda**

For fifty years—or longer—
From sentiment? Or stronger?
You cashed your cheques with us an' glad to do it.
So we know you weren't 'oldin'
Any grudge from days so golden
When I caught you out an' straightways made you rue it.
Tho' your books an' plays dramatic
Call the Bank "New Asiatic,"
An' you paint our gainful trade as grim an' grum;
Tho' I sometimes wished to slay you,
I know jolly well the way you
Pay us back is kindly-'earted, Gunga Plum.
So it's Plum, Plum, Plum,
What a thrivin' institution *you've* become.
When the millions who respect you
Pay 'uge fortunes to collect you,
'Ow I wish I'd saved that first page, Gunga Plum.

* The drink that won the Empire

** Obviously, there were no hard feelings as Wodehouse kept a small account with the bank until 1955 or so.

Plum and Philadelphia Follow the Money

By Dan Cohen

In 1915 P. G. Wodehouse was paid \$3,500 by *The Saturday Evening Post* for the serial rights to *Something New*. It was the biggest single payment he ever received for anything he had written to that time.

Years later in a letter to Paul Reynolds he wrote of *The Post*: “Fancy I deliver my serial in the last half of March—they pay the entire cheque at the beginning of April—they start the story in May—and they are through with it in six or seven weeks.”

For Plum and most other popular writers *The Saturday Evening Post* was the holy grail. The magazine paid more than any other publication in America, probably more than any other publication anywhere. They paid on time, and they didn’t hassle you.

Small wonder that for over a quarter of a century most of Plum’s important works appeared first in *The Post*—not just first in America, but first in the world. More than any other publication *the Post* made P. G. Wodehouse a very rich man.

And it contributed enormously to making his reputation. The *Post* was the great middle-brow magazine. Every week it went into half the homes and all of the dentists’ offices in America. For the first part of the twentieth century the majority of Americans got their Wodehouse from *The Post*.

And what does this excursion into publishing history have to do with the TWS convention to be held in October in Philadelphia? *The Saturday Evening Post* was published in Philadelphia,

that’s what. Plum’s heart may have been in London and New York, but his cheque book was in Philadelphia.

The Saturday Evening Post is long gone. But the building from which it was published is still there, and within easy walking distance of the convention hotel. It will be

part of the city tours being arranged by the convention. The lobby of the building has a huge mosaic mural by Maxfield Parrish that will absolutely knock your socks off.

There will also be a special presentation on Wodehouse and *The Post*, and an exhibit is being arranged.

Of course, it’s not all *The Post*. Come early. On Thursday night, October 11, the bar in the convention hotel will be transformed into the Angler’s Rest. Meet fellow Plummies, and have a Wodehousian drink. Did you want to know what a May Queen really tastes like? This is your chance. For the less adventurous there will be a simple Whisky and S. And for the stout of heart there will be singing around the bar piano.

Friday there will be cricket and other games, tours and informal (but informative) presentations at the hotel, ending with the gala Drone’s Club cocktail party. After a Saturday morning bracer the survivors will be ready for a day of Wodehousian scholarship featuring such serious subjects as cow creamers, Plum’s lawyers, movies, a quiz show and Ukridge’s guide to financial security. There will be an unbelievably brief business meeting, and the long awaited NEWTS clean, bright entertainment. In the evening there will be the gala banquet. We promise almost no after dinner speeches though there will be a siren song. It will all end in an orgy of song and dance calculated to stagger humanity.

Sunday morning and another bracer, you will be ready for brunch with a

rousing reading by the Blandings Castle chapter. Then the final farewells, a quick climb down the drainpipe, to head for home with fond memories and a hellofa hangover.

—Cyril Waddesley-Davenport



The Philadelphia convention logo without color—the giant fruit is, naturally, a plum. Drawing by Lou Glanzman.

A Mainly True History of Bread-Throwing Threw the Ages

By David Landman

Part III Conclusion The Renaissance to Modern Times

We were remarking that it was to be expected the excesses of the Middle Ages should provoke a return to the anti-bread throwing mores of classical times, and that thus was born the Renaissance. Shakespeare, as was his annoying habit, spoke for everyone when he wrote in *Merry Wives of Windsor*, "I love not the humour of bread" and in *Romeo and Juliet*, "Bread! It makes me mad." And it has long been recognized that *Hamlet* is rife with caustic remarks about danish. Yet, is it not possible that the Bard, for all his lip-service to Tudor party line, was a crypto-bread-thrower? Applying the cipher by which we have elsewhere demonstrated that Shakespeare is a pseudonym of George Clooney, we find convincing evidence that the poet was, in fact, a member of an Elizabethan secret society devoted to the forbidden practice of bread-throwing. Other members included Lord Bacon, Lettuce Knolles, Lord Cheddar, and the Lord Lieutenant of County Mayo, but it was clearly the Bard of Bread who held the whole thing together. The titles of Shakespeare's plays are actually the cleverly scrambled passwords for that evening's debauch. Take, for example, *The Tragedy of MacBeth*. A careful rearrangement of the letters produces the phrase, "A gyft bread cometh." Applying the same cipher to *Love's Labours Lost* gives us, "Toss a sub roll, love." Case closed.

Antagonism to bread-throwing culminated ca. 1768 when the unregenerate Marie Antoinette uttered her famous rebuke to the French peasantry, "If they won't throw bread, let them throw cake!" and thereby drew down upon her class the bread-baths of the French Revolution with its horrible perversion of Dr. Guillotine's innocent invention, the bagel slicer.

We are thus brought to modern times when bread throwing has reassumed its rightful place at the center of human affairs. After all, is not toast ritualistically thrown during the *Rocky Horror Show*? Did not British housewives, piqued by the revelation that Prince Charles was unfaithful, drive the offending Parker-Bowles from a local supermarket with a barrage of bread rolls? Did not ace pitcher Roger Clemens after a painful loss throw hot dog rolls at reporters? And did not beauteous actress Elizabeth Hurley while filming *Double Whammy* miss the soup

bowl into which she was supposed to throw her dinner roll and "accidentally" bung it in the face of the actor opposite her? We have this on no less an authority than *Complete Woman* magazine. (Hurley later disingenuously claimed she was dissatisfied with the size of the rolls she had been getting.)

By and large, the affairs of the modern world are determined by bread-throwing, though this may not be apparent to the casual observer. Take, for example, World War I. Historians have racked their brains to unravel the complex of issues which occasioned the Great Conflict. Perhaps the answer lies no farther than our butter plates. Chesterton, in his autobiography, relates the story of how in 1914 a mock-western film was produced by J. H. Barrie assisted by Harley Granville Barker. Shot in the wilds of Essex, Barrie, Lord Howard de Walden, Bernard Shaw, William Archer, and Chesterton, himself, appeared as cowboys. According to one version of events, the film was shown at a gala supper held at the Savoy Theatre. The stage was filled with political and cultural notables including Prime Minister Asquith. The brilliant assembly, it is reported, pelted each other with bits of bread, "showing," as Chesterton put it, "marked relaxation from the cares of State." Within the week Franz Ferdinand was no more and war bestrode the continent.

Barrie, once introduced to the pleasure of catapulting the staff of life, apparently couldn't get enough. In the biography of Charles Frohman, the theatre agent who figures so largely in Wodehouse's theatrical career, we read that Frohman's great friend Barrie lived in a London flat with a view of the Thames. Above him resided John Galsworthy, down-stairs Granville Barker, while just across the narrow street with windows facing Barrie's was the domicile of Bernard Shaw. When Barrie wanted to announce to Shaw that Frohman had arrived from America, he would throw bread-crusts against the sash. Invariably, Shaw's glossopion eyebrows would appear wagging a semaphoric welcome.

From jazz singer Anita O'Day, whose last name is pig Latin for "dough," to rock group Limp Bizkit, to classical composer George Crumb, modern music has been domi-

nated by baked goods. The poignant blues, “You Get No Bread with One Meat Ball,” the lament of a diner denied the pleasures of bread-throwing because of poverty, became the signature song of the Great Depression and induced charities to organize bread lines in which the masses stood for a daily dole of missiles.

The best of modern literature, as well, thrives on bread-throwing. P. G. Wodehouse, of course, but we also read in the great *Diary of a Nobody* how Mr. Pooter was put out at Christmas time by the throwing of bread pills. The episode is worth quoting in full:

We were jolly at supper, and Daisy made herself very agreeable, especially in the early part of the evening, when she sang. At supper, however, she said, “Can you make tee-to-tums with bread?” and she commenced rolling up pieces of bread, and twisting them round on the table. I felt this to be bad manners, but of course said nothing. Presently Daisy and Lupin, to my disgust, began throwing bread-pills at each other. Frank followed suit, and so did Cummings and Gowing to my astonishment. Then they commenced throwing hard pieces of crust, one piece catching me on the forehead, and making me blink. I said, “Steady, please; steady!” Frank jumped up and said; “Tum, tum; then the band played.”

I did not know what this meant, but they all roared, and continued the bread-battle. Gowing suddenly seized all the parsley off the cold mutton, and threw it full in my face. I looked daggers at Gowing, who replied: “I say, it’s no good trying to look indignant with your hair full of parsley.”

[George and Weedon Grossmith]

With such universal consequence in mind, you might think we have reached bread-throwing nirvana, and a great and holy peace broods on the land. But, I feel it my duty as your chronicler to alert you to an ominous cloud on the horizon. At present it is no bigger than a fairy cake, but if allowed to go unchecked, it threatens to vaporize civilization as we know it in a muffin-shaped cloud of destruction. For I have read in this morning’s paper that Bernard Rayner, the last member of the Rayner pigeon-feed dynasty, has settled out-of-court his battle with London mayor Ken Livingstone and will close the stall in Trafalgar Square where his family have been selling pigeon feed for a half-century.

What has this to do with bread throwing you ask?

Plenty. Pigeons are to bread-throwers what canaries are to miners—an early warning system. Whatever happens to pigeons—like periodic moulting, the urge to fly home as soon as you arrive at your vacation destination, and the discovery of strange messages tied to your leg—eventually happens to bread-throwers. If laws banning the throwing of cracked corn at pigeons have been passed, you can be certain Mayor Livingstone and his cronies on both sides of the Atlantic have The Wodehouse Society in their sights.

These are parlous times. There will be a convention in a few months. Let us show the world that we will not go down without a fight.

And so we come to the end of our survey of bread-throwing threw the ages. We trust we have demonstrated that our definition of what it is to be human must include the bread-throwing instinct. We are not merely “poor, bare, forked” animals. Though some of us may, indeed, be poor, bare, and forked (though not at the Convention banquet, we trust), we are first and foremost bread-throwing animals. And therein lies a world of difference.

Yet, as the expression goes, man does not live by bread-throwing alone. Let us not forget that as we are all predisposed by Mother Nature to be hurlers of bread, we are by the same token obliged to be targets of bread. With this in mind, may I then be the first to propose that we designate as the poster girl of The Wodehouse Society the aptly named Elizabeth Hurley.

Who Wants to Be a Host?

The response to our previous request for a host for the 2003 convention has thus far been a deafening silence. What’s up, folks? There are still some chapters who have not yet stepped up to the plate, so let’s hear it from you.

Pdrones—or you, Perfecto Zizzbaum—or you, Angler’s Rest—or you, Capital! Capital! Any and all interested chapters who think they can handle the fun assignment of organizing a convention (and believe me, though a lot of hard work is involved, it IS a lot of fun) can and should get in touch with Auntie: Elin Woodger, 35 Bayview Avenue, Southold NY 11971-1330; 631-765-9275; EWoodger@aol.com. Let’s hear from you today!

A Few Quick Ones

R. C. Olson unearthed an interesting comment from Plum about the craft of writing. It was included in an article in the *St Louis Post-Dispatch* of March 25 about an elderly newspaperman who, beginning in his teens, had sent letters to well-known writers asking advice about how to prepare for writing as a profession. He received more than 120 replies from such writers as Rudyard Kipling, Robert Frost, G. B. Shaw, and P. G. Wodehouse. PGW's reply was as follows:

I think newspaper work is the best foundation for writing fiction. I often wish I had had the experience . . . I don't know that there is anything that you take up in college which will definitely help you in writing fiction . . . I had the usual classical education, but I don't know that any of it stuck. I certainly can't remember a word of Greek or Latin now.

The article gives no indication of the date when that reply was written. Plum did, of course, co-write a column for the London *Globe* as a young man, but he wrote commentary and was not a reporter.

Joel Brattin found a column in the 19 & 26 February 2001 issue of *The New Yorker* on the curator of the Palazzo Capponi in Florence. The writer noted that the curator, Count Niccolò Piero Uberto Ferrante Galgano Gaspare Calcedonio Capponi "speaks a perfect Wodehousian English." What would Wodehouse make of a man with eight names?

The California Prune Board, with Food and Drug Administration approval, has officially changed the name of the prune to "Dried plum." True, Wodehouse will receive free publicity in supermarkets, but it will be at a price. The wonderful song "Poor Prune" from *Leave It to Jane* will be lost to future generations. "Poor Dried Plum" fails to grip. We do not know whether to laugh or cry.

Murray Wilson, otherwise known as Honest Patch Perkins, writes: "Reading in the current *Plum Lines* that PGW's works were once banned in Hungary brought to mind the following. I have a cousin by marriage who as a youngster read Wodehouse in his (the cousin's) native Hungarian. At college age he emigrated to the USA, became thoroughly proficient in English and read the books in the original. To his surprise he found them considerably less entertaining. Seems there may have been a gem of a Hungarian translator. As for the banning, I wonder when it was? If in the Iron Curtain era perhaps it was to do with "The Clicking of Cuthbert."

In a note to PGW-Net, **Murray Hedgcock** reported the following:

The Observer (London Sunday paper—literary editor Robert McCrumb, working on a new PGW biography) reports today that organizers of the Bollinger-Wodehouse prize launched last year for the annual Hay Festival are in deep trouble. There simply aren't enough funny books written in the past year to fill a list, let alone the refined quality of a short list, and the judges may have to make their own nominations. The item implies a dearth of genuine comic writing in any way fit to be linked to the Master. Which merely reminds us that he is way, way out in front of the field—yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

Susan Cohen informs us that Chapter One member Barbara Van Hook came across an audiotape of a presentation by Nathan Allen of Minneapolis on "G. K. Chesterton and P. G. Wodehouse," given at the Midwest Chesterton Conference in 1999, which goes into the similarities and differences of the two authors briefly, but is mostly a nice homage to Wodehouse. After listening to the tape Susan phoned Nathan Allen and the Minneapolis St. Paul branch of the Chesterton Society to thank them. It seems there are more than a few Wodehouse fans in their group.

From **Erik Quick** we have received preliminary word on a one-day seminar on the life and work of Wodehouse to be conducted at the Smithsonian in Washington on October 20, 2001. An evening reception may possibly follow at the British Embassy. Erik, asked to help organize the seminar, is currently lining up speakers. As this will take place a week after the convention in Philadelphia, some of us may wish to stay on in order to attend. Details will be provided in the next *Plum Lines*.

Posted to PGW-Net in April was an announcement of a stage play entitled "The Coming of Gowf and Other Golfing Tales." Based on Wodehouse stories from *The Clicking of Cuthbert*, the play will apparently be staged at the Old Red Lion Theatre in Islington, London, from August 21 to September 15. No other details are available, but for more information contact one Ken McClymont at kenshapproductionsoo@hotmail.com.

Bob Elliott sent along a page from the Daedalus Books catalog with a review of a book entitled *Wit: Humorous Quotations from Woody Allen to Oscar Wilde*, by Des MacHale. The review of the book includes a PGW quote: "It was my Uncle George who discovered that alcohol was a food, well in advance of modern medical thought."

Society Spice

Aunt Dahlia

The Oldest Member

My First Wodehouse

Few of us, I expect, can remember the exact circumstances in which we made the acquaintance of the works of the Great Man. **Peter Cannon** came across one such person, Jeremy Lewis, in Lewis's *Playing for Time* (1987). Peter writes: "This is a comic memoir by a British book editor that has an obvious appeal for Wodehousians. . . . While the author's tone is undeniably Bertie Woosterish, interestingly enough there's not a line of dialogue." This extract is from page 234. —OM

I had tried P. G. Wodehouse when I was about twelve—at about the same time as I was feverishly working my way through the Saint and Bulldog Drummond, and dreamt only of puffing insolent clouds of smoke into the faces of master-criminals—and had found him a good deal less entertaining than my contemporaries, all of whom emitted loud and annoying barks of laughter when confronted with the doings of Gussie Fink-Nottle and Catsmeat Potter-Pirbright. One day, having typed out my twenty-fifth application letter of the morning and posted off a great wodge of envelopes to various publishers, each of them containing a pitiful plea for admission, I called in at the Army and Navy Stores, bought myself a Wodehouse and, unable to face any more *curricula vitae*, spent the rest of the day learning about the Drones Club and Bertie's domineering aunts. So much did I enjoy this novel experience that, on my way back to my parents' flat in Ashley Gardens, I called in once again at the Army and Navy Stores, and bought another book about Bertie Wooster; and, far from advancing my career, I spent the next three weeks sitting in a deck chair in St James's Park, every now and then hurrying back to the Army and Navy to replenish my stocks.

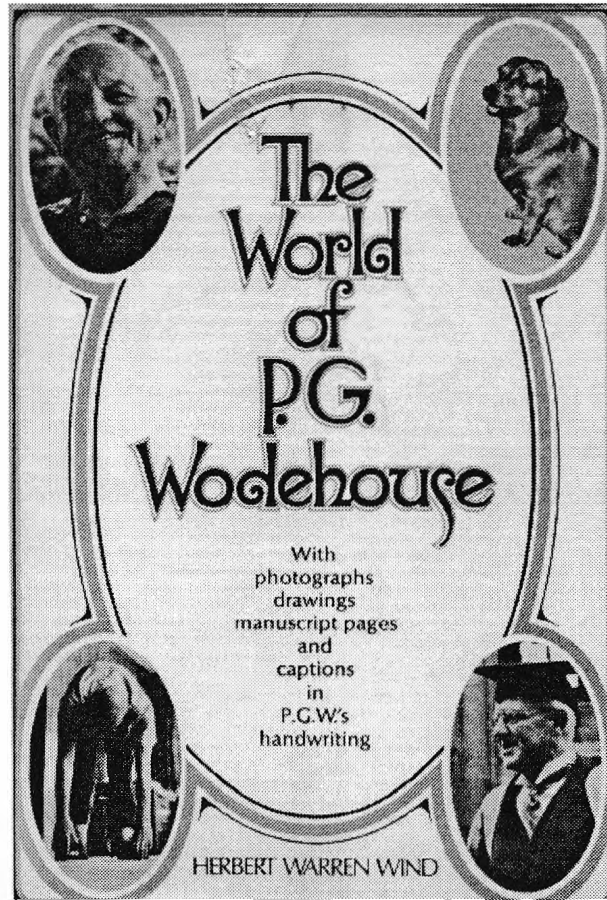
Such masterly inactivity could not go on forever, and as the days grew chillier and the evenings began to close in I stirred myself from my deck chair and went for the occasional interview. . . . I eventually found myself a job with a large and distinguished firm of publishers. Their offices were off St James's Street, in a rickety Georgian house. . . . In the panelled reception area was a full-length portrait of an earlier member of the ruling dynasty, raffishly smoking a cigarette and looking like a shrewder, fiercer version of Catsmeat Potter-Pirbright or even Bertie Wooster himself.

A statuette that had been on the mantelpiece, a thing about a foot long with no clothes on, Shakespeare it may have been, or Queen Victoria.
The Girl in Blue, 1970

Wind on Wodehouse

P. G. Wodehouse is acknowledged to have been the best writer of golf fiction. In America the best writer of golf journalism has been Herbert Warren Wind, who wrote about the game in *The New Yorker* and *Sports Illustrated* for decades. A lengthy article about Wind appeared in *The Boston Globe* on April 8, shortly before the Masters golf tournament. It spoke of Wind's love of the game and his respect for its great players, as well as the respect other writers feel for Wind as a chronicler of golf. What his peers in the press looked forward to "was reading his account of the tournament, even if it was six weeks later."

The article didn't mention that Wind also wrote an important book about Wodehouse, titled, as the picture below indicates, *The World of P. G. Wodehouse* (New York: Praeger, 1972). In it, Wind discourses with incomparable grace on the whole range of Wodehouse's writings, not merely his golf stories. On the back of the dust jacket Wind comments: "Wodehouse is a great writer who is not yet appreciated anything like he should be. . . . I have attempted to crystallize the main aspects of his fascinating life and his full-fledged genius." Get your hands on a copy if you can, and don't turn loose. You won't find any better writing about PGW.



The Mating Season at Chicago's City Lit Theatre

By Daniel Love Glazer

Wodehousians in Chicago are a blessed lot, for Chicago is the home of City Lit Theater, whose mission is to dramatize great works of literature. So along with producing the works of such notables as Henry James, Franz Kafka, Somerset Maugham, and Edith Wharton, City Lit has made something of a specialty of serving up a Wodehouse opus almost annually. Back in the 1986-1987 season, Plum's own dramatization of *Leave It to Psmith* was staged. In recent years, the Jeeves-Wooster saga has been featured, including *The Code of the Woosters*, *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit*, *Thank You, Jeeves*, *Right Ho, Jeeves*, and *Jeeves in the Morning*, each adapted for the stage by City Lit's Artistic Director, Mark Richard, a.k.a. Bertie Wooster. Those who attended the 1997 Wodehouse Society Convention in Chicago will fondly remember City Lit's presentation of the short stories, "Jeeves Takes Charge" and "Bertie Changes his Mind."

This year, *The Mating Season* is the Plum of choice, dramatized, for a change, by City Lit's Managing Director and resident Jeeves, Page Hearn. For marketing purposes City Lit chose to bill the show as *Jeeves and the Mating Season*. The run is from April 13 through June 10. On April 21, about 20 members of the Chicago Accident Syndicate took in the matinee performance. Our unanimous verdict: "Oojah cum spiff!" After the show, we were treated to a "Talkback," in which cast members discussed the production and answered our questions. We then repaired to a nearby Italian restaurant for some good-natured juicing and sluicing.

It occurs to me that, at this point, some comments about the show itself would be in order. City Lit's Wodehouse is always notable for its fidelity to the original text. The day we attended the show, my wife read *The Mating Season* for the first time (finishing it on the car ride to the theater) and she was amazed at the correspondence between novel and play. Most of Bertie's monologues and asides are retained word for word, delivered impeccably and seamlessly by Mark Richard. Of course, some things in the novel need to be cut, for reasons of time and practicality. In the Wimbledon scene, there was no action

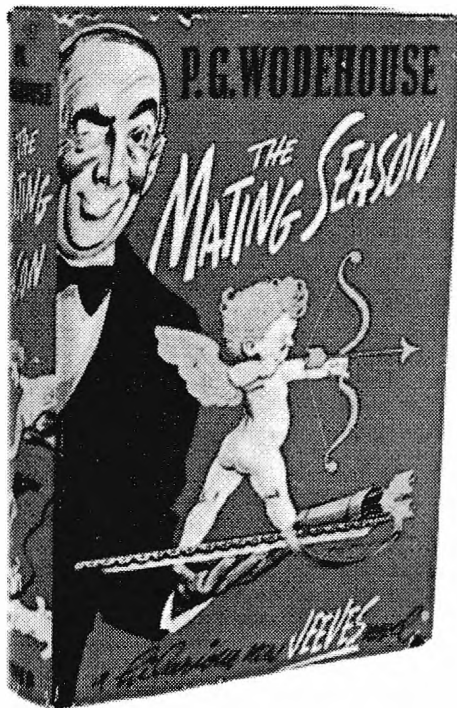
outside Hilda Gudgeon's house and no maid. Sam Goldwyn, the dog, did not appear in the flesh, though his bark was heard to good effect from offstage. Some of the village concert was excised. And four of Esmond Haddock's aunts, namely Charlotte, Emmeline, Harriet, and Myrtle, were represented pictorially by cardboard portraits and verbally by a soundtrack.

Hearn does take a certain liberty at the very end of the play. After Bertie announces his intention to "pull an Esmond Haddock on Aunt Agatha," the novel has him squaring his shoulders and striding to the door, but in the play, Bertie gets cold feet and goes out the window, evidently to adopt Jeeves' suggestion of climbing down the waterpipe and hieing it to the milk train. Hearn's version is more consistent with Bertie's character as we have all come to know and love it, but it does depart from the novel.

The production was remarkable for the multiple roles played admirably by several actors. Heidi Gottcent portrayed Gertrude Winkworth, Madeline Bassett, Queenie the parlormaid, and Eustacia Pulbrook (violinist at the village concert), like a chess master playing blindfolded against five opponents simultaneously; James W. Joseph was Catsmeat Pirbright and also Reverend Sidney Pirbright. Katherine Ripley played Corky Pirbright and Hilda

Gudgeon, Madeline's lovelorn school chum; Scott Kennedy was the dignified butler Silversmith, as well as Master George Kegley-Bassington, woeful reciter of "Ben Battle;" Joseph Wycoff brilliantly embodied both the Greek god-like Esmond Haddock and the shambling Gussie Fink-Nottle—a fact that I, not having consulted the program, didn't realize until well after the show, when my wife so informed me. The next time there is a stage production of "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde," Mr. Wycoff would be perfect for the title roles. And Page Hearn was not only his always unflappable Jeeves, but also a frightfully domineering Dame Daphne Winkworth!

The lark's on the wing, the snail's on the thorn, God's in His heaven, and City Lit is doing Wodehouse—all's right with the world!



Dust wrapper of first American edition, 1949

More on *The Mating Season*

By Katherine Lewis

Katherine's review of City Lit's *The Mating Season* arrived after Daniel Love Glazer's review was firmly set in *Plum Lines* (with the concrete hardening by the minute), but Katherine's is too good to leave out. We include some excerpts here.

Mark Richards and Page Hearn have exceeded all expectations with their choices of fine actors. My favorite was Joseph Wycoff, who portrays Esmond Had-dock and Gussie Fink-Nottle. He is the living, breathing embodiment of Peter van Straaten's illustrations of these characters. Catsmeat and Corky come alive. Two complicated acts rush by in one delicious moment.

Some of the music hall and slapstick humor left me hysterical in my front row seat—I could not contain my laughter. The essence of the play, however, and what made it so delicious to the ear as well as the eye, was the careful reproduction of the words of Wodehouse. Page kept faithfully to the dialogue of the novel, retaining the purity of the work.

Garbage

Those who feel that Wodehouse goes a bit over the top in his ragging of modern writers by attributing to the inklingers in his works such titles as *Songs of Squalor*, *Sewers of the Soul*, *The Stench of Life*, and *Offal*, may want to revise their view when they learn that this year's National Book Award winner was A. R. Ammons's book-length poem, *Garbage*.

We quote (no kidding) a brief passage: "garbage has to be the poem of our time because / garbage is spiritual . . ."

Put that in your pale parabola and smoke it.

—SS

"About fifteen of the dullest speeches I ever heard. The Agee woman told us for three quarters of an hour how she came to write her beastly book, when a simple apology was all that was required."

The Girl in Blue, 1970

Featherstonehaugh

How do you, dear reader, pronounce the name you see above? Every now and then a contributor brings up the question and invariably answers it by saying that the correct pronunciation is "Fanshaw." And just as often, we editors point out the statement in Dan Garrison's *Who's Who in Wodehouse*: "pronounced as spelled, acc. to Debrett's *Correct Usage*." But to no effect—a few months later up pops the "Fanshaw" statement, followed by our faithful response.

Bill Horn adds support to Debrett's dictum (as if it needed any) with the entry shown below from *The BBC Pronunciation Dictionary of the British Isles*, 1983 edition. The "Key to Pronunciation" in that book, beginning on page xvi, reads in part as follows:

Two systems have been employed to indicate pronunciation, one for the benefit of those acquainted with the International Phonetic Association's method of symbolizing sounds and the other for the general user. . . . For the second user an English modified spelling system has been used which, after its explanations have been studied, should be immediately obvious to most English speakers. The systems have been adapted to Received Pronunciation, which is familiar alike to BBC announcers and to listeners and viewers in this country and overseas, whether it happens to be their own type of speech or not. . . .

The entry shown below, copied from page 91, indicates a preference for "featherston-haw," with "fan-shaw" in second place and three other variants lower in the scale. (Sorry, I don't have some of the diacritical marks, so I left them all out.) Unless the preference has changed since 1983, this seems to settle the question of pronunciation.

—OM

**Featherstonehaugh, f.n., also
spelt Featherstonhaugh,
Fetherstonhaugh, 'fɛðərstənha,
fɛt̥hərstɒn-haw; 'fænʃɔ, fán-
-shaw; 'fɛstənha, fɛstɒn-haw;
'fɪsənhei, fɛssɒn-hay; 'fɪərstən-
ha, fɛərstɒn-haw**

The Shakespeare of Golf

By Robert Sullivan

Carolyn Pokrivchak found this article in U. S. Airways *Attaché* magazine for October 1997.

I know the feeling, and so do you. And so did Plummie, who in '26 captured it most felicitously: "It was a morning when all nature shouted 'Fore!' The breeze, as it blew gently up from the valley, seemed to bring a message of hope and cheer, whispering of chip-shots holed and brassies landed squarely on the meat. The fairway, as yet unscarred by the irons of a hundred dubs, smiled greenly up at the azure sky; and the sun, peeping above the trees, looked like a giant golf-ball perfectly lofted by the mashie of some unseen god and about to drop dead by the pin of the eighteenth. It was the day of the opening of the course."

Seventy-one years later, and the prose hasn't been equaled, as regards putting quill to parchment with golf in mind. Herb Wind, Dan Jenkins, John Updike—fine writers all. But the bard of the links is Plummie. You don't have to know that a brassie was a brass-bottomed two wood, that a mashie was an approximate five iron, or that a goof was, as Plummie put it, "one of those unfortunate beings who have allowed this noblest of sports to get too great a grip upon them, who have permitted it to eat into their souls." But you do need to know that Plummie was Sir Pelham Grenville Wodehouse—P. G. Wodehouse by byline, Plummie to his wife and friends. If Harvey Penick was golf's Socrates—the game's greatest teacher and philosopher—then Plum was golf's Shakespeare: its master comedian, romanticist, and occasional tragedian. Wodehouse's world of golf was, usually, a sweet mid-summer afternoon's dream, played out in an Arcadia where bliss is going 'round in one over bogey, and where true love triumphs over a stiff wind.

Golf and love: Those are the two essential ingredients in the golf stories of P. G. Wodehouse. (His canon is so overlarge—about 96 books in his 93 years—that it is divided and subdivided.) There are the dozen-odd Bertie-and-Jeeves novels, the dozen-odd Blandings novels, the very odd Psmith novels, the Jeeves stories, the Mulliner stories, the school stories, the stories that don't fit in any category. And then there are the golf stories, filled with golf and love, love and golf. To wit:

Reggie was a troubled spirit these days. He was in love, and he had developed a bad slice with his midiron. He was practically a soul in torment.

(From "A Damsel in Distress," 1919)

You know how it is. If you have a broken heart, it's bound to give you a twinge now and then, and if this happens when you are starting your down swing you neglect to let the clubhead lead.

(From "There's Always Golf," 1937)

"You love her?"

"Madly."

"And how do you think it affects your game?"

"I've started shanking a bit."

The Oldest Member nodded. "I'm sorry, but not surprised. Either that or missing short putts is what generally happens on these occasions. I doubt if golfers ought to fall in love. I have known it to cost men ten shots in medal round."

(From "Scratch Man," 1959)

The golf stories could just as well be called "the Oldest Member stories," as all but a couple of them are narrated by this veranda-sitting, tweed-suited gentleman who is possessed of "the eye of a man who, as the poet says, has seen Golf steadily and seen it whole." Routinely, in one of these stories, a young duffer will be climbing to-



The Oldest Member and a more or less willing listener.

ward the clubhouse from the 18th green and the Oldest Member will diagnose in his demeanor something that is causing (1) trouble in love, (2) trouble in golf, or (3) trouble in both. By way of remedy, the Oldest Member will draw the youth aside and relate “from the innumerable memories that rush to my mind” a story, the moral of which sets things right.

Wodehouse was so funny, it might make you wonder if he was any good. Well, no less than the novelist John Updike himself is an admirer. “I read Wodehouse in my teens,” he told me. “He was a wonderful writer, and the golf stories seemed to me to be just as wonderful as the rest, and to this day they seem the best fiction ever done about the sport.” So there. But what Updike did not explain to me was: Why golf? What did golf mean to P. G. Wodehouse? “Golf meant everything to him,” says Peter Schwed, Wodehouse’s friend and longtime editor. “He was golf mad.” But not always. As a young boy growing up in late-nineteenth-century England, he was cricket mad and rugby mad. “He took up golf too late in life to excel,” writes Frances Donaldson in her biography of Wodehouse, but “his theoretical knowledge is immense.” Wodehouse, for his part, implied with tongue-in-cheek that he wished he had spent more time playing, less working: “Whenever you see me with a furrowed brow you can be sure that what is on my mind is the thought that if only I had taken up golf earlier and devoted my whole time to it instead of fooling about writing stories and things, I might have got my handicap down to under eighteen.”

But he did spend his time fooling about writing stories. And after the wheel-spinning, rejection-filled start that many writers encounter, he became one of the world’s most famous, most prolific, and most highly paid humorists. His vision of crazy British clubs, antic country castles, and eternally sunny skies went down like sweet vermouth during the Roaring Twenties. Not only was Wodehouse entertaining, but—as Updike said—he was good. In 1939, Belloc called him the greatest writer working in English; Evelyn Waugh referred to him always as “the Master.”

The first golf story, “Ordeal by Golf,” appeared in 1919. By then, Wodehouse was playing the game himself, or at least playing at it. “He never made any pretensions of being anything but a duffer,” Schwed told me. “He was a bum golfer.” Wodehouse had at least one good day, and he wrote about it, years later, in the preface to *The Golf Omnibus*: “I may have managed to get a few rays of sunshine into the stories which follow. If so, this is due to the fact that while I was writing them I won my first and only trophy, a striped umbrella in a hotel tournament in Aiken, South Carolina, where, hitting them squarely on the meat for once, I went through a field of some of the

fattest retired businessmen in America like a devouring flame.”

The Golf Omnibus, assembled in 1973, is the first folio of Wodehouse on golf: It is what you need, and it is all you need. A collection of 31 stories, the omnibus includes several classics: “The Heart of a Goof,” “The Clicking of Cuthbert,” “Sundered Hearts,” and “Ordeal by Golf.” In “The Coming of Gowf,” Wodehouse describes the kingdom of Oom, where King Merolchazzar eventually declares golf the official religion. For all the silliness in the book there is substance. “I think the golf stories are just about his best stuff,” says Schwed. “He was an acute observer of the species, and in the golf stories the satire is right on the mark. Anyone who’s ever golfed will have to laugh at the situations out on the course. This stuff really happens.”

As Schwed implied, the golf stories aren’t just for Wodehouse fans, they’re for golf fans—of which association Wodehouse was a dues-paying member. “I loved the game,” he once wrote. “I sometimes wondered if we of the *canaille* don’t get more pleasure out of it than the top-notchers. For an untouchable like myself two perfect drives in a round would wipe out all memory of sliced approach shots and fozzled putts, whereas if Nicklaus does a sixty-four he goes home and thinks morosely that if he had not just missed that eagle on the seventh, he would have had a sixty-three.”

Wodehouse was 92 when he wrote that. He had long since given up the game; he rarely played after settling in Remsenburg, New York, a sleep-seeking village that lies a five iron from Shinnecock Hills. It may seem surprising that the man who made Bertie Wooster’s Drones Club world famous never pressed for membership at those hallowed courses, or at any of the other great links of eastern Long Island. But the fact is, Wodehouse harbored a life-long loathing of clubs.

It was golf, the game, that he loved. He loved it sunny, he loved it pure, and he loved it flat-capped, argyled, and knickerbockered. He loved it olden. And although the feeling of opening day was unchanged over three-quarters of a century, other things about golf were evolving, and not all of this progress sat well with the great old writer. “Time like an ever-rolling stream bears its sons away, and with them have gone the names of most of the golf clubs so dear to me,” he wrote months before his death. “I believe one still drives with a driver nowadays, though at any moment we may have to start calling it the Number One wood, but where is the mashie now, where the cleck, the spoon, and the baffy?”

“Miss-in-baulk” and “Oojah-cum-spiff”

By Charles E. Gould, Jr.

May 11, 2001

The Editor,
Harvard Magazine,
Chapter & Verse Department,
7 Ware Street,
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Dear Sir, or Ms, or Madam (in these mysterious times):

In response to the query of Mr. Robert Strauss about two P. G. Wodehouse phrases (May-June issue, page 24), the *Oxford English Dictionary* does its best, and I have little to offer but *glossnolia*.

The phrase “miss-in-baulk” (also *balk*) emerges from the game of billiards (at which I am not expert). The “balk” (an old word, Middle English, Old English, akin to Old High German) is the part of a billiard table behind the aptly-named “balk line,” defining an area at one end of the table within which a player whose ball is in hand must place it to make a stroke. (At its root, a *balk* is a ridge in the field or the cloth—or some other nasty obstacle to fair play.) A *miss-in-baulk* is, in billiards, a failure to hit the object ball, on account of which failure the opponent scores, but in some circumstances this is the correct play, I can’t imagine why, but so says the *OED*. I don’t know what any of that means; but in Wodehouse, giving some dreaded encounter or event or task the “miss-in-baulk” means, I think, not only giving it a miss but gaining something else: e.g., avoiding Aunt Agatha and enjoying the pleasures of New York simultaneously.

“Oojah-cum-spiff?” Pronounced as spelled. Well, of course, *cum* is Latin for “with.” *Spiff* (according to the *OED*) centuries ago was the percentage allowed to drapers’ boys for selling off old stock (I’ve just made some *spiff*, selling a lot of tired inventory to a dealer in California, though I’m not precisely a “draper’s boy”). *Oojah*: its origin evidently is a puzzle, but it’s roughly synonymous with “thingummy” or “whatsis” or W. S. Gilbert’s “Likewise, never mind”—a substantive to indicate vaguely something whose name the speaker can’t recall. So “Oojah-cum-spiff” (functioning only, I think, as a predicate adjective) means, in the parlance of today’s American youth “Like whatever, wow—plus!” or “Okay, *totally*!” This amazing locution did not appear in the *OED* until a supplement cited Wodehouse’s as the first usage (*Very Good, Jeeves*, 1930, Chapter 1, page 25 in the U.K. first edition).

Now you know—at least as much as I do; and we must hope that this will provoke the shocked and supercilious effusion of someone who knows much more . . . including where Wodehouse got it all. I hope that you will be kind enough to pass this along to Mr. Strauss. Meanwhile, I fear that Wodehouse himself would regard the whole discussion as over-particular and pedantic (*not* oojah-cum-spiff) and give it the miss-in-baulk . . . picking up aunt Agatha *Christie* instead.

With all best wishes,

Yours,

Charles E. Gould, Jr.

A Bad Something New

Tony Ring recently heard of a Dover Publications version of *Something New*, claimed by Dover to be an unabridged reprint of the D. Appleton 1916 original, published in America. Tony obtained a copy and subsequently wrote to the Chief Executive of Dover “in disbelief at what I see,” explaining just why Dover’s claim is untenable. A section of between 1000 and 2000 words has been omitted from Chapter Nine—precisely the section omitted from the *British* edition of the book for good and sufficient reasons. And a crucial sentence has been omitted from the last chapter, precisely the sentence omitted from many of the Penguin (*British*) editions of the book. “At best, a lazy editor,” Tony writes, and concludes with this warning: “I recommend that no Wodehousean acquires this book.”

What was actually in the champagne supplied to Barolini and purveyed by him to the public, such as were reckless enough to drink it, at eight shillings the bottle remains a secret between its maker and his Maker.

“Ukridge’s Accident Syndicate,” *Ukridge*, 1924

The Origin of Jeeves

By P. G. Wodehouse

Ben Jenson found these paragraphs on "the back of a record jacket for a Caedmon recording of two dramatized stories of Bertie and Jeeves done in 1964. . . . I am not a scholar of PGW's writing so I don't know whether it is in an anthology or not." As far as I know it does not appear elsewhere. —OM

I have often been asked whether Jeeves was 'drawn' from anyone. The answer is Yes and No, for while I had no actual individual model he has some of the characteristics of half a dozen butlers I knew in my hot youth. As a child I lived on the fringe of the butler belt. As a younger man I was a prominent pest at houses where butlers were maintained. And later I employed butlers. So it might be said that I have never gone off the butler standard. (Although I cannot point it out too strongly that Jeeves is not a butler, he is a gentleman's personal gentleman. Nevertheless, he is *like* a butler. And he has butler blood in him, for his Uncle Charlie Silversmith has been a butler for years.)

I find it curious, now that I have written so much about him, to recall how softly and undramatically Jeeves first entered my little world. Characteristically he did not thrust himself forward. On that occasion he spoke just two lines—a bit part if ever there was one. The first was "Mrs. Gregson to see you, sir," the second "Very good, sir." At this point—early 1916—Bertie Wooster hogged the entire show and I never looked on Jeeves as anything but one of the extras, a nonentity who might consider himself lucky if he got even two lines. It was only when I was writing a thing called "The Artistic Career Of Corky"—late 1916—that he respectfully elbowed Bertie to one side and took charge.

Nobody has ever called Bertram Wooster one of our brightest minds, and he and his friend Corky—who had even less of what it takes to solve life's difficulties—were faced by a major problem. Being a conscientious artist, I simply could not let either of them suddenly have a brilliant idea for solving it, and yet somebody had to have one or the story could not be written. In the upshot the chap who had the brilliant idea was me. Why not, I said to myself, groom this bit player Jeeves for stardom? Why not, I said, still soliloquizing, make him a bird with a terrific brain who comes to Bertie's rescue whenever the latter gets in a jam? "Eureka!" I would have cried, only I didn't want to steal Archimedes' stuff, and I got down to it without delay.

"Jeeves," says Bertie on page four of "The Artistic Career of Corky," "we want your advice. And from now on," he might have added, "you get equal billing."

I have now written eight Jeeves novels and thirty-nine Jeeves short stories, and though carpers may say that

enough is enough and cavillers back them up in this opinion I doubt if I shall ever be able to fight against the urge to write Jeeves novels and Jeeves short stories. People keep telling me that there are no Jeeveses in England now and that Bertie Wooster is probably trying to make do with a woman who comes in Tuesdays and Fridays to clean up and wash the dishes, but I shall ignore them. It is no good them trying to cure me. I am hooked.

Lord Emsworth Lives . . .

. . . in the person of Christopher Owen, a British actor who, since June 2000, has performed his original show entitled *Right Ho, Wodehouse* at more than sixty venues around Great Britain. The show features Mr. Owen as Lord Emsworth, who is to address the Parva Village Literary Society on the subject of his family's biographer, Mr P. G. Wodehouse. Also highlighted are Mr. Owen's wife, Joy, David Wykes on the piano, and songs by Jerome Kern and Ivor Novello, with lyrics by Plum. Further details on the production can be obtained by going to: <http://www.christopher.owen.ukgateway.net>.

Having put on his show successfully in the U.K. and with plans to take it to Saudi Arabia and the Far East, Mr. Owen is now turning his attention to other overseas venues. His hope is to bring *Right Ho Wodehouse* to the United States, an idea which meets with our hearty endorsement. The problem is: How? If any Plummies know of a theatre or other venue willing to put on Mr. Owen's show, or some other means by which he can import it to the U.S., please let him know.

"Frederick won't be staying here long, will he?" Lord Emsworth asked, with a father's pathetic eagerness.

Full Moon, 1947

The Great Sermon Handicap

By Norman Murphy

The following was included among the materials handed out at last summer's Wodehouse Millennium Tour. Of course, anything by Norman is worth sharing with *Plum Lines* readers!

—AD

Preface: Some years ago, Jimmy Heineman paid me the compliment of asking me to write the introduction of one of his multi-lingual volumes of "The Great Sermon Handicap." I asked what languages Volume V covered and was delighted to find it included Amharic and Aramaic, languages reputedly recognisable to the ancient Assyrians. Jimmy was slightly surprised by my enthusiasm, but I knew it gave me the lead-in I wanted.

I have appended it below for two reasons: Firstly, because I am prouder of it than any other short piece I have written, and secondly, because I have tried to describe the background that every one of Wodehouse's readers would have recognised in the 1920s.

Jimmy's commission prompted me to find out what happened to the Assyrians; one doesn't seem to hear much about them nowadays. I found there are still a few around, though not in Assyria (Iraq). Converted to Christianity, probably under the Byzantine Empire, they supported the British in both World Wars. In particular, the gallant defence by the Assyrian Levies of British bases in Iraq against Iraqi forces in 1941 meant they had little to look forward to once the British pulled out. In 1945 the few thousand remaining left their ancient homeland forever. Some settled elsewhere in the Middle East, while a sizeable contingent came to the American Midwest.

Introduction to The Great Sermon Handicap, Volume V (English, Sanskrit, Armenian, Arabic, Maltese, Ancient Hebrew, Modern Hebrew, Aramaic, Amharic, Somali, Coptic):

In his foreword James Heineman reminds us how world-shaking events have been decided by such apparent trifles as the mist obscuring the sunken road at Waterloo. In agreeing with him, that unlikely strategist, Bertie Wooster, expressed himself more bluntly:

"Not know the terrain and where are you? Look at Napoleon and that sunken road at Waterloo. Silly ass!"

One wonders at the possible repercussions of this volume upon the world. The Reverend Mr. Heppenstall's epic sermon on Brotherly Love includes a "rather exhaustive excursus into the family life of the early Assyrians." What will the outcome be when today's Assyrians read of the family life of the Reverend Mr. Heppenstall?

What revolutions of thought or philosophy may it

The Great Sermon Handicap

P. S. Wodehouse



VOLUME V

In English • संस्कृत • Հայերեն • بالعربية • bil-Malti
בלישון הקודש • בעברית • ארמית • ስዕል • Oo Somali-ah
Ḳen • TamepallanQum • In Phonetic English

This is the volume for which Norman wrote the introduction.

not engender in the Coptic seminaries of Ethiopia, in the tents of the Tuaregs or amongst the authorities on Mount Sinai? Will a new Prester John arise, denouncing the evils of ante-post betting or fulminating against the wearing of soft-fronted albs for evening service? It might even serve to reconcile ancient enemies in the Middle East—an awesome thought.

There are those unfortunates who claim (for which error they will in due course undoubtedly be eaten by bears) that Wodehouse wrote of a sunlit world that never existed. But if you ask them to describe what they remember of their childhood holidays, the effect is remarkable. The eye softens, the lips smile in affectionate memory, and they describe golden, halcyon days when the sun al-

ways shone, the grass was greener, and the world was a happier place.

What Wodehouse did was to dramatize his happy memories in imperishable language, and nowhere better than in "The Great Sermon Handicap." He spent much of his boyhood with four clergymen uncles just like Mr. Heppenstall. From them he learned of such crises in clerical life as dissent in the choir, schism in the Church Ladies' Guild, and scandals recounted in hushed tones at episcopal garden-parties.

He saw the Anglican church in the last years of Victorian England, before the advent of radio or television, when the Sunday sermon in the parish church was an important event in village life. While their elders endured lengthy addresses from the pulpit, the juvenile members of the congregation passed the time as best they could. Some might amuse themselves by counting how often a word appeared in the Collect for the Day, or calculating how many times the vicar sneezed, cleared his throat or, as here, in betting their friends how long the sermon would be. When the story first appeared in *Cosmopolitan* magazine in 1922, every reader would have recognized the scene.

Occasionally even the older members of the congregation took steps to alleviate the tedium. One landowner, from his seat below the pulpit, managed to keep the sermons short by laying out his money for the collection in a line of half-crowns along the front of his pew, with his watch alongside. As each five minutes passed, a coin was ostentatiously picked up and returned to his pocket!

The villages of Twing, Upper and Lower Bingley, Little-Clickton-in-the-Wold, or Boustead Parva do not appear on any map. Their originals are to be found around Bredon Hill, just across the river from the vicarage in Worcestershire where Wodehouse spent many school holidays—Bredon's Norton, Eckington, Great and Little Comberton, Bricklehampton, Elmley Castle, Hinton-on-the-Green, and Ashton-under-Hill, each nestling around its own parish church. No matter in what language it is read—and James Heineman is making heroic efforts to ensure it can be read in as many as possible—"The Great Sermon Handicap" remains a delightful cameo of English life that will endure as long as England has village churches and clergymen to preach in them.

She gave a sort of despairing gesture, like a vicar's daughter who has discovered Erastianism in the village.

Laughing Gas, 1936

The Great Plum Paragraph Contest

The denizens of Chapter One, hosts of the 2001 convention of TWS, have devised a contest for all interested parties.

Last year, on the Internet, someone made the mad mistake of asking what other writers the people in TWS read—in other words, who is your second favorite writer? The question unleashed a torrent, if torrent is the word I want, Jeeves, of replies. It seems that Plum fans have reading habits that are exotic, eccentric, and evocative.

We challenge those reading habits. Pick out your favorite Wodehouse paragraph, or one that you consider typically Wodehousian, and rewrite it in the style of one of your second-favorite authors. That is the only rule. The contest will be judged by a blue-ribbon panel of Plummies, all of whom have been chosen by Ouija board.

Send it any way you want, before September 1, 2001. Send it in Esperanto if you wish, or in telegraph form like Lord Emsworth. Send it to me, David (Jas Waterbury) McDonough at

Winners will be announced at the convention in October 2001, where there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Enter early and often. Cheating and chicanery are encouraged. Please don't send perishables. Void where prohibited by law. Relatives and employees of the Wodehouse Society are more to be pitied than censured.

The task of composing a sermon which should practically make sense and yet not be above the heads of his rustic flock was always one that caused Augustine Mulliner to concentrate tensely. Soon he was lost in his labour and oblivious to everything but the problem of how to find a word of one syllable that meant Supralapsarianism.

"Gala Night," *Mulliner Nights*, 1933

Plum's Letters to Billy Griffith

The following exchange was snatched off PGW-Net. —AD

There is an interesting article in [a recent] online *Daily Telegraph*. . . . Trying not to infringe copyright, the gist of the article is that Plum often suffered from writer's block and had to reread his own books to check whether he had already used his story ideas. He also regretted that charm or sporting prowess alone no longer guaranteed a place at Oxford and Cambridge, and he deplored the loss of cricket's amateur status.

All this is revealed in letters that he wrote to his friend Billy Griffith, the Sussex and England cricketer, over more than forty years. The letters are to be auctioned at Christie's South Kensington in London in June by Griffith's son, Mike (Wodehouse's godson). They are expected to fetch £8,000 to £12,000 when they are auctioned.

In one letter in 1953 Wodehouse confessed to Griffith: "The devil of it is that every time I get a particularly good idea, I have to reread all the other Jeeves books to make sure I haven't used it before."

Wodehouse's friendship with Griffith, who later became secretary and then president of the MCC, lasted until

Plum's death. The man from Christie's said: "This ranks as a major archive, particularly important because it is unpublished and existing Wodehouse biographers have not had access to it."

—Beach. The Butler's Pantry, Blandings Castle.

To which John Fletcher added:

This generally unsympathetic article [in the *Daily Telegraph*] by Will Bennett calls PGW "an arch-reactionary who regretted that charm or sporting prowess alone no longer guaranteed a place at Oxford and Cambridge and who deplored the loss of cricket's amateur status." You would not recognise in this "arch-reactionary" the man who made Psmith, one of his greatest heroes, a Communist journalist engaged on bringing down rack-rent landlords in New York.

But it does get better, Mike Griffith saying of PG's letter-writing, "It is extraordinary that he took the trouble to write such fantastic letters—his output was amazing."

Volunteer officers

Information and new memberships

Marilyn MacGregor

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

Neil Midkiff

Original contributions to *Plum Lines*

Other contributions to *Plum Lines*

Ed Ratcliffe, OM

Elin Woodger, AD

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

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