



Plum Lines

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A Damsel in Distress: Novel, to Play, to Film

By Brian Taves

Brian, in addition to the high distinction of membership in The Wodehouse Society, is a film archivist at the Library of Congress. He holds a Ph.D. in cinema-television from the University of Southern California, the filmatic equivalent of a pilgrimage to Lourdes. He is the author of three books and will be a speaker at our Philadelphia convention. The charming Henry Ranleigh illustrations with their original captions were copied from the first appearance of the story in the *Saturday Evening Post* of 1919. They were kindly provided by Len Lawson. —OM

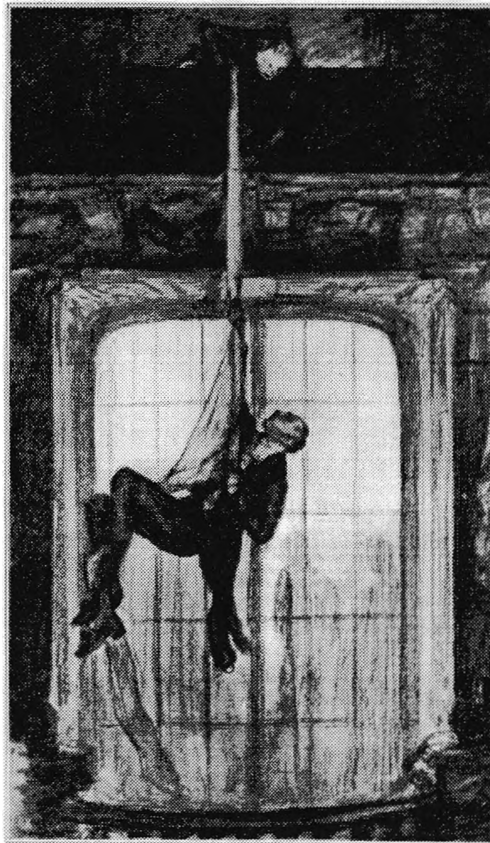
Rarely does a novelist have the opportunity to participate in the adaptation of one of his own stories for the screen, but such was the case with Pelham Grenville Wodehouse. The 1937 movie, *A Damsel in Distress*, was the first and only time he assisted in transposing his prose to film.

A Damsel in Distress had initially been filmed back in 1919, at the time of its original publication, in a version faithful to the novel. In 1928 Wodehouse had collaborated on a stage version with Ian Hay, which had condensed and rearranged some scenes for the limitations of the proscenium, while retaining the highlights of the book.

On the advice of George Gershwin, RKO producer Pandro Berman bought the screen rights to *A Damsel in Distress* in November 1936. Gershwin had collaborated in the theater with Wodehouse before he wrote the novel, and Gershwin believed that the character of the music writer named George Bevan in *A Damsel in Distress* was based on him. Gershwin's nine songs for the film were composed before the script was written, and he died dur-

ing production of the movie. *A Damsel in Distress* had an unusual follow-up: in 1998, the score of the film, along with several songs Gershwin had written but which were not used in the picture, were included in a new stage musical of the Wodehouse novel, this time entitled *A Foggy Day* for one of the songs.

RKO was interested in filming *A Damsel in Distress* because the novel's romantic lead was a musical comedy composer, allowing a singer and dancer to be cast in the role—and RKO needed a Fred Astaire vehicle. Scripting was already well underway when Wodehouse was asked to assist in May 1937. As he wrote to his daughter, "I only expected to get a couple of weeks polishing the existing scripts. But that script turned out so badly that they threw it away, and I and another man [Ernest Pagano] started doing a new picture from the bottom up, following the story of the book pretty closely." Shooting took place from July 22 to October 16, while work on the script continued until September 25 (Wodehouse left on August 14); the final screenplay credits Wodehouse, Pagano, and S.K. Lauren. Wode-



George Leaped From His Rail Like a Hunted Grasshopper, and Swung Himself Out.

house wrote, "I think I have made a big hit with my work on this picture. The other day, after they had been shooting, the director [George Stevens] rang me up to tell me he was so enthusiastic about my stuff that he had to call me up and tell me so! And I hear in roundabout ways that it has got over."

The recurring gag of everyone infectiously saying "Right-ho" to one another seems a nod to Wodehouse's presence on the set. Similarly, the song "Stiff Upper Lip" is the most colloquial in its wording and captures the tone of Wodehouse prose. Like the Ian Hay stage version, *A Damsel in Distress* retained the basic plot outline of the novel, but unlike the play, the movie deleted and merged a number of the characters, and added others, becoming a second, separate Wodehouse variation on the novel. Names are also changed: George Bevan becomes Jerry Halliday, and Maud becomes Alyce (although retaining her identity, not becoming the Alice Faraday of the novel).

To add box-office insurance, George Burns and Gracie Allen were brought in from Paramount to partner Astaire in gags and dance routines. Burns and Allen play Jerry's press agent and his secretary, using their own names as they did in most of their movies of this time. While their participation was definitely outside the original, and the humor different from the Wodehouse style, Burns and Allen provide the movie with additional amusement.

Joan Fontaine was cast opposite Astaire. She had just been placed under contract to RKO, and was only then emerging from low-budget films; her first successful starring role would not be until 1940 with *Rebecca*. The cast-

ing of Burns and Allen was partly to compensate for the risk associated with placing a relative unknown as the love interest.

Whereas previous Astaire films had featured a dancing partnership, *A Damsel in Distress* placed Astaire front and center, emphasizing the solitary aspect of his performance. Fontaine and Astaire have only one brief number together, simultaneously inviting comparison with Rogers yet demonstrating that she was unable to dance adequately opposite Astaire. Only the presence of Burns and Allen keep the entire picture from pivoting entirely on Astaire. The expectations of a romantic musical comedy usually call for a couple at the center, but *A Damsel in Distress* opts for a solitary lead or at most a trio (when Burns and Allen are also on screen), an inherent imbalance in the genre. Fontaine believed that the movie actually set her career back several years.

Reginald Gardiner had played the role of Percy, the antagonist in the romance, in the Hay version on the London stage. In the movie, by contrast, the character of Percy is eliminated, and Gardiner is cast as Keggs the butler, whose part is rewritten to take over much of the role played by both Reggie and Percy in the novel and the play. As a result, Keggs becomes a much more sprightly and unlikely character. For instance, rather than Percy, it is Keggs who follows Alyce to London, and ends up imprisoned when he believes Jerry is her secret boyfriend and has a scuffle with him. Gardiner was an ideal choice, an English comedian in the same tradition as Wodehouse.

Reggie's much reduced part is played by bandleader

Ray Noble, with his only distinguishing trait being an addiction to swing. Reggie has a brief romance with Gracie before she decides to marry George Burns (in the movie). The secondary romances in the novel and the play, of Reggie and Alice Faraday, and Lord Marshmoreton and Billie Dore, are eliminated in the movie, along with both of these female characters.

In the movie, Alyce's father remains the curmudgeonly Lord Marshmoreton (ideally portrayed by Montagu Love), whose joy is his garden and who delivers Jerry's message to his daughter, supporting the romance. Constance Collier ferociously portrays Lady Caroline, who only



"If There Is Anything in the World I Can Possibly Do to Help," He Said Slowly, "I Hope You Will Let Me Know. I Should Like Above All things to Help You."



"I Say, Maud, Do You Find Love Puts You Off Your Stroke? Does It Make You Slice Your Approach Shots?"

agrees to the wedding of Jerry and Alyce to avoid a scandal. Unlike the stage play, in which the novel's Albert the page becomes Albertina, Albert in the movie remains his original impish self. As portrayed by Harry Watson, Albert hopes to preserve his stake in the drawing against Kegg's machinations.

Instead of the novel and play's opening with the meeting of the future romantic couple, the movie begins by establishing the conflict between the family's determination to sequester Alyce in the castle and her desire for love. In the servant's hall, a lottery offers the names of Alyce's prospective suitors, introducing the interplay between Kegg and Albert to see who will win the prize. As in the novel, Albert's support helps foster the romance, but in the movie it is the crucial motivating factor, with the page writing a spurious note from Alyce that spurs Jerry's interest. In the book and play, by contrast, it was a case of love at first sight for a man who has avoided women as a consequence of his life in the theater. In the movie, Jerry yearns for a real woman after his publicist, George Burns, has concocted fictional romances for the gossip columns that have given him legions of giddy femi-

nine followers.

Jerry first visits Alyce's home, Totleigh Castle (already renamed in the play from the novel's Belfer Castle), with Burns and Allen, who join Kegg's weekly public tour of the grounds. Gracie uses her typical combination of ignorance and malapropisms to befuddle her guide. He shows the visitors the site of Leonard's Leap, a dangerous escape from the castle balcony in the Middle Ages to preserve a lady's honor. Jerry, refused entrance by Kegg, gets in through a ruse of Albert, and meets Alyce upstairs. When she seems unwilling to discuss love, he convinces her to talk about it in the third person, consequently failing to realize she loves someone else. However, Jerry must make a quick exit onto the balcony, where Albert drops him a sheet to climb to safety, convincing Alyce that Jerry must have escaped by heroically repeating the legendary Leonard's Leap. As he leaves the grounds, Jerry gives a note for Alyce to Marshmoreton, assuming he is the gardener. Jerry moves into "Leonard's Manor" instead of the novel's cottage "down by Platt's," and the visiting Marshmoreton soon learns his identity. He even serves to confirm his daughter's love for Jerry, believing he is the American ski instructor she truly loves.

In these sequences, ideas from the novel are used, but combined with fresh material, as the movie increasingly strays from the source. Some of the incidents most directly inspired by the novel seem awkward on the screen, such as the cab fracas and Kegg and Albert overhearing key events and trading drawing tickets.

Reggie is supposed to propose to Alyce at a local fair, but when Jerry arrives ahead of him and kisses Alyce, he receives a slap in the face. (The movie's subsequent fun house sequence is the musical and choreographic highlight.) Afterward, Alyce tells her father she now loves Jerry, and Marshmoreton explains why Jerry believed she loved him. (The film dispenses completely with the climactic meeting with her previous lover, now grown fat and obnoxious, that in the novel and play made her realize her true love; as a result, Alyce seems fickle in the movie.) Meanwhile, Jerry is thoroughly confused when Alyce goes to the manor to say she loves him, and urges him to come to the evening ball at the castle. The advancing romance is abruptly halted when Burns plants a newspaper item citing Alyce as lover Jerry's 28th victim. This time it is Kegg who helps Jerry into Totleigh, now that he has taken the lottery ticket for Jerry from Albert. Only when Jerry is compelled to truly perform Leonard's Leap, through the trees and onto the ground, does Alyce realize she loves him.

A major screen credit seemed to open up the possibility of a new career for Wodehouse, but when *A Damsel in Distress* was released on November 19, 1937, it proved

to be the first Astaire picture to lose money at the box office. This was probably inevitable; after seven vehicles together, audiences had grown accustomed to seeing Astaire paired with Ginger Rogers, and reviewers inevitably compared Fontaine unfavorably. The failure of *A Damsel in Distress* would compel Astaire to make two more movies with Rogers, although their reunion in *Carefree* (1938) also met with a lukewarm boxoffice reception. Hence, the reaction to *A Damsel in Distress* was hardly unique for an Astaire picture at this point in his career. However, the disappointing box-office results must have stung Wodehouse, not only because of his involvement in its creation, but because his name had become a more prominent part of advertising and promotion than on any of the previous films from his novels. Subsequently, few movies were made from Wodehouse sources, although in decades to come he would be more successfully adapted for television.

By Jeeves in New York

The excellent news from Elin Woodger is that the musical *By Jeeves* will open at the Helen Hayes Theater in New York City soon after you receive this *Plum Lines*. Alan Ayckbourn will come over from England to direct the presentation.

Previews begin on Wednesday, October 17, with evening performances Monday–Saturday at 8 P.M. and matinees Wednesday and Saturday at 2 P.M. The opening performance will be on Sunday evening, October 28, at 8 P.M., and later performances will follow the schedule given above for previews, with the addition of Sunday matinees at 2 P.M. Tickets are available from Ticket Telecharge, phone (212) 239-6200, at prices ranging from \$75 to \$85.

The effect was instantaneous and gratifying. As he drained his first glass, it seemed to him that a torchlight procession, of whose existence he had hitherto not been aware, had begun to march down his throat and explore the recesses of his stomach. The second glass, though slightly too heavily charged with molten lava, was extremely palatable. It helped the torchlight procession along by adding to it a brass band of singular power and sweetness of tone. And with the third somebody began to touch off fireworks inside his head.

"The Story of William," 1939

Copyright on the Internet

Our president Elin Woodger received the following letter on May 29, 2001.

Dear Elin Woodger:

I am the literary agent for P. G. Wodehouse, and would be most grateful for your help over a delicate matter. We have noticed that some individuals who are clearly genuine fans—and sometimes also members of the Society of which you are President—have internet sites devoted to him in which quotations from his works appear. Of course it is wonderful to see such enthusiasm, and I wouldn't want to deaden that enthusiasm in any way—and having a small amount of material on such websites can help to promote Wodehouse. But I also have a responsibility to make sure that copyright isn't breached, perhaps inadvertently.

Perhaps the simplest way of handling this would be to give a blanket consent on the following conditions:

- a) the relevant website is not used for commercial purposes or contains any form of advertising;
- b) it is run by an individual, not a business, who is a member of a recognised PGW Society or a recognised PGW internet discussion group;
- c) the combined length of quotes on any site does not exceed 250 (two hundred and fifty) words;
- d) there is an acknowledgement next to the quotations that they are the copyright of the Trustees of the Wodehouse Estate;
- e) individuals wishing to use quotes under these guidelines should register with your Society.

I would be extremely grateful if you could include this request in the US Society journal, and also if you could circulate it to all participants in the discussion group PGWnet.

Please let me know if you have any queries.

Best wishes,

Linda Shaughnessy
A P Watt Ltd

A Historic Cricket Match—in Every Sense

The Sherlock Holmes Society of London XI versus The P.G. Wodehouse Society (UK) XI

By Norman Murphy

On Sunday, June 10th, the small picturesque village of West Wycombe, set in a beautiful wooded valley on the Dashwood estate, saw a most unusual game of cricket. In answer to a challenge from Peter Horrocks of the Sherlock Holmes Society, we had assembled a team and done our best to meet their second, unspoken challenge—to dress as well as they did.

The match was to be played to the laws of cricket as they were in 1895, and spectators and players were encouraged to dress in period as well. I think the Sherlock Holmes Society won this secondary contest hands down. Their team wore specially-made Victorian cricket caps (very small peaks), their supporters wore everything from Norfolk shooting suits to striped blazers of every colour and hue and had enough beards to stuff a sofa. The ladies were even better. There were long elegant dresses, there were parasols, and there were hats. And when I say hats, I mean hats in the true meaning of the word.

We did our best and the Wodehouse ladies did us credit in long skirts and straw boaters, while nobody looked more like a benevolent Professor Moriarty than John Fletcher in an all-enveloping ulster and deerstalker. The visiting American contingent were a credit to both Societies; Marilyn MacGregor and Francine Swift looked exactly right, and John Baesch wore striped cap and blazer as though he'd been born in them.

Hilary Bruce had fitted out our team with sashes—plum-coloured, of course—and then there was Murray. Murray Hedgcock is a journalist and cricketing expert. Not only does he know what the rules of cricket were in 1895, he acted as umpire (“our” umpire), knew exactly what an umpire wore then—and wore it. From large black boots, baggy trousers, white coat, neckerchief twisted round the neck, to the final triumph of a hat I have only seen in Victorian photographs. If you can visualise a soft, high-crowned brown bowler (Derby), you'll know what he looked like.

With an umpire like that, we couldn't lose and we didn't. Although the Sherlock Homes Society fielded a Peer of the Realm and a reverend canon, we had Oliver Wise, Bob Miller, and Hal Cazalet on top form. Playing the 1895 rules as though they had been brought up on them, they hit all round the wicket and we finished with a score of 171.

The 1895 rules allow, even encourage, underarm bowling and lobs—and to everyone's delight Robert

Bruce took a splendid wicket with one such.

The weather was typically British: bright sunshine interspersed with heavy showers, but nobody seemed to mind. Lunchtime saw every sort of picnic imaginable from humble sandwiches and thermos flasks (“Oh goody! Hot soup! Just what I need.”) to the opposite extreme (“Darling, I told you to put the champagne on ice last night.”) We were given two excellent addresses on Doyle and Wodehouse's friendship and joint cricketing experiences, and everybody talked to everybody else at the tops of their voices.

It was a splendid day. As Bob Miller, our captain, said as he looked round him at the colourful, cheerful throng, “If the rain stopped us bowling a single ball, it would still be a good day. Everybody's having the time of their lives.”

As the teams came off the pitch at the end (they scored 65), Murray called for silence and gave us the sad news that the ball used would have been illegal in 1895. Therefore the whole match was null and void and would have to be played again. It will be. Next year.



Hal Cazalet on the left, cleverly concealed behind dense undergrowth

A New York State of Mind

By David Landman

I was fortunate to spend my youth and early manhood in New York when the city possessed what seems to me its only reason (besides good Chinese restaurants) for existence—a night-blooming, high-hearted, champagne ambience freighted with infinite possibility. A place where one could, by grace of the Shubert Theatre box office, sit for three hours next to Marilyn Monroe, all fulgor and flame; where, when one's car broke down on a garage exit ramp, one might, until the tow truck arrived, spend a pleasant quarter hour chatting with Nelson Rockefeller, the driver of the obstructed car behind; where on the strength of owning a rare Bessie Smith 78, strum guitar one smoky night with blues legend Josh White; where, exiting a movie premier, one could be buttonholed by Walt Disney, himself, soliciting a frank opinion of his opus.

This and more may have befallen me as a young pieface in the Big Apple, but a time came when, a pater-familias, I began to feel more danger than delight in the metropolis, and packing wife and chattel into a snorting billy, headed, like Pa Joad in *The Grapes of Wrath*, for the land of milk and honey—in our case the suburbs of Boston, MA.

I frequently return to Gotham to visit friends, and it was on such an excursion last Christmastide that my faith in the magic of the city was restored.

One bitterly cold afternoon on Madison Avenue somewhere in the lower '70s, pal Saville and I ducked into a deli for a hot bowl of *consomme aux nouilles*, he to ingest his, I, if the manager permitted, to pour mine into my shoes in an effort to restore circulation to my toes. We were seated at a table for two, but as three such tables were pushed together, our arrangement was essentially a banquet for six. Accordingly, I could not help overhearing the conversation of the couple next to us, an elderly, animated gentleman entertaining a female companion, who, judging from the old-world courtesy accorded her, might have been a blind date he was trying to impress. It turned out she was his wife of many years, and when I heard him say to her how lucky they were to have known Charlie Chaplin and how the Little Tramp's films would last through the ages delighting young and old, I leaned over the Formica to kibitz a little. "I wouldn't be so sure about Chaplin's lasting appeal," I opined. "You see before you the beached hulk of a dominie, who in two successive semesters treated his students to a Chaplin film as an essay topic. Not since *Ishtar* has there been such universal condemnation of a theatrical event. Couldn't see what

was funny. Hated him, in fact."

A conversation thus entered, it wasn't long before I discovered that Saville and I were seated next to Cy Feuer and his wife.

Who, you ask, is Cy Feuer? And, more pertinently, what has this to do with Wodehouse? Hang on a moment longer, kiddies; I will reveal all.

Cy Feuer and his partner Ernest Martin were Broadway producers who cast a long shadow over the American musical in the 50's. Five smash hits in a row—*Where's Charlie?*, *The Boy Friend*, *Guys and Dolls*, *Can-Can*, *Silk Stockings*. Did he know Rogers and Hammerstein? It was Dick and Oscar. Did he know Lena Horne? Only too well. It wasn't passion that evoked her trademark flaring of nostrils. It was sheer hatred. The brilliant names spun over the bowl of mixpickle like so many Catherine-wheels—Cole Porter, Ray Bolger, Ethel Merman, George and Ira, Ingrid Bergman, John Steinbeck; the atmosphere was so creamy with nostalgia you could have spread it on your bialy.

Delicately, I sidled to the 64-dollar question. Frank Loesser? Best friends. And, at last—P. G. Wodehouse? Plum! of course. Used to visit him in Remsenberg when Loesser and he were planning the Bertie Wooster musical which Loesser's untimely death aborted.

Two hours later, our carefully nursed broths congealed in their crocks and the manager congealed into the spitting image of Edgar Kennedy deep into his slow burn, we parted, Feuer trousering the paper napkin on which I had written my address when he agreed to write up his Wodehouse anecdotes for Plum Lines, and I, blessing the New York gods for having put me one degree of separation from the Master.

But, alas, either the paper napkin blew away in the blustery winds or the 90-year-old impressario forgot, for I have not heard from him.

Feuer did relate one Wodehouse anecdote which I think is worth repeating. It seems that every time business would summon Plum to New York, Ethel would carefully pack an overnight bag for him, his pajamas and dressing gown carefully folded on top. When Plum returned, Ethel would unpack his case and invariably discover that its contents had not been disturbed, remained exactly as she had packed them. And so the question abides: Did Wodehouse sleep in his clothing? In his skivvies? In the buff? Did he sleep? If Cy knows, he isn't talking.

A Progenitor for Boko

By William A. S. Sarjeant

The name of George Webster “Boko” Fittleworth will be familiar to all ardent Wodehousians. Geoffrey Jaggard, in his masterly discursus in *Wooster’s World* (1967, p. 59), characterized him thus:

...a valued member of Bertie’s inner entourage, [he] presents to the beholder a face like an intellectual parrot. Like so many of the younger literati, [he] dresses like a tramp cyclist left overnight in the rain in an ashcan. It is indeed on record that he, alone among the world’s teeming millions, at first appearance ‘really got Jeeves rattled’:

He winced visibly and tottered off to the kitchen, no doubt to pull himself together with cooking sherry.

In the work cited above by Jaggard (*Joy in the Morning*), we are given the reason for Boko’s nickname. In England, prior to World War II, a jocular description of hitting someone on the nose was “he biffed him on the boko”; it is used by The Master himself in a later work (*Service with a Smile*). George Webster’s nose was indeed prominent and beaky, causing Bertie’s wonderment as to why the superlatively attractive Zenobia Hopwood should have fallen for someone so singularly unattractive in looks.

Boko was, of course, one of those unfortunate enough to have found himself engaged to the formidably intellectual Florence Craye (see *Joy in the Morning*); but, like Bertie, he survived that peril. Later we find that he was a one-time flat-mate of Harold “Ginger” Winship, who was to be a third survivor of that particular hazard (see *Much Obligated, Jeeves*).

Though not wishing to pontificate on this (or, for that matter, on any other) topic, I believe I may have discovered the origin of “Boko’s” unusual surname. In an earlier article (*Plum Lines*, 16, pp. 6-11), I discoursed at some length on Pelham Grenville Wodehouse’s strong liking for crime fiction. One of the leading figures in that field during Plum’s youth was Richard Austin Freeman (1862–1943), remembered as the creator of the greatest of scientific investigators of crime, Dr. John Evelyn Thorndyke.

However, Freeman also wrote several novels, and quite a number of short stories, in which the great medico-legal investigator did not appear. One of the longer and more exciting of these short stories gave its name to the collection *The Great Portrait Mystery* (1918).

Its principal protagonist was a certain Joseph Fittleworth, a not-too-successful painter who had “accepted with avidity a not very lucrative supernumerary post at the National Gallery,” London, where

...he could at least be among the objects of his worship which, we may remark, included an exceedingly comely young lady, who came regularly to the gallery to copy pictures, principally of the Flemish school [1918, p. 8].

Early in the events that follow, a disturbance is staged in the Gallery as a distraction to enable the mysterious theft of a painting. Joseph feels responsible for this unfortunate occurrence and tenders his resignation, not withdrawing it even when the painting is, even more mysteriously, returned to the gallery. Through Joseph’s doggedness and with the help of the desirable Miss Katherine Hyde, the mystery of the theft and return is eventually resolved and a long-lost treasure rediscovered. All ends happily and Joseph needs never to withdraw that hastily-tendered resignation. Instead, he can share his newfound wealth with Katherine, now his wife, and happily return to his painting.

Now, an artistic temperament can produce different results in different generations. Might Joseph and Katherine Fittleworth be the parents of a novelist son, christened George Webster at the altar and rechristened “Boko” by his friends at the Drones Club? Neither Joseph’s physical appearance nor his garb are anywhere described, but his job at the National Gallery would enforce a much more conventional style of dress than Boko’s. Maybe, though, Joseph was able to dress more informally after the treasure had been found and he was safely married; or maybe, as happens so often, his son reacted against his father’s sartorial conformity. Both alternatives seem feasible.

More seriously, might Plum have noted the name “Fittleworth” as being not a very suitable surname for the serious-minded Joseph, but a very appropriate one for a more humorous creation of his own imaginings?

Well, it’s likely enough; but of course, we will never know for certain.

The Land Where the Good Songs Go

The long-awaited Wodehouse CD is here. It's good. You'll like it. Get a copy. You probably won't find it in the music store down the street, with the CDs of Urgoo Splat, King of Gangsta Rap, and the other sources of air pollution. You can order it from Harbinger Records, 25 Charles Street, #1-C, New York NY 10019, and surely from a source in the UK. When I ordered my copies from Harbinger in July the total cost for each, including postage, handling, and tax, was \$14.00. We understand that that bargain price is current at the time of writing.

As described in the last *Plum Lines*, the CD includes 16 songs with lyrics by Plum and music by Jerome Kern, Cole Porter, George Gershwin, and Ivor Novello.

Neil Midkiff will provide a full review of the recordings in our next issue. Just two comments right now: As Neil said a year ago, "Anyone who thinks musicals have improved in the last 75 years hasn't heard these songs." And Hal Cazalet, in particular, seems to be having lots of fun singing his great-grandfather's lyrics. I loved 'em. —OM



Front cover of the CD booklet

P.G.'s Other Profession

By Ronald Brown

Dick Parks sent along this notice from *The Washington Post* of June 22, 2001, about the concert on June 20 at the Library of Congress where the songs from the new CD, as well as a couple of bonus numbers, were performed.

“On the other side of the moon, ever so far, beyond the last little star, there’s a land, I know, where the good songs go.” As wordsmith to Jerome Kern’s music, P.G. Wodehouse was lamenting songs that “had their day, and then we threw them away . . . for some other, newer tune.” The song is called “The Land Where the Good Songs Go.” It’s a gorgeous song, a great song, a song that never should have disappeared, but Wodehouse and Kern knew where it was headed as they wrote it.

Just about everything else they wrote together now resides where the good songs go, but 19 of their witty, beautifully crafted, poignantly funny, tenderly bright songs were momentarily returned to us Wednesday night at the Library of Congress by the New York Festival of Song. What a bonanza! With Steven Blier fueling the show

from the piano, four smashing singers—sopranos Sylvia McNair and Jill Anderson, tenor Hal Cazalet, baritone Jason Graae—mugged and hoofed their way through the systemic center of classic Broadway: songs with heart. This was the real stuff performed by musicians who love and respect it.

“You’re the Top” and “Anything Goes”—Wodehouse collaborations with Cole Porter—were thrown in for good measure. This exquisitely paced production seized perfection immediately and held it until the last beat of rapturous applause died away.

Dick Parks, a musician himself, added these observations of his own about the show:

The performance, entitled “P.G.’s Other Profession,” delighted a near-capacity crowd of almost 500. Wodehouse wrote lyrics for theater mainly between 1917 and 1924, and his work is still heard whenever *Showboat* or *Anything Goes* are revived. The Festival’s founder (and pianist/narrator on stage), Steven Blier, asks in his lengthy program notes “Who’s the greatest unknown lyricist in American song?” and the answer goes around the hall: “Wodehouse!” Blier goes on to argue that the reason for Plum’s desuetude, if that’s the word I want, as a lyricist

lies in his success as a novelist and “posthumous TV personality.”

Last night’s performers gave of their excellent best in delivering the songs. The program included melodies by Jerome Kern, Cole Porter, and Ivor Novello, with an encore by the Gershwins: “Oh, Gee, Oh Joy.” The two standards, “Bill” and “Anything Goes,” were received with special enthusiasm, and the audience gave the usual standing O. This reviewer particularly enjoyed the readings of “Tell Me All Your Troubles, Cutie” and “We’re Crooks” from *Miss 1917*, and “There Isn’t One Girl” from *Sitting Pretty*, all with tunes by Kern.

The rather limited stage business and dancing was quite enjoyable and effective; the anticipated CD of this show won’t show all the glamor that so delighted the audience last night. But the recording will allow Wodehouse’s lyrics to be heard clearly, and that’s the whole idea.



Back cover of the CD booklet: sheet music from long ago

In order to make a song a smash, it is not enough for the singer to be on top of his form. The accompanist, also, must do his bit. And the primary thing a singer expects from his accompanist is that he shall play the accompaniment of the song he is singing.

“The Masked Troubadour,” 1937

A Very Capital! Capital! P.G. Wodehouse

Eric Quick has lined up a perfectly spiffing Wodehouse day at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington on Saturday, October 20, 2001. That’s only a week after the convention in Philadelphia, just down the road a piece. I’m sure a lot of us will disguise ourselves as tourists in the intervening days and then, suddenly unmasking, take Washington by storm.

The orgy, or bash, has the title you see in the headline above, complete with exclamation marks. It will open at 9 a.m., include a three-course lunch somewhere in the middle, and conclude at 4:30 p.m. Rumors that dancing girls will appear are greatly exaggerated.

Tony Ring will begin the day with a talk entitled, if I heard it right on a scratchy phone, “An Overview of Wodehouse: The Man and his Influences.”

Brian Taves, TWS member and on the staff at the film division of the Library of Congress, will follow, discussing, surely, some aspects of the films of PGW.

Michael Dirda, TWS member, Pulitzer Prize winner, and an editor of *The Washington Post* “Book World,” will be the next speaker. Michael spoke at our Chicago convention and had us tearing up the pews. Do not miss this man.

Barry Day will follow. He is working on a book on Wodehouse and has published numerous others on such subjects as Oscar Wilde, Noel Coward, and the reconstructed Globe Theater. He plans to present a demonstration of Wodehouse’s music, abetted by cabaret stars Eric Comstock and Lorna Dallas, and the English actor Simon Jones. You will leave the joint with a song on your lips.

Allen and Patricia Ahern will also appear. They are well-known in the bibliophile, or first-edition, world—if you’re yearning for your very own Gutenberg Bible or First Folio, they are the people to see. Anyone who deals in such items is bound to be worth hearing.

How much, I hear you asking, will all this cost. Only \$100 for Smithsonian members, \$145 for non-members—a bargain, for where else can you find such a presentation? For tickets, call (202) 357-3030 and ask for tickets to—well, the headline of this article, and be sure to include the exclamations. Or go to the Smithsonian website. I can’t give you the URL because most of the outlying suburbs of my computer are not operating at the moment.

—OM

Georgiady on Wind

By Peter Georgiady

"Wind on Wodehouse" was a little item in the last *Plum Lines* on Herbert Warren Wind's short biography entitled *The World of P.G. Wodehouse*. The item brought this welcome response from Peter.

—OM

Being the only person in TWS who is also a member of the Golf Writers' Association I have a double fascination for that book and its author.

I've owned a copy of *The World of P.G. Wodehouse* since I found it on the closeouts table at a discount store in the late 1970s. Six or eight years later I developed an interest in golf literature and fairly quickly realized that, inexplicably, the same Herbert Warren Wind who wrote extensively on the Royal & Ancient game had written this Wodehouse biography. In 1994 I was heading to Boston on golf business and contacted Herb, asking if he would allow me to visit him for an hour and converse, not about golf but rather about his meetings with Wodehouse. I had achieved very minor recognition in golf writing and he was familiar with my name, probably agreeing because I was the only person to contact him with an interest in PGW.

We spent two hours together that June afternoon, the first hour of which was devoted to Wodehouse conversation. Back in the early 1970s Herb was still working for *New Yorker* magazine, he being the only sports writer they ever employed, and was given the opportunity to write a "profile" (and he always referred to it as a profile, not a biography) of PGW. He recalled making a number of trips to the Wodehouse home on Long Island where he spent many hours chatting with Plum and the family, often over lunch. The anecdote I remember more than any other was Herb remarking that Wodehouse always spoke in grammatically perfect English, as opposed to the rest of us who speak in much more careless patterns than we write. Since much of the joy of rereading Wodehouse for me is savoring his magnificent sentence structure, I could only dream of how a talk with Plum might have sounded.

By this point in his life (1994) Herb had whittled his personal library down to where it would reside in one smallish room. He had three or four Wodehouse volumes on his shelf—nothing special or rare, just good reading. Throughout the small townhouse were framed documents and photographs. In a gallery-style hallway hung framed letters from an amazing range of people including Wodehouse and Agatha Christie. He was very modest about these; I was most impressed. It was difficult to separate the Wodehouse talk from golf conversation and

we eventually lapsed into more golf-related matters, not before he admitted his favorite golf short story was *The Clicking of Cuthbert*.

One of my questions for Herb was, "Had you ever played golf with Wodehouse?" His answer was negative, but he suggested I contact Alastair Cooke on that issue. I subsequently wrote Cooke who responded, "never played golf, but had lunch with him once at the golf club."

A year or two prior to this meeting I had mailed him my copy of *The World of P.G. Wodehouse* asking him to inscribe it to me. The book was returned and part of the inscription read, "You did well to track down this book. I think only a few thousand copies were printed."

The last time I saw Herb was at the 1996 Masters, perhaps the last trip he made to the Augusta National course where he coined the term "Amen Corner." We were engaged in a four-way conversation with the magnificent Peter Dobereiner, who passed away later that summer, and George Peper (of *Golf Magazine*). It was a chance meeting; a dream conversation with Wind and Dobers, the game's two greatest living authors. That morning in April serves me as a parting memory of the dean of American golf writers. Herb is now in his 80s and living in the Boston area, but sadly it is reported he is in very poor health with failing memory.

By Jeeves on TV

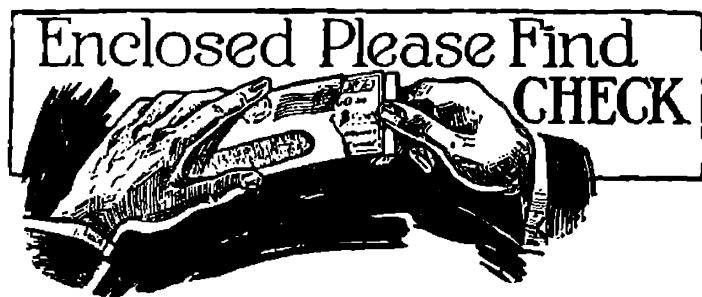
Someone in Chapter One, Philadelphia (sorry, I've lost track of the name), sent a newspaper clipping about a Canadian television production of the musical *By Jeeves*. The announcement appeared in *The Toronto Star* of March 31, 2001. The production used American actors for a telecast in Canada, probably last spring, and a showing this fall in the United States on PBS. The article includes an interview with Alan Ayckbourn, who wrote the lyrics several years ago and was directing the TV performance.

Discussing the failed 1975 version of the show Ayckbourn said, "One of my consolations was getting to meet Wodehouse in his house on Long Island. It was a perfect English home complete with flower gardens. I thought I could have been in Surrey. . . . I've restructured everything. I read about 20 of the stories and tried to get the period right. It's very difficult. Wodehouse's England never really existed, but it's the kind of place we think of as a golden period." We have no information on when the show will be telecast in America.

—OM

Your Check Is in the Mail Convention Posting

By Dan Cohen



By now, if you're an American member, you should have already received your tax rebate check. What are you planning to do with it?

Are you going to join the Drones for a weekend of golf at Le Touquet?

Perhaps you will put it all on a "from the stable" tip on the Goodwood, or risk all on a game of Persian Monarchs with Mustard Pott.

Or your taste may run more to a bit of *bijouterie* from Aspinalls.

But there is something better you can do with your newfound wealth—something that will really give you that Wodehouse feel. You can join Aunt Dahlia, Rosie M Banks, Pongo, Gussie, Bill (just Bill), the Oldest Member and all the others at the great TWS Philadelphia bash on October 12, 13, and 14.

The experience will do more to tone up your system than a week at Harrogate.

As Shakespeare said: "If you're going to do a thing, you might as well pop right at it and get it over with," (from the Authorized Wooster translation).



I apologize for the lateness of this issue of *Plum Lines*—it may seem as if the above article should have been written in the past tense. We had intended to get the issue to you several weeks before the convention, but due to what Jeeves would call a concatenation of circumstances it became impossible. —OM

"I turned him down like a bedspread."
"The Right Approach," 1959

Good news from the convention planners of Chapter One:

Could the news from Philadelphia get any better? We are delighted to announce that, in conjunction with the convention, the Philadelphia Public Library will be holding a Wodehouse exhibition at its main building, on Parkway between 19th and 20th Sts.

The exhibit is being organized by Chapter One. The main theme is Wodehouse's connection to the *Saturday Evening Post*, a Philadelphia institution for over one hundred years. Faulkner, Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Wodehouse—all the giants cashed checks from the *Post*. Between 1915 and 1965, Wodehouse published 14 novels and 36 short stories, as well as non-fiction, in the *Post*, including the very first Jeeves stories and the very first Blandings Castle novel, *Something New*.

The exhibit is being sponsored in part by the rare book and music departments of the library, and will feature original copies of the *Post*, dust jackets, first editions, letters, and sheet music, as well as various pigs and cow-creamers of our acquaintance. Although part of the exhibit will be open only for the days of the convention, the library is planning to display much of the material from September through November. More information will be included in the information packets when you sign in at the convention.

Louis Glanzman, Artist

Louis Glanzman's logo for the Philadelphia convention is shown here. Conventioneers will see other examples of his work: his great painting, *Signing of the Constitution*, will be seen by everyone who visits the East Wing, next to Independence Hall, and six of the "wayside exhibits" in Independence National Park include his paintings: "The City tavern," "The First Continental Congress," "Backyards in the Capital City," "A Working Class House," "Independence Square," and "The President's House."

Copies of his historical posters will be available at our convention. Many of us have seen his paintings on the cover of *Time* magazine. We are grateful for his contribution to our convention.



A Few Quick Ones

Our own Neil Midkiff has been enjoying the chance once again to accompany a great singer in the Wodehouse/Kern/Hammerstein classic song "Bill" in *Show Boat*. In the July-August production at Foothill Music Theatre in California, he was cast as Jake, the piano player in the Chicago nightclub scene. In this capacity, he tickled the ivories of the on-stage piano for Julie (played by Julie Valentine) in "Bill" and Magnolia Ravenal (played by Barbara Reynolds) in the ragtime-tempo version of "Can't Help Lovin' Dat Man."

Marilyn MacGregor, our far-flung newt correspondent, reports that a period of universal newt happiness appears to have set in: Stanford University is providing a small tunnel under a campus road so that the little critters can follow their philoprogenitive instincts to a nearby lake, unsquashed by commuters' cars on the busy road above. Love conquers all.

Kevin Peters passes along a Grand Old British Custom of which I was previously unaware: "In Ebert's review of *The Others* is the statement 'It is a sound tradition in British fiction that servants do not leave a house only to return later and be rehired (the sole exception is George Wellbeloved, Lord Emsworth's pig-keeper at Blandings Castle).' " We must be grateful for Plum's iconoclasm in this case, but can anyone tell me why the tradition exists at all? What's wrong with saying "Goodbye" and *then* "Hello" to a good servant? Does it violate a Unity? How, to use a blunt Americanism, come?

Elliott Milstein and Dick Olson note with pleasure a recommendation of columnist George Will for light summer reading: read the stories of P. G. Wodehouse. They are "unblemished by seriousness." Will concludes with invaluable advice: "If you would prefer a beach book that begins 'Call me Ishmael,' seek help."

David Landman discovered an interesting literary positioning of PGW in an article by Shashi Tharoor, an Indian novelist whose new work, *Riot*, is to be published just about . . . now. Tharoor writes: "My novels reflect an intellectual heritage that embraces the ancient epic the Mahabharata, the Kerala folk dance called the ottamthullal, and the Hindi B-movies of Bollywood, as well as Shakespeare, Wodehouse, and the Beatles. "Wodehouse," remarks David, "apparently finds his niche between the Bard and the Guitared."

Dave Ruef informs us that the Belgravia restaurant named Drones, opened by David Niven Jr. in 1973, has been revitalized and is once more the place to be and be seen. But Bertie's, purveyor of British cuisine in Paris, has closed.

Bill Horn, who sent information about the BBC pronunciation of "Featherstonehaugh" in the last issue, has this historical note to add:

"In August, 1998 I visited Featherstone Castle in Northumberland. At the gate I spoke to the steward. He said that the Featherstonehaugh family, long departed from the castle, pronounces it featherstone haw.

"The castle was built by a deMonte during the reign of King Stephen (1135-54). It sits in a vale or haugh. The name Featherstone is also topographical. The deMontes took the name Featherstonehaugh before the reign of Edward I, i.e., before 1272." [I checked the *OED*, hoping to find a "featherstone" entry with reference to topography, but found no "featherstone" at all. — OM]

Jim Goodrich forwards a *Variety* review of *By Jeeves*, the Lloyd-Webber-Ayckbourn musical due to open this fall on Broadway. The review concerned the Pittsburg staging, which the producers regard as definitive, and was, I'm sorry to say, rather negative. "A pleasant trifle" sums it up more positively than if I quoted more.

Bob Elliott passes along the happy news that Daedalus Books is offering *A Wodehouse Bestiary* for only \$4.98, plus postage, handling, tax, and other trifles that tend to double the cost of the thing. It's a book without which no home should be. Some choice Wodehouse quotes, along with much other funny stuff, are included in *Wit: Humorous Quotations from Woody Allen to Oscar Wilde*, also \$4.98. A call to (800) 395-2665 will open the action. Don't fire until you see the whites of their eyes.

OM

AD

SL

The Oldest Member

Aunt Dahlia

Society Spice

Featherstonehaugh Again The Great Sermon . . .

I was surprised by the response to the last issue of *Plum Lines*. There, plum spang in the middle of page 6, was the witty and clever poem “Gunga Plum,” which elicited, to my surprise, no response at all. (There’s no bruised ego in that statement. I had nothing to do with writing the poem.) On page 13 were some notes on the rather trivial question of the pronunciation of a single word, “Featherstonehaugh.” Every response but one to that issue of *Plum Lines* addressed itself to the question of pronunciation of that one word.

What concerned me when I wrote that “Featherstonehaugh” item was that almost none of the contributors who told us to say “Fanshaw” gave an authority or support for the statement. (My response to any such peremptory instruction is always a puzzled “Why should I do it?”) It was, of course, Wodehouse who chose “Fanshaw.” The creator of a character is free to choose the pronunciation of that character’s name, his readers are free to choose whether they will follow him, and surely there are limits: an author who says that “John Smith” should be pronounced “Gobbledegook Donk” will find very few followers. But I expect most of us will accept “Fanshaw” because Wodehouse chose it and because of its humorous associations.

At the moment, then, “Featherstonehaugh” is pronounced:

- (a) “Fanshaw” according to PGW;
- (b) “Featherstonehaw” according to Debrett’s *Correct Usage*;
- (c) “Featherstonehaw” according to the BBC, with “Fanshaw” as second choice.

Having once again belabored the trivial, I shall now, like Albert Peasemarch, withdraw. —OM

[Ricky turned on the Duke of Dunstable.]
 “You are without exception the worst tick and boulder that ever got fatty degeneration of the heart through half a century of gorging food and swilling wine wrenched from the lips of a starving proletariat. You make me sick. You poison the air. Good-bye, Uncle Alaric,” said Ricky, drawing away rather ostentatiously. “I think we had better terminate this interview, or I may become brusque.”

Uncle Fred in the Springtime, 1939

Stephen Brown relays this item from BBC News on the Web:

“A vicar has talked his way into the *Guinness Book of Records* by delivering the longest non-stop sermon. The Reverend Chris Sterry, Anglican vicar at Whalley in Lancashire, has broken the



record for an unscripted speech of 27 hours and 30 minutes. But he intends to carry on with his marathon sermon at the parish church for 36 hours. He hopes his preaching will raise £2,000 for church funds. The vicar is not allowed to repeat himself, talk nonsense, and is not allowed to pause for more than ten

The Rev. Sterry—hecklers help keep him awake.

seconds. He can take a break of 15 minutes every eight hours. Two referees working four-hour shifts are ensuring that the rules are observed.”



The Rev. James Bates, outclassed and aware of it

“They will get a proper sermon and I hope that those who come to listen will get something out of it,” Sterry said on his parish website.

He was still preaching when our last information arrived. Steggles, where are you now that we need you? Claude, Eustace—rally round! —OM

Though he scorned and loathed her, he was annoyed to discover that he loved her still. He would have liked to bounce a brick on Prudence Whittaker’s head, and yet, at the same time, he would have liked—rather better, as a matter of fact—to crush her to him and cover her face with burning kisses. The whole situation was very complex.

Summer Moonshine, 1938

Book-Lenders, Beware!

Bill Graff found this item in the *London Times* of June 9, 2001. It's about a problem we all, as booklovers, may have faced. The columnist is listed only as PH.

Maureen Silver from Oxford asked: "I lent a book of which I am fond to a friend a year ago. He now denies that I lent it to him or, on other occasions, illogically claims that he has already returned it. How can I get my book back?"

Only with more difficulty than it is worth. Otherwise honest people can be dishonest about books. My grand old headmaster, Robert Birely, the Skiddaw of honour and propriety, admitted without a blush to removing books by P. G. Wodehouse when staying in grand houses where they had never been read. Your friend may have forgotten the book. You could have a surreptitious squint at his shelves next time you visit. Sharing books with friends is one of life's most civilised pleasures. Friends are more important than things, even books. So grit your teeth. Buy two copies of your book in paperback for Christmas, and heap one on his head as a coal of fire "for the book we somehow managed to lose."

Birth of a CD

From "Louise" on pgwnet comes this paragraph on how the new Wodehouse CD originated. In *W Magazine's* June 2001 issue, Louise found an article by Lorna Koski entitled "Bye, Bye, Bertie." It begins thus:

One day, not long ago, Hal Cazalet was in the attic of his family house in Sussex, England, going through the archives of his great-grandfather, the novelist P.G. Wodehouse, when he made a surprising discovery. There, along with the writer's cocktail shaker and favorite chair, were page after page of facsimiles bearing the words and music to nearly 100 songs. There were photographs, too, showing Wodehouse with his various collaborators: Guy Bolton, Jerome Kern, Cole Porter, and George Gershwin. Although Cazalet knew that his famous ancestor had dabbled in song writing early in his career, he had never realized how prolific Wodehouse had been or the extent of his success.

The six years of labor that passed from then until the appearance of the new CD was for Hal but the work of a moment.

—OM

"The head of my profession."

In a private collection of Wodehouse books I found this flyleaf inscription:

*Fr P. G. Wodehouse & Ltr.
The head of my profession
from Evelyn Waugh
Christmas 1961*

On the opposite page was pasted the following note:

*This book was inscribed and given by Evelyn Waugh to Plum!
It was one of Plum's most treasured possessions.*

The book was Waugh's *The End of the Battle*.

—OM

New Look for Our Mailings

By Neil Midkiff

You'll notice that beginning with this issue your copy of *Plum Lines* is mailed in a window envelope; your address is on an inserted page, along with the information we have for you in our database. Please take a moment each time to review that information, and let us know any necessary corrections. If the page is white, you're paid up; if it's on yellow paper, dues are due, so please make any changes and return the yellow page with your payment as instructed.

Although the return address on our mailing envelopes is now Neil Midkiff's, that's only so that undeliverable mail gets returned directly to him for database updates. Ed Ratcliffe is still supervising the printing and mailing, and deserves the credit for that effort.

Chapters Corner

By Sandy Morris

Our chapters have been meeting and eating their way through the winter and spring and summer months. With videos and plays and parlor games . . . with lunches and teas and ice cream treats and numberless potluck meals, chapters have been reading, discussing, and hearing Wodehouse.

Blandings Castle, Bay Area, Northern California, has been focusing on the Millennium tour of England enjoyed by several of their members last year. Their meeting last summer was essentially an ice cream social with sandwiches and apple pie and discussions of the film *Topsy Turvey* about Gilbert and Sullivan, which they rated very highly, and travelers' tales of the Millennium Wodehouse trip. After a potluck lunch in December, they viewed Neil Midkiff's DVD of the trip, including the prototypes of the Mayfair clubs, Lord's Cricket Club, Dulwich College, and country sites such as West Park and Severn End which served as models for Blandings Castle and Brinkley Court respectively. In addition, Neil demonstrated the mechanics of his editing abilities on his new computer, having reduced eleven hours to one hour for showing. In March, a potluck lunch (of course!) was followed by a continuation of the DVD, featuring the music at the pub evening. In addition, members worked diligently on the Blandings Players skit for the Philadelphia convention. July saw them all at another potluck lunch, viewing the Blandings Players' rehearsal of their convention skit.

Chapter One, Philadelphia, enjoyed a scintillating March meeting, enhanced by the presence of guest Elin Woodger. An overwhelming number of members showed up to continue the convention plans. These are *tres secret*, but you can be told they involve, among other things, a sign, a poster, and a book display! The main activity of the day was playing "Which Butler Is This?" charades, which pleased the Chapter One Peasmarch to no end. Oh, yes, the group also viewed their latest Philadelphia Zoo readoption papers.

The Chicago Accident Syndicate is alive and well and living in . . . Chicago! In April, they attended the City Lit Theatre production of *The Mating Season*. Spring and summer agendas included botanical garden and golfing. To spur interest in the group, they are developing bookmarks to be dispersed through local area book dealers, hitting potential members where it will do the most good – in their books!

The Drone Rangers of Houston have an unaccount-

able amount of energy and seem to have two major happenings at nearly every meeting. In January, they heard Marjorie Thompson's review of *The Purloined Paperweight*. Their May meeting featured Rebecca Joiner's paper, "Children in Wodehouse," plus Brad Frank's presentation of the book of the evening, *Enter Jeeves*. The annual potluck and video evening in June featured *A Damsel in Distress* starring Fred Astaire plus a surprise Wooster-and-Jeeves video.

The NEWTS have caught us up on their doings. Last October's golf outing at the Funway Cafe in Foxboro, Massachusetts, celebrated Plum's birthday.

The Christmas Nottle was held on December 16 and, since New England winters tend to discourage long travel and NEWTS are widely scattered—ponds all over the place, you know—they did not meet again until this past April for a Great Sermon Handicap and egg-and-spoon race. These activities were held at Saint Mary Parish, where Father Wendell Verrill, aka Wendell J. Stickney and a NEWT, presides. The Handicap goes like this: someone opens a Bible and points to the page at random, then Father Verrill delivers a homily on that topic, whatever it is, with the point being to see how long he can keep going. An activity any chapter could do—well, would you want a rule that the sermon must make sense? In June, some of the NEWTS heard Father Verrill preach the homily at the funeral of member Richard Morrissey, who died in May. The June meeting was essentially a decision-making Nottle, focusing on refining the script of their convention skit and discussing ways to memorialize Richard Morrissey. In August and September, NEWTS gathered to rehearse their convention skit. In addition, the September meeting featured story reading and potluck goodies.

The Northwodes of Minnesota marked the anniversary of The Master's passing with a mid-February discussion of the events of his life; any tendency toward the maudlin was corrected with ratafia and an episode of *Wodehouse Playhouse*. There followed gatherings for the Derby—rather lightly attended; the punters must have been put off by our having lost our shirts last year—and a cocktail hour in late June.

The Pdrones Club, St. Louis, enjoyed a lovely April afternoon tea at the home of member Murali Sundaram, but unfortunately the gathering turned out to be a very fond farewell to their host. Dr. Sundaram the radiologist, as he is known in selected circles, left his post at St. Louis University and decamped to the Mayo Clinic in Rochester at the end of June. Murali, an original Pdrone since the Club began in 1992, has served as the resident cricket expert, having once considered a professional career on the pitch before settling on medical studies. All the Pdrones wish him well in his new post.

Is This Rupert Psmith?

By Stephen Brown

If the man in this picture looks as though he could be about to carelessly flick a speck of dust from the sleeve of his coat, there is a good reason. He is Rupert D'Oyly Carte, the young man after whom Rupert Psmith was closely modeled. The picture was taken when he was 43. It is an interesting conjecture, then, that this photo gives us an idea of how Psmith himself might have looked at about the same age.

Rupert D'Oyly Carte had a life worthy of his literary alter ego. He was born in 1876, took control of the famous Savoy Hotel in 1903, and remained in that capacity until his death in 1948. Like many Wodehouse characters, such as George Bevan in *A Damsel In Distress*, Rupert had a stage career. He took control of the D'Oyly Carte Opera Company in 1913 at the death of his mother and guided the fortunes of the Gilbert and Sullivan shows the rest of his life. While P.G. Wodehouse was working at the Princess Theater, Rupert was across the pond making his own contributions to the stage, though if they had met professionally later in life, I imagine we would have heard about it somewhere in personal letters or remembrances, but this is only a guess.

Further paralleling his life to a Wodehouse story, Rupert married the daughter of an earl, Lady Dorothy Milner Gathorne Hardy, in 1907. Being the daughter of an earl, she retained her title, becoming Lady Dorothy D'Oyly Carte (he remained a lowly "Mr."). Try saying "Dorothy D'Oyly" four times fast and you'll see that Wodehouse himself couldn't have come up with a better name.

Furthermore, in the First World War, Rupert D'Oyly Carte held a position as a King's Messenger, a hazily-defined position whose functions included the handling of diplomatic bags. D'Oyly Carte's work was secret, its exact nature unknown. His usefulness in this position was possibly aided by the fact that as the head of an international hotel, he likely had many important contacts abroad. I imagine him putting secret naval papers inside a stuffed bird, as in *Leave It to Psmith*, leaving the Kaiser's spies nonplussed.

In reviewing Rupert D'Oyly Carte's career, we find a man prominent in stage life who married an earl's daughter and was involved in handling secret diplomatic pouches. This could pass as an early Wodehouse story itself, and the idea of the real-life Psmith engaging in these adventures can only fire the imagination, filling the mind with imaginary dialogue spoken in the manner of Rupert Psmith.



Rupert D'Oyly Carte

The photo itself has the opposite effect. Whereas the real career of D'Oyly Carte gives us material for imagined adventures, the real photo of the man takes away the fictional mental image of Psmith, for it takes the imagined appearance of the Wodehouse character and gives him a real face. Everyone, I suspect, has a clear mental image of how Bertie, Jeeves, or Lord Emsworth should look. The above photo possibly presents us—given that Wodehouse so closely based the character on the man—with an image of Rupert Psmith.

Plum's own story of how he came to model Psmith on a real person is given in his introduction to the 1969 New Autograph Edition of *Something Fresh*:

People are always asking me . . . well . . . someone did the other day . . . if I draw my characters from living originals. I don't. I never have, except in the case of Psmith. [And Ukridge]. He was based more or less faithfully on Rupert D'Oyly Carte, the son of the Savoy Theatre man. He was at school with a cousin of mine, and my cousin happened to tell me about his monocle, his immaculate clothes and his habit, when asked by a master, how he was, of replying, "Sir, I grow thinnah and thinnah."

—OM

Sebastian Beach

A character sketch by Tony Ring

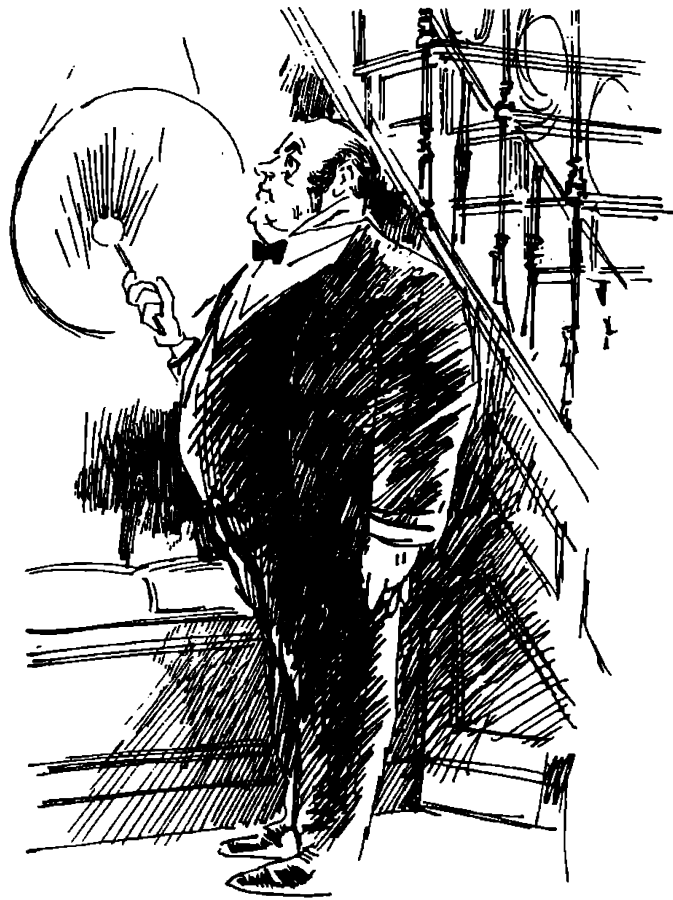
Tony is one of the most active members of our Wodehouse Society, a leading member of the P. G. Wodehouse Society (U.K.), and editor of its journal *Wooster Sauce*. He is compiling the massive *Wodehouse Millennium Concordance*, from whose fifth volume, *Wodehouse at Blandings Castle*, much of the following material is taken. —OM

Of more than sixty members of the species *butler hominibus* found in the canon, Beach is the most familiar and, putting aside the appalling *faux pas* committed by those who claim that Jeeves butted as Wooster lounged, the best-loved and the undoubted prototype. Perhaps he only remained a prototype for the duration of the first story, for prototypes are susceptible to development in later models and, apart from lowering the propensity to conspire in the pinching of pigs and the shooting of secretaries, one can see little scope for improvement.

We knew, respected, and liked him for sixty years, more than three times as long as the period during which he gave devoted service to Lord Emsworth (starting as under-footman), and enjoyed watching his evolution from the substantial and pompous individual who seemed on the point of bursting rather like a frog or toy balloon and spoke only in the upper case, into the warm, avuncular, dedicated sixteen-stone family servant and friend ever ready to place his pantry and his employer's port at the disposal of his visitors. He may have made two chins grow where one had been before and to have a waistcoat which swelled like the sail of a racing yacht, but in fairness we pause to comment that all was not ever thus: in his youth he had been athletic enough to win a choir boys handicap cycle race at a village sports meeting open to all those whose voices had not broken by the second Sunday in Epiphany, and we note that this incident helps to prove that despite his size he was not an elephant, for when called upon many years later to remount a mettlesome charger, he had forgotten how, and fell off the bicycle. We regret that the height of his later athletic achievement was winning the Market Blandings Darts Tournament, although we congratulate him on winning the magnificent silver pocket watch given as a prize.

We sympathise with the problems he had with his stomach, his swollen joints, his feet (including his ingrowing toe-nails), his nervous headaches and his adenoids. We understand the reasons which caused him to contemplate resignation when faced with the prospect of a hir-

sute Lord Emsworth, and to actually resign (though in the event the resignation was rejected) when guarding an airgun less than judiciously. We appreciate his tactful suggestion that if he were to be heard singing pig-calls in the moonlight, his authority as a disciplinary force amongst the domestics might be lowered. We agree with Lord Emsworth's view that he is not a jumping bean. We trust that he did not hold it against his niece Maudie Stubbs for too long that she became engaged once more to the disreputable Sir Gregory Parsloe-Parsloe (do we dare to suppose that the match may, at last, be the making of the Baronet?). And we enjoy the tone of his voice, a fruity voice like old tawny port made audible, though without the resonance which might have been added by the experience of mint juleps.



Sebastian Beach by Peter Van Straaten in *P. G. Wodehouse: A Comprehensive Bibliography and Checklist*, (New York: Heineman, 1990).

Wodehouse and “Flying”

By Bart Pepermans

Bart is a member of the Belgian Drones Club who was asked to speak on this subject at a dinner last November in honor of their departing patron, Mr. Colvin, the British Ambassador to Belgium. Earlier in the year, Ambassador Colvin—whom Bart describes as “a notorious Wodehouse-addict”—had dedicated a plaque in Huy, Belgium, to memorialize Wodehouse’s imprisonment there during World War II. This combined with a previous talk by a Belgian colonel of the RAF seemed to suggest to Kris Smets, the Drones Club’s chairman, that there was a paper to be found in the topic of flying. Amazingly, he was right, as Bart has proved. By the way, Bart ended his talk by reading the story of the flying pig that was reported in the last issue of *Plum Lines*. And he reports that the dinner was a big success—but of course!

—AD

A nice week ago, our honorable chairman Mr. Kris Smets mailed me a gentle though firm request to prepare a small talk about the links between the subject of our dinner (flying) and the works of P. G. Wodehouse. The first thing that came in my mind was: How for Plumsake can I take on such a difficult task? I had no time to reread the 100 works that Wodehouse left us in search of some links between his characters and “flying.” In my mind I couldn’t retrieve a single passage that includes a trip by an airplane. So I nearly gave it up, but then I came to one last solution: I could consult my Wodehousian friends all over the world to give me some hints.

When I asked Mr. Tom Kreitzberg, an American *Eminence Grise* on Wodehouse, to help me, he answered: “I suppose it’s too late to change the subject of the dinner to ‘rail travel’ . . .” Nevertheless, these are the results of my research:

Many Wodehouse connoisseurs thought that Wodehouse never mentioned “flying in airplanes” in his stories. This would be quite understandable, because the writer never took a plane in his life. He was afraid of flying and always preferred ocean liners for cross-Atlantic travel. After his emigration to America, he rarely travelled at all, because he disliked it. I couldn’t retrieve any biographical references that PGW ever took a plane for a trip in America.

My first thought connecting Wodehouse with flying was the novel *Pigs Have Wings*, first printed in 1952. But the title doesn’t refer to flying like an airplane—it refers to a rhyme from the famous Lewis Carroll poem entitled “The Walrus and the Carpenter,” which we can read in his *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There* (1872). The poem counts 18 verses, and this is the most important for us Wodehousians:

“The time has come,” the Walrus said,
“To talk of many things:
Of shoes—and ships—and scaling-wax—
Of cabbages—and kings—

And why the sea is boiling hot—
And whether pigs have wings.”

As for the real “flying in airplanes” stuff—well, the connoisseurs were wrong. There really are some references to flying in the works of Wodehouse:

(1) In *Lord Emsworth and Others* (1937), we can read the short story “There’s Always Golf” in which the character named Clarice Fitch “used to fly across oceans and things.” It’s just a passing reference, with no details given.

(2) In the short story “The Spot of Art” from *Very Good Jeeves* (1930), Bertie legs it to Paris to escape certain disaster, and hangs about there until he gets the “all clear” from Jeeves to return. When it finally arrives, Bertie explains: “I hopped on to a passing aeroplane and a couple of hours later was bowling through Croyden on my way to the centre of things.”

(3) *Bachelors Anonymous* is one of Plum’s last novels, published in 1973. In the first chapter, Ivor Llewellyn makes an ocean crossing by plane, though he is known as a fervent ship traveller. Mr. Trout, his lawyer, sees him off at the Los Angeles airport. Wodehouse describes their relationship as follows: “Mr Trout had handled all Mr Llewellyn’s five divorces and this formed a bond. There is nothing like a good divorce for breaking down the barriers between lawyer and client. It gives them something to talk about.”

(4) In the second part of *A Man of Means*, a book Wodehouse wrote in joint authorship with C. H. Bovill and first published in 1914, the hero, Roland Bleke, a person of intense ordinariness, escapes by bribing the pilot of a plane to get him away from the area.

(5) In *The Parrot and Other Poems*, a 1988 edition, there is the poem “All About the Aerial Derby,” which is about



From *The Parrot and Other Poems* (1961), isn't an explicit one. Myra Schoonmaker is engaged to the Reverend Cuthbert ("Bill") Bailey, and as usual, her stepmother Lady Constance can't agree with Myra's choice. Lady Constance telegraphs to Myra's father (her husband), James Schoonmaker, who is in America, and asks him for help. One or two days later, he arrives at Blandings Castle. He can't have done this by ship, and I assume that transatlantic flights in 1961 were not unusual. Wodehouse never mentioned the flight explicitly, but James Schoonmaker's fast crossing gives us no other explanation. Richard Usborne once called this fact an anachronism, but he probably overlooked the possibility of an airplane crossing.

The quotation marks around "flying" lead us to the more metaphorical senses of the word. First of all, numerous birds are mentioned in Wodehouse's books and one bat that I know of! In *Love Among the Chickens* (1906), Ukridge runs a chicken farm. In the short story "Jeeves and the Impending Doom," from *Very Good, Jeeves!* (1930), Bertie Wooster and the Hon. A. B. Filmer are pursued by a hissing swan. Then there is the famous parrot-story in "Uncle Fred Flits By," a short story out of *Young Men in Spats* (1936). In *Leave*

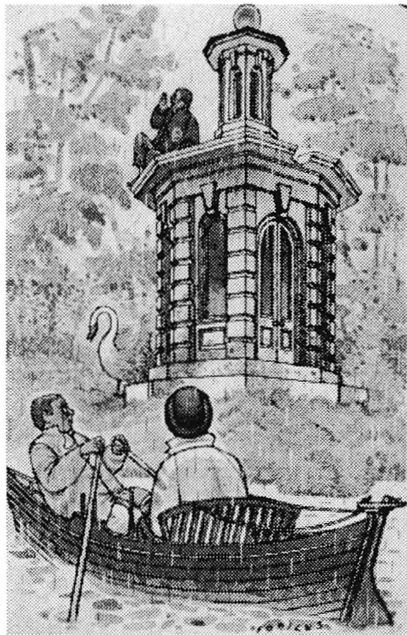
the balloon race across England sponsored by Gordon Bennett in 1906. Although the Wright Brothers had made their first flight a few years before, ballooning was still considered by many to be the only practicable form of aviation.

(6) The last example I found, in *Service With a Smile*

It to Psmith (1923), when Psmith and his ladylove are in a cottage in the woods, he sees a dead bat on the floor of the cottage. He covers it with his handkerchief. "Somebody's mother," he murmured reverently." Wodehouse even wrote an essay in *Louder & Funnier* about the decay of falconry, in which he explains why falconry and hawking as a pastime has lost its hold on the British public. Finally, some of Wodehouse's more lovable characters belong to a London club called the *Pelican Club*; and so we can find several more examples of "birds" appearing in Plum's stories!

And what about "flying" in the wider sense of "running away"? The examples are as numerous as Jeeves's braincells! Think of Bertie running away from his various female entanglements; Bingo Little dodging his creditors in *The Inimitable Jeeves* (1923); Gussie Fink-Nottle in scarlet tights rushing round London in *Right Ho, Jeeves* (1934); the pursuit of George Mulliner across fields in "The Truth about George" from *Meet Mr Mulliner* (1927); and if you want to read about all the other "fly for your life—all is discovered" examples, I'll give you the 20 sheets of paper after my talk!

To finish my talk, we could put that "flying" is also the ultimate boys' dream—the desire to break the rules, to control a kite, or to build castles in the air. The work that Wodehouse left us contains a lot of (unfulfilled) dreams. He showed us reality through glasses of fiction and relativity. He lifted up the banality of life to magnificent intrigues.



From "Jeeves and the Impending Doom"

"You can't compare the lorgnettes of to-day with the ones I used to know as a boy. I remember walking one day in Grosvenor Square with my aunt Brenda and her pug dog Jabberwocky, and a policeman came up and said that the latter ought to be wearing a muzzle. My aunt made no verbal reply. She merely whipped her lorgnette from its holster and looked at the man, who gave one choking gasp and fell back against the railings, without a mark on him but with an awful look of horror in his staring eyes, as if he had seen some dreadful sight. A doctor was sent for, and they managed to bring him round, but he was never the same again. He had to leave the Force, and eventually drifted into the grocery business. And that is how Sir Thomas Lipton got his start."

Uncle Fred in the Springtime, 1939

Fighting Words

Ray Steen found this tribute to Plum's good nature. Reminds me of the saying, "The best revenge is to live well."

Writers are sometimes kind to each other, but this is usually in the category of literary logrolling, says James Charlton in *Fighting Words*, a short anthology of writers lambasting other writers. "Venom and abuse," he says, "that's what comes from the heart."

[For example] Oscar Wilde—"the amiable, irresponsible, esurient Oscar," said Whistler in the peroration to a massive insult—excelled at criticizing his peers. Of George Bernard Shaw: "An excellent man: He has no enemies, and none of his friends like him." Of Henry James: "Mr. Henry James writes fiction as if it were a painful duty."

[But] Even the wickedest tongue is apparently incapable of being beastly to P. G. Wodehouse, although Sean

O'Casey called him "English literature's performing flea." "Thinking it over," Wodehouse reflected, "I believe he meant it to be complimentary, for all the performing fleas I have ever met have impressed me with their sterling artistry and their indefinable something which makes for a good trouper."

No opportunity was lost on Plum. A few years after O'Casey's dig, Wodehouse published his collected letters to William Townend under the title *Performing Flea (Author, Author in the US)*.

O'Casey was still alive to see it.

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