



Plum Lines

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Wodehouse and the Psychology of the Individual

BY TIM ANDREW

I MUST begin with a disclaimer. Notwithstanding the title of this article, I am very far from being qualified as a psychologist, except through the compulsory attendance at the University of Life that goes with being a school principal. I did, I must confess, pretend to study something called "The Psychology of Education" some 35 years ago, but—in sharp contrast to the formal regulations—most of us on the course regarded it as an optional part of the programme. When the dreaded day of the end-of-year examination loomed, our kindly tutor advised us that if we didn't feel we knew the textbook answer to any of the questions, we should put our own ideas down. I have been using his advice as my guiding principle through life ever since and it is in that spirit that I have prepared what you're about to read.

We seem determined to perpetuate the view that Wodehouse was a sort of saint, unworldly to a fault, except of course that he had no faults since he was practically perfect in every way, his sunny disposition untroubled by the normal tensions and strife of human relationships, untroubled indeed by the outside world. Well, "Phooey!" say I. Wodehouse was far from being the dumb brick he liked—especially in later life—to present himself as. He may well have been politically naïve and—after a year's internment—out of touch with the world. An intensely private man? Yes. A man who so valued his privacy that he created a persona to hide behind? Probably, and which public figure doesn't do it? But unworldly in the sense that he was disconnected from the world? I think not!

To demonstrate that Wodehouse was directly connected with reality, you don't need to read his intimate correspondence or his letters to his agent. You don't need to look at his determination to pay as little tax as possible. You don't even need to read Norman Murphy's evidence of the extent to which Wodehouse wrote from life.

But you *can* look at his correspondence if you like. For example this, written to Denis Mackail in 1953:

I find in this evening of my life that my principal pleasure is in writing stinkers to people who attack me in the press. I sent Nancy Spain of the *Daily Express* a beauty. No answer, so I suppose it killed her. But what fun it is giving up trying to conciliate these lice. It suddenly struck me that they couldn't possibly do me any harm, so now I am roaring like a lion. One yip out of any of the bastards and they get a beautifully phrased page of vitriol which will haunt them for the rest of their days....

We don't have the space to begin to analyse what's going on in that paragraph; suffice it to say that the emotions expressed are very human, completely understandable and not entirely saintly.

In fact, to demonstrate PGW's connection with reality, you just need to look at what he wrote for public consumption. For example:

Poets as a class are business men. Shakespeare describes the poet's eye as rolling in a fine frenzy, from heaven to earth, and giving to airy nothing a local habitation and a name, but in practice, you will find that one corner of that eye is generally glued on the royalty returns.

If I had wanted to be really provocative, I could have called this little piece "Wodehouse the cynic" and got away with including that.

His observation of the world of schools in *The Little Nugget* was very sharp and could be published in one of my trade's publications today and still strike a chord in every staff common room in the land:

It was almost as if Mr Abney [the headmaster, you will remember] had realised intuitively how excellent the discipline of work was for my soul, for the kindly man allowed me to do not only my own, but most of his as well....

...the headmasters of private schools are divided into two classes: the workers and the runners-up-to-London. Mr Abney belonged to the latter class. Indeed, I doubt if a finer representative of the class could have been found in the length and breadth of southern England. London drew him like a magnet.

Success or failure for an assistant-master is, I consider, very much a matter of luck. My colleague, Glossop, had most of the qualities that made for success, but no luck. Properly backed up by Mr Abney, he might have kept order. As it was, his classroom was a bear-garden, and, when he took duty, chaos reigned.

Teachers are making precisely those sorts of comments about their headmasters all over England at this moment.

My contention is that you can't write fiction that grips unless you understand human nature in all its manifestations. Certainly, you can't write humour that hits the bulls-eye as often and unerringly as Wodehouse's unless you have real insight into the foibles of mankind. Manifestly, this insight is evident in his writing. So, by way of demonstration, here are some examples, beginning with the description of a character from *Heavy Weather*:

Lady Julia Fish was a handsome middle-aged woman of the large blonde type, of a personality both breezy and commanding....She came into the room a few moments later like a galleon under sail, her resolute chin and china-blue eyes proclaiming a supreme confidence in her ability to get anything she wanted out of anyone....Even setting aside her loathsome family connections, there was a

patronising good humour about her manner which [Lord Tilbury] resented. And certainly, if Lady Julia Fish's manner had a fault, it was that it resembled a little too closely that of the great lady of a village amusedly trying to make friends with the backward child of one of her tenants.

If you take just that last sentence and read it out loud with what Bertie Wooster would have called "top spin," substituting the name with that of someone whose patronising manner you particularly dislike, it comes out pretty strongly.

Talking of Bertie Wooster, his emotions at the prospect of a possible re-union with Florence Craye strike a strong chord:

Honorina Glossop was hearty, yes. Her laugh was like a steam-riveting machine, and from a child she had been a confirmed back-slapper. Madeline Bassett was soppy, true. She had large, melting eyes and thought the stars were God's daisy chain. These are grave defects, but to do this revolting duo justice neither had tried to mould me, and that was what Florence Craye had done from the start, seeming to look on Bertram Wooster as a mere chunk of plasticine in the hands of the sculptor.

The root of the trouble was that she was one of those intellectual girls, steeped to the gills in serious purpose, who are unable to see a male soul without wanting to get behind it and shove. We had scarcely arranged the preliminaries before she was checking up on my reading, giving the bird to *Blood on the Banisters*, which happened to be what I was studying at the moment, and substituting for it a thing called *Types of Ethical Theory*. Nor did she attempt to conceal the fact that this was a mere pipe opener and that there was worse to come.

Have you ever dipped into *Types of Ethical Theory*? ...here we are.

"Of the two antithetic terms in the Greek philosophy one only was real and selfsubsisting; that is to say, Ideal Thought as opposed to that which it has to penetrate and mould. The other, corresponding to our Nature, was in itself phenomenal, unreal, without any permanent footing, having no predicates that held true for two moments together; in short, redeemed from negation only by including indwelling realities appearing through."

Right. You will have got the idea, and will, I think, be able to understand why the sight of her made me give at the knees somewhat. Old wounds had been reopened.

Hands up the man who doesn't identify with Bertie's feelings! The serious point is that at the heart of the joke is a kernel of hard reality. Which of us does not, at least deep down, entirely understand and identify with Gussie's diffidence when it comes to declaring his love for Madeline? We



Lady Julia Fish and Lord Tilbury, as depicted by May Wilson Preston for The Saturday Evening Post in 1933

would not, of course, allow ourselves to be persuaded by a sagacious gentleman's personal gentleman to go to a Fancy Dress Ball dressed as Mephistopheles in an attempt to stiffen our sinews. Nor would we drivel on at such lengths and in such detail about the mating habits of newts when we finally got our chance. But, I bet there are few who could honestly say that at some point in their lives they haven't been in a situation where they were (a) in such awe of the person they were addressing they could barely speak and that (b) when they finally did manage to utter a few words, what emerged was little more than babble. Thus, in the context of a Wodehouse story, we empathise with the feelings of the character, and without that firm root in reality the farce would not work.

That extract also contains the most wonderful side-swipe at pretentious academic writing. We are still letting writers get away with it. If you doubt me, I suggest you try wading through Roy Porter's recent prize-winning *Enlightenment*, a book about the scientific and philosophical roots of the modern world, which was made slightly more bearable for me by the mind games I was able to play imagining how Wodehouse would have written a parody of it.

WHILST we are on the subject of his sideswipes at writing, consider Madeline's synopsis of the plot of *Mervyn Keene, Clubman*. It occurs in *The Mating Season*. Bertie, trying to intercept his letter to Madeline, written as from Gussie, after meeting sundry fauna—cats and caterpillars *inter alia*—in the garden of The Larches, gets into the house only to be discovered when he has taken cover behind a sofa. Madeline, of course, assumes he has come because his love for her is so strong he cannot keep away, and she launches into the story as a comparison of Bertie's passion with Mervyn Keene's. It is interrupted by lots of comment from Bertie, either to Madeline or to the reader, but I've edited it severely so you get the full undiluted benefit (and so that I finish without filling this entire edition of *Plum Lines*):

"Oh Bertie!" she said...."Shall I tell you the story of Mervyn Keene?"

She took time out to gulp a bit. Then she carried on in a low voice with a goodish amount of throb to it.

"He was young, rich, and handsome, an officer in the Coldstream Guards, and the idol of all who knew him. Everybody envied him.

"But really he was not to be envied. There was a tragedy in his life. He loved Cynthia Grey, the most beautiful girl in London, but just as he was about to speak his love, he found that she was engaged to Sir Hector Mauleverer, the explorer.

"...he spoke no word of love. But he went on worshipping her, outwardly gay and cheerful, inwardly

gnawed by ceaseless pain. And then one night her brother Lionel, a wild young man who had got into bad company, came to his rooms and told him he had committed a very serious crime and was going to be arrested, and he asked Mervyn to save him by taking the blame himself. And of course, Mervyn said he would...for Cynthia's sake.

"...he confessed to the crime and went to prison. When he came out, grey and broken, he found that Cynthia had married Sir Hector and he went to the South Sea Islands and became a beachcomber. And time passed. And then one day Cynthia and her husband arrived on the island on their travels and stayed at Government House, and Mervyn saw her drive by, and she was just as beautiful as ever, and their eyes met, but she didn't recognise him...because he had been living the pace that kills, trying to forget.

"He found out she was leaving next morning, and he had nothing to remember her by, so he broke into Government House in the night and took from the dressing table the rose she had been wearing in her hair. And Cynthia found him taking it, and, of course, she was very upset when she recognised him.

"...and there was a very powerful scene in which he told her how he had always loved her and had come to steal her rose, and she told him that her brother had died and confessed on his death-bed that it was he who had been guilty of the crime for which Mervyn had gone to prison. And then Sir Hector came in.

"And, of course, he thought Mervyn was a burglar, and he shot him, and Mervyn died with the rose in his hand. And, of course, the sound of the shot roused the house, and the Governor came running in and said: 'Is anything missing?' And Cynthia, in a low, almost inaudible voice said: 'Only a rose.' That is the story of Mervyn Keene, Clubman."

Bertie's response to this was:

Well it was difficult, of course, to know quite what comment to make. I said "Oh, ah!", but I felt at the time it could have been improved on. The fact is, I was a bit stunned. I had always known in a sort of vague, general way that Mrs. Bingo wrote the world's worst tripe—Bingo generally changes the subject nervously if anyone mentions the little woman's output—but I had never supposed her capable of bilge like this.

As a very sharp parody of the plot of a pulp, romantic novel, that is brilliant, even down to the breathless "of course" every few lines. The titles of the books and the poems his fictitious writers produce hit the mark just as well. For me the classic example has to be "Across the Pale Parabola of Joy," a title which manages simultaneously to

appear to be absolutely loaded with meaning whilst actually being completely meaningless. These days, we'd call it satire and it would be read out on the BBC by a sharply dressed man of indeterminate young-ish age. Indeed, if you take my suggested treatment of the description of Julia Fish, stripping out the patter and Wodehousean "noise" around the punch line, many of the things he makes his characters say are strong stuff.

Wodehouse did indeed create a world that is unreal in that, however convoluted the plot and severe the preliminary vicissitudes, the poor win the capital to buy a share in the onion soup bar which sets them on the path to riches, the deserving young man marries the beautiful, good-hearted chorus girl, and the stinkers get their comeuppance. Because he created that Elysium, we assume he inhabited it himself, just as it can be easy to ascribe to the personality of an actor the qualities of the character he plays. Wodehouse was able to get us to suspend our disbelief and revel in his world because fundamentally he was an

extremely sharp observer of the human race, its foibles and the way it uses words. His facility with the English language was such that he could have written in any style he liked. It's our good luck that he decided to use his insights and his abilities to entertain us.

I can think of many words to describe Wodehouse. Given the 90-odd books, the short stories, the plays, the lyrics and the rest, "driven" is one word that comes to mind. I am sure he was a nice man: his kindness to animals and his aversion to giving offence are widely acknowledged. He was no doubt a very private man, and why not? But, as Robert McCrum, his current biographer, said in a recent BBC documentary, he was neither dumb nor a brick. And, UNWORLDLY? Please! He knew exactly what he was doing.

Americans who haven't had a chance to see the recent BBC documentary will be interested in the opposite page.

Pickering Plans Pack Particularly Powerful Punch, Plummies!

BY ELLIOTT MILSTEIN, CHAIRMAN AND CEO, PICKERING MOTOR COMPANY ¹

THE Pickering Motor Company (aka Greater Detroit Wodehouse Society, Inc.) met Wednesday, February 5, 2003, deep in the preparations for The Wodehouse Society Convention, August 8-10, 2003 (see enclosed sign-up sheet). Besides the usual browsing, sluicing, and general merriment that always accompany a gathering of Plummies, there was a lot of serious work to do, and much of it actually got done. Planning a convention of this magnitude, especially with so few people, is a daunting task. Our peripatetic *Plum Lines* investigative reporter was able to get a few words from each of the members.

LuAnn Warren is in charge of designing and ordering the "loot," the affectionate term used for the convention give-aways. "We decided to do something different this year," she says. "For loot, we are giving each attendee an actual lute with the Society logo." A lute for each attendee? It turns out she is joking. "No, it's the usual stuff, but with a little twist, like we're doing travel mugs instead of regular coffee mugs. I really had a lot of fun working on the logo, though. I think it's really spiffy." Spiffy, eh? LuAnn is clearly getting into the swing of things.

Her husband, David Warren, is a Wodehousian of some thirty-plus years. "I'm really excited about being in the short story reading. I have a very small part, the two main parts being given to our two professional actors. I

have always enjoyed the readings and skits of previous conventions, there being a certain charm to amateur theatricals, but these guys are better than Laurie and Fry and that's really exciting."

Who are these actors and what story will they be doing? "Now, now," says David, wagging a gentle finger, "that would be telling. But kidding aside, this reading alone is worth the price of admission."

Sherry and Michael Smith are new to Wodehouse and the Society, each having read only one book. "I sure hope there will be lots of other newcomers there," says Sherry. "I'll be really intimidated if the whole convention is a bunch of experts, all trading in-jokes." LuAnn and David, veterans of several conventions, assure her that many of the attendees are quite new to Wodehouse and are most welcome. "Well, Michael and I are really looking forward to just going to Toronto...it's such a lovely city with so much to do." Michael agrees. "And your money goes so much farther with the exchange rate, not to mention the deals at the duty-free shop. You can buy Cuban cigars too....It's better than shopping on the Internet! [Michael's favorite pastime]" What about the convention, Michael? "Oh, sure, we're looking forward to that too."

Bridget Campion and husband Richard Scrimger couldn't make it to the meeting, they being the only mem-

bers of the Pickering Motor Company who don't live in Detroit. But we contacted them in their home in Coburg, Ontario and they couldn't agree more about Toronto, having lived in or near the city for over 30 years. They have been given the task of putting together the city guide for all the Wodehousian visitors. "The guide will direct our guests to all the hot spots [reference to Ronnie Fish and Hugo Carmody deleted], restaurants, plays and things, and especially bookstores. Toronto is the bookstore capital of Canada, and Canada has many times more Wodehouses in print than the US, so we know our American brethren will want to bring all that valuable cash and help our economy out a little." Those interested in purchasing tickets to a play before getting the "Scrampton Guide to Toronto" may go to the following website:

<http://www.torontoperforms.com>.

Another relative newcomer to Plum and TWS is Dicron Mahakian, now well into his fourth Wodehouse and unable to put it down. "I love how you will be reading along then just come up on this line that just cracks you up. And it's just so clever you don't even realize that he was trying to be funny...it's just FUNNY." Uh, OK, Dicron, but what about the convention? "Oh, that. Yeah, sounds nice." Anything else? "Well, from what Elyse says I think it should be fun."

The Elyse he is talking about is Elyse Milstein. Veteran party planner of three formals, six corporate Christmas parties and perpetually planning her daughters' weddings, she has been given the task of organizing the social events. "The reception is in this beautiful room on campus that spills out onto a terrace. If the weather holds, it will be gorgeous. The informal gathering Thursday night is in this wonderful bar in the Windsor Arms hotel, which is to die for!" Uh, OK, Elyse, get a grip there. "I am particularly pleased with the site of the Saturday banquet. It will be breathtaking. The people I am working with both at St. Mike's and the Sutton Place are wonderful and so helpful. And with the exchange rate, we can get so much for our money. I know the social events will be fabulous."

"For me," says veteran Elliott Milstein, "the heart and soul of the Wodehouse Convention is the Saturday speaker's list, which is where I've put most of my energies. I think we will have the best Saturday program ever." What makes it so good? "Well, for one thing, I'm NOT giving a speech. That's a big plus. But we have nice mix: old favorites, the crème de la crème who have never failed to delight, like Tony Ring, Helen Murphy, and Jan Kaufman; members we all know and love, but who have never spoken before, like Tom Smith; and great newcomers whom I know will be wonderful, like Richard Scrimger, Dennis Chitty, and Curtis Armstrong. The Saturday lectures will educate, elevate and amuse. What more could anyone ask?"

Well, in the unbiased opinion of THIS reporter, it

sounds like an event to stagger humanity. The imagination boggles. (Examine your imagination. Isn't it boggling?)

So grab that sign-up sheet, make out that check (or cheque, if you prefer) and get it in the mail before April 15! Oh, and make your reservations too. Evening dress at the Sutton Place. Gentleman in flannel suits can be accommodated at the College. Plenty of room at the College.

See you in Toronto! ²

¹ In the interests of disclosure we must report that the Pickering Board recently granted Elliott three stock options at one cent each.

² This is neither an offer to sell nor solicitation of an offer to buy.

BBC documentary available in American video format

BY JAN HUNT

We have a master print of the BBC documentary "The Long Exile" and have permission from PITY to make American-format videotape copies for fellow Wodehouseans.

My First Time

BY DAN COHEN

FOR better or worse, we live in an age of self-revelation. Today we are swamped with tell-all biographies. You can't turn on the TV in the afternoon without seeing a panel of people who look like your neighbors (and may actually be your neighbors) telling a nationwide audience things about themselves you really want to hear. And the Royal Family, which was once so famously and decorously secretive, seems to be acting just like those folks who may be your neighbors.

I don't approve, but it is the spirit of the age, and we must all adjust. So I have decided that what *Plum Lines* really needs is a little more self-revelation from the members of TWS, and I am going to try and initiate an occasional feature called "My First Time."

No, not that! This is The Wodehouse Society—not The Jerry Springer Show or the *Daily Mail*. What I am talking about is a column on the first time you read Wodehouse, and how you became addicted to him.

As the Bard said: "But be not afraid of Wodehouse; some men are born Wodehouse, some achieve Wodehouse, and some have Wodehouse thrust upon them." Anyway the Bard said something like that.

I am issuing a call for members to send in their Galahad Threepwood-like reminiscences of the first time. To provide an example, and get the ball rolling, I will start with my own experience.

ON SEVERAL occasions Bertie Wooster commented on how difficult it is to get the story started. I am experiencing that difficulty right now because I can't remember when I first read Wodehouse. It seems to me that Wodehouse has always been a part of my life.

The first clear recollection I have of actually reading Wodehouse is a 1940s scene from the seventh or eighth grade at Ray Elementary School (a red brick institution built and run along the lines of Joliet Prison) on Chicago's South Side. I was in an English class and was supposed to be reading an improving book — *Silas Marner*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, or something like that. Hidden inside of the book I was supposed to be reading

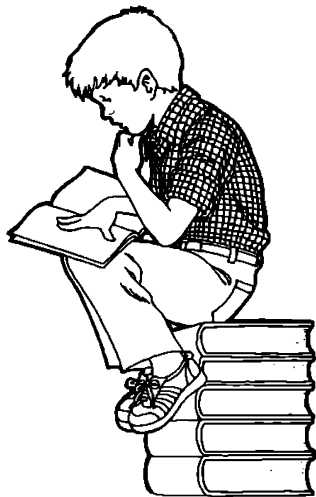
was a paperback copy of a Jeeves novel. I guess I should have been reading *Spicy Detective* (yes, there really was such a publication), but it was definitely Wodehouse.

This wasn't my first encounter with Wodehouse, but I have searched what is left of my memory and can't find a clue to where I first encountered him. I'm quite sure no one in my family read him—my very (working) class conscious family had no interest in or sympathy with the activities of the British upper class.

Like any other red-blooded American boy I read comic books (*Plastic Man* was my favorite), and pulp science fiction (*Amazing Stories* and later *Galaxy*). But I also recall reading humor—*The New Yorker* and *The Saturday Evening Post* cartoons—even humor without pictures—Thurber (okay, Thurber drew some pictures too), H. Allen Smith, S. J. Perlman, Robert Benchley, and of course P. G. Wodehouse. I imagine I first encountered all of these writers in a library—probably the school library. We always had a "library period" where the inmates were herded into the library and told to be quiet for forty minutes. If we happened to read something during that time it was icing on the cake for the Chicago school system. I read humor, and started with short stories. That's how I know that a Jeeves novel was not my first Wodehouse experience. I had to work up to anything more than fifteen pages long.

I now have a fair collection of humor writing, and from time to time dip into some of my old favorites from those bygone days. I may get a smile, and a warm feeling of nostalgia, but that's about all. Except for Wodehouse: he remains fresh and funny, and I laugh just as hard as I did in the confines of Ray School.

And it was the laughing that did me in back then. Our eagle-eared English teacher heard me, and knowing that nobody ever laughed at *Silas Marner* or *A Tale of Two Cities*, caught me reading the contraband. She must have first thought that she had uncovered something a good deal more lethal than Wodehouse, because she looked disappointed after she examined the cover of the paperback book. She riffled through a few pages to make sure it really was Wodehouse, and not a work of literature like the *The Amboy Dukes* (anyone remember that?) in a false cover. My punishment was light. She took the book away from me and returned it after class with the admonition that I should read that sort of book on my own time. I took the advice to heart, and have been reading Wodehouse on my own time ever since.



Letter from England

BY ELIN WOODGER MURPHY

IN WHAT may be a futile attempt to emulate one of my heroes, Alistair Cooke, I have offered to write a column for *Plum Lines*, reporting this American's perspective on things Wodehousian from the other side of the Atlantic. The task should be a snap for yours truly, since there always seems to be something going on over here, Wodehouse-wise. PGW still reverberates in the national consciousness, and rarely does a week go by without some Wodehousian reference appearing in the media.

Just last December the BBC aired an hour-long documentary that did our Plum very well indeed, covering his life from beginning to end, with particular emphasis on his years in America and his work as a lyricist, which is often overlooked. Included were interviews with Sir Edward Cazalet; Hal Cazalet, who also sang; Patrick Wodehouse; John Mortimer; and the latest Wodehouse biographer, Robert McCrum, on whose research the documentary was based. A fair and fascinating examination of the German broadcasts included an interview with Barry Pitt, a chap who had been interned with Wodehouse and soundly verified that PGW had intended no malice or support of the Germans but had merely wanted, first, to entertain his fellow internees and, later, to reassure his American fans that he was all right. All in all, it was an excellent documentary, and it is a shame that there are no plans to air it in the United States. (Impressions of the broadcast can be found on the UK Society's website: <http://www.eclipse.co.uk/wodehouse>; see page 5 for information on ordering an American video copy of the documentary.)

More recently, there was the news that Prime Minister Tony Blair and French president Jacques Chirac were meeting in Le Touquet in early February. Murray Hedgcock brought to our attention some news reports that didn't miss the Wodehousian implications of the meeting. An article in *The Times* noted, "It is as if Lord Emsworth had finally decided to have it out in a showdown with Sir Gregory Parslow [sic] about their pigs." And Martha Kearney, political editor for BBC Newsnight, had this (among other things) to say of the day's events: "What with excellent conversation and browsing and sluicing, the afternoon passed quite happily."

Delightful as it is to come across quotes like this, it is even more delightful when they are rendered by somebody one knows. One's mate, for instance. Norman has been fairly busy lately, infesting the media with his presence. On February 6 he was interviewed on BBC Radio 4 regarding cads and bounders, between which there is a significant difference, as Wodehouse well knew. (In essence, cads

know when they are doing wrong, bounders do not.) It is with pride that I report an abundance of emails after the broadcast, all congratulating me on making Norman speak at a speed listeners could actually understand.

Meanwhile, in the February issue of *The Oldie* magazine, there is a Murphy letter discussing "the urban myth of German parachutists arriving in England dressed with spats 'as worn.'" Norman relates one of the offshoots of the World War II affair as given by Malcom Muggeridge to Basil Boothroyd. According to Boothroyd, Muggeridge "claimed to have advanced in Wodehouse's defence that German Intelligence, nurtured on the exploits of Bertie Wooster and fellow-drones, had parachuted an agent into the Fen country wearing spats. 'This unaccustomed article of attire led to his speedy apprehension.' The last time we met I asked him if this had in fact happened. He was laughingly evasive."



The same issue of *The Oldie* has a page written by author and film critic Barry Norman, in which he describes his six heroes. Number two on his list is P. G. Wodehouse—"The funniest, most stylish humorous writer in the English language." Quite right, although one wonders why he put some hack named William Shakespeare ahead of our Plum. Oh, well, there's quite a nice picture of Wodehouse included, and I'm pleased to tell you that the photo, which was attributed to the P. G. Wodehouse Society (UK), came from my personal collection.

Speaking of the UK Society, it has a distinct advantage over the US group in that, being in a smaller country, opportunities for members to get together from all over are more frequent. Three times a year, for example, there are gatherings in the Savage Club, London, hosted by my husband Norman, who is a club member. Appropriately, P. G. Wodehouse had also been a member (and it was in the Savage Club record books that Norman found the Wodehouse abode that gave him Bertie Wooster's London address). A typical Savage evening involves drink, conversation, general Society announcements, and a short talk, usually given by a member whose arm has been gently twisted into it. On February 11, it was Tim Andrew's turn. Tim is a school headmaster, a member of the UK Society's governing committee, a longtime member of TWS (having attended several conventions), and, I'm happy to say, a good friend. His talk was so good that I wasted no time in applying more pressure to his arm, and for that reason you will find it as the lead article in this issue of *Plum Lines*. Let the next Savage speaker beware!

Wodehouse and the Crime Wave

BY STU SHIFFMAN

"But you seem gloomy, Jerningham — moody. Why is this?"

"Because it is impossible to bring the criminals to justice."

"Criminals? Was there more than one?"

"There were two, Woodger. Two of the blackest-hearted menaces to society that ever clutched a knife handle. One held Sir Ralph down, the other did the stabbing."

"But if you are so sure of this, how is it, Jerningham, that you cannot give the scoundrels their just desserts?"

Travers Jerningham laughed a bitter laugh.

"Because, Woodger, they aren't in the book at all. The fiends were too cunning to let themselves get beyond the front page. The murderers of Sir Ralph Rackstraw were Messrs. Hodder and Stoughton."

— P. G. Wodehouse, "About These Mystery Stories," *The Saturday Evening Post*, May 25, 1929, reprinted in *The Defective Detective*, ed. Steve Carper, Citadel Press, 1992

"THE PHRASE 'classic English detective story' conjures up immediate and comforting images of an insulated, complacent, even cozy Britain, a neverland in which genteel slayings are perpetrated, promptly investigated and solved, often by gifted, if eccentric, amateurs, against the reassuring backdrop of pre-Blitz London, peaceful rural villages, or fully staffed Wodehousian country estates." So says Malcolm J. Turnbull in his *Victims or Villains: Jewish Images In Classic English Detective Fiction* (Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1998). I wonder if Wodehouse's upper-class characters and situations were assimilated by middle-class English mystery writers between the wars as shorthand for an unfamiliar milieu.

Then there is confessed mystery addict W. H. Auden's essay, "The Guilty Vicarage," in which he finds a timeless quality in the mystery story not unlike Greek drama, and says "that the typical reader of detective stories is, like myself, a person who suffers from a sense of sin." O Woe, O Woe, and cue the chorus of Frogs. Is the Golden Age (1920s and 1930s) mystery, as Wodehouse's stories are musical comedies without the music, just Greek Drama without the gods and masked Chorus? Or just crossword puzzles with dialogue? George Grella, in his essay "Murder and Manners: The Formal Detective Novel" (included in *Dimensions of Detective Fiction*, ed. Larry N. Landrum et al., Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1976), enumerates the usual setting of the Golden Age detective novel, saying that these "serve a comic as well as functional purpose. The novel invariably presents murder in isolated and luxurious surroundings, combining the necessities of the whodunit with the manner [sic] tradition." Thus we have the familiar and ubiquitous English country or manor house, gentlemen's clubs, charity bazaars, and similar settings that keep out the riffraff except for the occasional policeman and passing tramp suitable as red herring. These settings are familiar enough in Wodehouse too, where the police constable only exists to lose his helmet.

The usual suspects are familiar too, including at least one member of the gentry or squirearchy, a professional man, clean-cut sporting type, military man (never below the rank of major as in Major Plank), the "smashing decent girl," and Church of England cleric. The last is usually a muscular Christian type, like Stinker Pinker or Beefy Bingham. It is all in a land untouched by time (like *Beauty and the Beast* and other fairy tales) and the troubles of the real world (world wars, influenza epidemics, and social upheavals). Even detective author Professor Charles Latimer, leading character in Eric Ambler's gritty thriller *A Coffin for Dimitrios* (1939), finds himself at the end of the eventful novel planning the setting of his next story: "Well, there was always plenty of fun to be got out of an English country village, wasn't there? The time? Summer; with cricket matches on the village green, garden parties at the vicarage, the clink of teacups, and the sweet smell of grass on a July evening. That was the type of thing people liked to hear about. It was the type of thing he himself would like to hear about."

It sounds just like Blandings Castle.

Leroy Lad Panek, in his *Watteau's Shepherds: The Detective Novel in Britain 1914-1940* (Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1979), writes about the creation of the Golden Age sleuths (as opposed to the "clubland hero" protagonists of the thrillers by such as "Sapper" or Buchan): "Sometimes the new characters are intellectuals like Appleby or Strangeways, and most of them are partly comic—based more on Wodehouse than Wallace." Christie is a case in point, delivering us the comical music hall Frenchman (in thin disguise as a "Belgian," even funnier to the English than the French) in the person of Hercule Poirot, and his Watson, Captain Hastings, who is at least as dim as any denizen of the Drones Club. In Agatha Christie's early thriller, *The Secret Adversary* (1922), which introduces the series characters of Tommy and Tuppence, her would-be detectives place a newspaper

ad, in which they emulate Bulldog Drummond in *Bulldog Drummond* (1920), announcing that they are "Two young adventurers for hire. Willing to do anything, go anywhere. Pay must be good...no reasonable offer refused." Compare this to the ad placed in the newspapers by our hero in *Leave It to Psmith* (1923). Of course Bulldog Drummond and Tommy and Tuppence encounter evil machinations against England by a Master Criminal and numerous despicable foreigners, while Psmith ends up on assignment as one of Blandings Castle's roster of many impostors. Fortunately, he is up to the challenge of this much more complicated problem!

Panek notes that for Christie: "The spirit of burlesque and hi-jinks carries over into the last thriller of the twenties, *The Seven Dials Mystery* (1929). This book takes up characters from *The Secret of Chimneys* and involves them in an even more improbable situation: suppose that Sapper's Bulldog Drummond story *The Black Gang* (1922), in which Drummond and his adventure-loving chums go about beating sense into communists and other criminals, had been written by P. G. Wodehouse. This was the premise of Christie's novel. A group of young adventurers for a secret society—the Black Gang to Sapper, the Seven Dials here—to fight crime. They are patently Wodehousian characters with names like Pongo, Codders, Bundle, and Socks: these sound a bit like Stinker Pinker, Stiffy Byng, Bingo Little, or Oofy Prosser from the master. Christie's characters also act like people in Wodehouse. To avoid Codders' noxious embrace, Bundle simply jumps out of the window and runs. Lord Caterham and his mansion, Chimneys, have become very much like the Earl of Emsworth and Blandings Castle in the Wodehouse saga." Ye gods, quipped I silently in response. Pongo, of course, was used by the Master as in Pongo Twistleton. Panek also notes that Christie tried to write here in the master's voice and fails but that "the linguistic imitation is only one part of the complex of items which combines to give the flavor of a Wodehousean burlesque. There is even one character with a valet who has exquisite taste and is ruthlessly efficient!"

I decided to investigate the case for myself, and so obtained a copy of this slim volume for further study from that estimable institution, the Seattle Public Library. Indeed, I find *The Seven Dials Mystery* to be much as described, rather as if a coterie of Wodehousian figures had wandered into some plot from Dornford Yates, Sexton Blake, or even G. K. Chesterton's *The Man Who was Thursday*. The Marquis of Caterham (ah, not an earl, but you can't have everything) has rented his stately home, Chimneys, to industrialist Sir Oswald and Lady Coote, who host a lavish weekend party with a selection of young people. Tredwell the Beach-like butler manages it all beautifully, while the Scottish gardener MacDonald puts Lady

Coote in her place in a manner worthy of Angus McAllister at Blandings. Sir Oswald's secretary, the Efficient Rupert Bateman, known as "Pongo," had been at school with many of the young men, including several holding rather ornamental positions at the Foreign Office, including Ronny Devereaux, Gerald Wade and Bill Eversleigh. A group practical joke on Gerald Wade, involving the placing of eight alarm clocks, goes cockeyed when Wade is found dead surrounded by only seven. Soon Ronny Devereaux is also found dead and it is apparent that "all is not as it appears!" A seemingly sinister secret society based at a club called the Seven Dials may lay behind it all, with a menace to a new industrial process, and Lady Eileen Brent, "Bundle" to her friends and family, is determined to solve the mystery with the aid of the seemingly Woosterish "amiable youth" Jimmy Thesiger. Bundle's friend Bill describes him, saying "You must know Jimmy—pink-faced chap. Looks a bit of an ass. But really he's got as many brains as I have." Bill, although a peach of a chap, is not himself necessarily the pick of the litter intellectually.

Some scenes between Thesiger and his man Stevens seemed to have a very familiar flavor, in the chapter entitled "Visitors for Jimmy":

His sleep-ridden brain tried for a moment to cope with the situation, but failed. He yawned and rolled over again.

"A young lady, sir, has called to see you."

The voice was implacable. So prepared was it to go on repeating the statement indefinitely that Jimmy resigned himself to the inevitable. He opened his eyes and blinked.

"Eh, Stevens?" he said. "Say that again."

"A young lady, sir, has called to see you."

"Oh!" Jimmy strove to grasp the situation. "Why?"

"I couldn't say, sir."

"No, I suppose not. No," he thought it over, "I suppose you couldn't."

It goes on in that manner and is quite entertaining. The reader immediately finds the character quite appealing. And yet, once again Christie does her patented party trick at the end and the reader (and Bundle) has the scales fall from his or her eyes.

We've all noticed that Dorothy L. Sayers's Lord Peter Wimsey and his man Bunter owe a debt to Bertie Wooster and Jeeves, but with a fairer portion of intelligence in the case of Wimsey. Panek, while noting that the "burbling detective certainly goes back to Trent" (of E. C. Bentley's *Trent's Last Case*; Bentley also invented the modern poetic form of the cleriheuw), insists that the "grace notes" in Wimsey's speech come from Wodehouse, and that Psmith is the character with more influence on the creation of Wimsey in "deportment, appearance and speech." Indeed,



Sayers's Lord Peter Wimsey, as depicted by Stu Shiffman

he says that Mike Jackson is where Sayers found the original for Inspector Charles Parker. We may be thankful that mystery author (and the beloved of Lord Peter) Harriet Vane, while a strong and independent woman, is derived from Sayers (herself dangerously close to a Florence Craye type) rather than from Bobby Wickham or Stiffy Byng. Harriet is more of a Rosie M. Banks type, creative and self-supporting. Would this make Lord Peter Bingo Little? Surely not! Once again, the mind reels. Still, one imagines a cricket match between Mike Jackson and Lord Peter, coached perhaps by an aging A. J. Raffles.

George Grella, again in "Murder and Manners," feels that Lord Peter falls into his "best Bertie Wooster Oxonian even when confronting a poisoner" in *Strong Poison*: "I read a book somewhere which said it was all done by leucocytes—those jolly little white corpuscles, don't you know—which sort of got around the stuff and hustled it along so that it couldn't do any harm...the point is that if you go on taking arsenic for a good long time...you establish a what-not, an immunity, and you can take six or seven grains at a time without so much as a touch of indijaggers."

Jeeves, one suspects, would advise the young master not to essay this in practice. Although perhaps excellent for the complexion, it cannot be healthful in the long view.

Bunter rarely breaks out into full Jeevesian flower, but does so most noticeably in *Gaudy Night* (1936), when Harriet Vane goes up to Oxford to stay at Shrewsbury College (based on Somerville). At one point, Lord Peter and Bunter study a note that a character discovers on the church tower. Bunter remarks that: "I would say that it was written by a person of no inconsiderable literacy ability, who had studied the works of Sheridan LeFanu and was, if I may be permitted the expression, bats in the belfry, my Lord."

Of course, there are other characters in Sayer's roster with Wodehousian parallels. This game can be rather fun. Lord Peter is Galahad Threepwood (to add to his Bertie and Psmith models) to a somewhat less dim Lord Emsworth of his brother Gerald, Duke of Denver. Helen, his Duchess, is a cold character with a superior and commanding *hauteur*, a Lady Constance or Aunt Agatha. Pickled Gherkins, heir to the title, is a combination of Lord Bosham and Freddy Threepwood. The Dowager Duchess is a jolly sort owing a lot to Aunt Dahlia, without the tendency towards manipulation that Dahlia shows towards Bertie. Lord Peter's sister Lady Mary is a trouble-prone blend of Stiffy Byng and Madeline Bassett until married to Inspector Parker.

One wonders if the late Duke of Denver collected eighteenth-century silver.

Dean Miller notes that the British writer and antiques maven John Malcolm, in his series of sprightly fine-art and murder mysteries starring Tim Simpson, reveals more than a passing interest in the works of PGW.

In *Mortal Ruin* (1988, p. 95) a bookseller initiates the following exchange:

"Are you a reader of P. G. Wodehouse, Mr. Simpson?"

"Of course; all true Englishmen are."

The bookseller then shows Simpson a book published by Herbert Jenkins, with "the classic Herbert Jenkins design."

In *The Wrong Impression* (1990, p. 121) is a description of Vine Street Police Station, which "used to figure cheerfully in jovial P. G. Wodehouse stories when young men from Oxford got done for trying to pinch policemen's helmets on Boat Race Night..." (Simpson notes that the area is not so cheerful now, with drugs in Piccadilly Circus and the like.)

In *Hungover* (1994, p. 128) we see noted "Bertie Wooster's variation of Hood"—that is, Bertie's citation of Thomas Hood's ballad celebrating Eugene Aram, school-master and murderer, "with gyves upon his wrists."

Let us give Mr. Malcolm all due credit for exceptionally good authorial taste.

Murray Hedgcock, under his PGWnet nom de Plum of **de Freece**, broadcast the following on February 4:

There is no indication that M. le President Chirac and Her Majesty's Prime Minister, Tony Blair, paid homage to the Wodehouse stay at Le Touquet when they held today's summit at this chilly watering-hole—clearly disagreeing on most matters arising.

The BBC Newsnight roundup, stressing the conviviality of externals alongside the lack of agreement on basics, had political editor Martha Kearney use PGW quotes to illustrate the mood.

A Prince for Hire

Your opportunity to secure a copy of a 'new' P. G. Wodehouse story!

BY TONY RING

YOU may have read last year about the discovery of the text of the unpublished novelette *A Prince for Hire* in an American magazine. The P. G. Wodehouse Estate has granted Galahad Books consent to publish a limited printing of just 1,000 copies in book form, and orders are now being taken.

Even if *A Prince for Hire* could not be said to be vintage Wodehouse, nevertheless it is the only demonstration that we have of his attempt to revitalise earlier novels. Wodehouse served a lengthy apprenticeship before he developed his trademark style of incomparable farce, during which period he wrote two versions of *The Prince and Betty*. The English novel, published by Mills and Boon, was a straightforward romance; the American story incorporated much of the action from the 1909 serial *Psmith, Journalist* and both books were published in 1912.

In 1931, the American version was rewritten, virtually from scratch, as the novelette *A Prince for Hire*, and serialised in the monthly *Illustrated Love Magazine*. It was not published contemporaneously in book form.

A Prince for Hire was probably dashed off to fulfil a contract for a serial while Wodehouse was in Hollywood. Its status as an adaptation is evident, although it incorporates glimpses of his mature style, and stands as the only novel he substantially rewrote twenty years after its original appearance.

Accordingly, it is an essential book for all Wodehouse collectors.

Galahad is producing three versions of the book:

A leather-bound edition, uniform with its earlier publications *Plum Stones* and *The Luck Stone*. This will be restricted to 16 copies for sale at £250 (\$400) post-free.

"I could see that, if not exactly disgruntled, he was very far from being grunted," she said of M. Chirac.

Stressing the somewhat smoother passage of the day than many had feared, she offered: "What with excellent conversation and browsing and sluicing, the afternoon passed quite happily."

I don't vouch for the precision of the quotes, having taken them from TV minutes ago, and rushing them worldwide without checking the library. But it truly cheers the soul, that The Master can still be seen as a fit and proper commentator on life, the universe, and everything.

An edition in hard-covers with a dust-jacket featuring the cover of the magazine in which the first instalment appeared. This will be restricted to 200 copies at £40 (\$70) plus postage of £3 in the UK; £6 (\$10) overseas.

A paperback edition of 784 copies, with a front cover similar to the dust-jacket, costing £14 (\$24) plus postage of £2 in the UK; £4 (\$6.50) overseas.

Each has an explanatory *Introduction* written by Tony Ring.

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NOTE: If you prefer to pay by cheque (in £ or US\$), please enclose it with your order.

Your credit card will not be charged, nor your cheque paid in, until the orders are about to be despatched (about June). The June edition of *Wooster Sauce* will give the exact publication date, and you should receive your order within three weeks.

Collecting Wodehouse

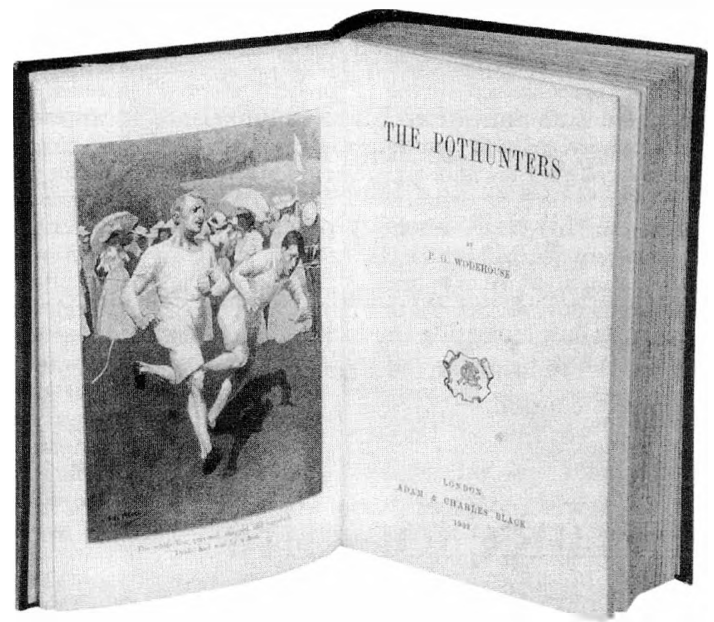
BY JOHN GRAHAM

THIS is the first installment in what I hope will become a regular feature devoted to the topic of collecting P. G. Wodehouse. For many years, *Plum Lines* ran a column called "Something New," focusing on new books by and about The Master. Fortunately, these reissues continue at a steady pace; witness the new Penguin paperbacks and Everyman hardbacks now being published. And yet, as the January 2003 issue of *Firsts* magazine (see page 14 of this issue of *Plum Lines*) makes clear, there is also a great interest out there in older copies of Wodehouse's books, magazine articles, sheet music, and ephemera published during his lifetime. Indeed, a number of prominent Wodehouse scholars (Joseph Connolly, David Jasen, Barry Phelps, and Charles Gould among them), first made their mark by buying and selling Wodehouse material, especially the highly-prized British and American first editions. It was Barry Phelps who first observed (in *Plum Lines*, January 1984) that "collecting" Plum is one of the five great pleasures in the Wodehouse universe. And for the past 21 years in his October catalogues, Charles Gould has continued to inform and delight us in that same pleasure. My hope is to carry on the Phelps-Gould tradition in this column, sharing the joy and excitement that comes with collecting one's favorite author.

This column is intended both for the long-time, committed collector (and it has been suggested that some of us should be committed) as well as for the casual collector of reading copies, reprints, and dog-eared paperbacks. For many years I placed myself squarely in this latter category. It was Joseph Connolly that I hold responsible for getting me starting in this "gentle madness" (to borrow a title phrase from Nicholas A. Basbanes).

Around 15 years ago I picked up a copy of Connolly's book, *P. G. Wodehouse: An Illustrated Biography* (London: Orbis Publishing, 1979) and was soon hooked by its enticing illustrations of English first editions, many in their familiar orange dust jackets. Even better, at the back, it had a collector's price guide (where *The Pothunters* was valued at up to 100 pounds) and a "complete" bibliography of English and American first editions (of course it is no longer complete and was never fully accurate, but the one-line descriptions of the English dust jackets are still quite amusing). I knew that Wodehouse was widely read and admired, but that his books were deemed collectable (and that someone would devote an entire book to them) was a revelation.

I soon got busy scouring used book stores (my first purchase, at The Strand in New York, was an American



first of *Quick Service* sans dust jacket for \$15) and attending east coast book fairs on Fall weekends. Pretty soon I was planning all my vacations around the annual calendar of ABAA book fairs (Boston in November, California in February, New York in April and, if I could manage, London in June). On one trip to London in early 1991 I met a young chap named Nigel Williams who sold books out of his home in Dulwich. The following September I received in the mail from him an entire catalogue devoted to Wodehouse. It was his first all-Wodehouse catalogue and listed 259 items for sale (his 16th was issued this February and lists 695 items). Today Nigel Williams has two book shops in Cecil Court, just off Charing Cross Road, and I have two book cases full of Wodehouse—one devoted to English firsts and one to American firsts.

Kathryn Smiley has written about "Strategies for Plum Collecting." Her recommendations for new collectors are good ones and I second her advice about obtaining two indispensable guides. The first, of course, is the McIlvaine bibliography. Although it is now out of print, used copies quite often appear for sale on eBay. Expect to pay about \$130. (All prices quoted in this article are in U.S. dollars.) In the meantime, the second reference is easier to get and much cheaper at \$14.50, including postage. It is Quill and Brush's *Author Price Guide to Wodehouse*, compiled and distributed by Maryland booksellers Allen and Pat Ahearn (and is available by phone at (301)874-3200 or through their website at www.qbbooks.com).

The other recommendation I would make is that in addition to the old ways of buying books (via shops, fairs, and catalogues), you also take advantage of the Internet. Two sites are particularly worthwhile knowing about and exploring on a regular basis (I search both every day).

First, there is the auction site eBay, the world's largest garage sale. You can sometimes find great bargains here, but it is important to be an informed buyer. A second good website (and a great place to become informed about prices) is abebooks.com, where hundreds of used and rare book dealers from North America, England, and the Continent offer tens of millions of books for sale. Be sure to use their "advanced search" option to help you find exactly what you want—you can search by title, publisher and price range, among other features.

One thing I plan to do in these columns is to "celebrate" important publishing anniversaries in Wodehouse's career. As you know, Plum's first book, *The Pothunters*, was published in September 1902, and the 100th anniversary of his next two school stories will be coming along this Fall. Still, if we wait for the centenary of every book, it will be 2077 before I get around to discussing *Sunset at Blandings*. I don't know about you, but I can't wait that long, so I also plan to honor 75th and 50th anniversaries.

Although I missed its 100th birthday by about six months, *The Pothunters* still seems to me the logical place to start. Most of the story was serialized January–March 1902 in *The Public School Magazine*, but the magazine ceased publication before the last eight chapters could appear. This means that the first printing of the full story was not until A. & C. Black published the book in London in September. The first edition has royal blue boards with a picture of a silver loving cup on both the front cover and spine. There is also an early reissue from the same plates (date unknown) bound in light blue covers with a line drawing depicting two runners. First edition sheets may also have been imported into the US by Macmillan, but I've never heard of any copies appearing on the market. No one knows for sure how many copies of these early editions were issued, although Wodehouse notes that until Herbert Jenkins published *Piccadilly Jim* in 1918, he never sold more than 2,000 copies.

The first edition of *The Pothunters* is relatively scarce and certainly one of the high points of any Wodehouse collection. Along with *Mike* (1909), it is the school story in greatest demand by collectors, although it is by no means the most difficult to find (that honor would have to go to *The White Feather*). Prices of first editions vary widely. As of late February, there were two copies of the true first issue for sale on [abebooks](http://abebooks.com)—one priced around \$1,500 (too low), the other at \$7,500 (too high). In January a somewhat tattered copy sold on eBay (the first I've seen offered there) for \$1,141.25. You can expect to pay \$500–\$1000 for a second issue, depending on condition. But don't let these high prices intimidate you. If you are still looking for a hardback "place holder," you can always pick up a nice reprint in dust jacket, published in 1972 by The Souvenir Press, for about \$30.

A Few Quick Ones

Gary Hall notes that "*Sports Illustrated*, not usually a bastion of literary prowess, published an article in December listing their choice of the 'Top 100 Sports Books.' While some of the items are beyond obscure (do you remember Earl (the Goat) Manigault, from the basketball playgrounds of Harlem?), they did have the good sense to list, as number 28, *The Golf Omnibus*. Their comment: "Wodehouse's status as golf's Shakespeare, its master comedian and tragedian, is borne out by this collection of short stories in which golf and love are the two constants. 'I doubt if golfers ought to fall in love,' says one character. 'I have known it to cost men ten shots in a medal round.'"

Gary comments: "While the comparison to Shakespeare is certainly apt, anyone who witnesses my golf escapades knows that applying the word 'constant' to such a game is less than appropriate."

Thomas Smith, aka Plug Basham, found a reference to Plum in Simon Schama's *A History of Britain*. Speaking of Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin, Schama writes: "Baldwin, who liked to present himself as a plain-as-pikestaff solid sort with (like Cobbett and Lord Emsworth) a passion for pigs..." Few American writers, unlike their British counterparts, would assume such knowledge on the part of their readers.

Daniel Love Glazer reports: In *The Weekly Standard*, Christopher Buckley has an essay, "Life is a Banquet," in praise of Patrick Dennis, the author of *Auntie Mame*. The essay has two references to Wodehouse:

Babcock (rhymes, sort of, with Babbitt) plays the same role in the Mame stories that Gorgon aunts play in the works of Dennis's literary antecedents, P. G. Wodehouse and Oscar Wilde....

There are serious writers who call P. G. Wodehouse "The Master," and it's tempting to garland Dennis with the same laurels.

For the full essay see <http://theweeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/002/298dsfyr.asp>

In a *New York Times* article of January 30 on Graham Greene's *The Quiet American*, Martin Nolan noted:

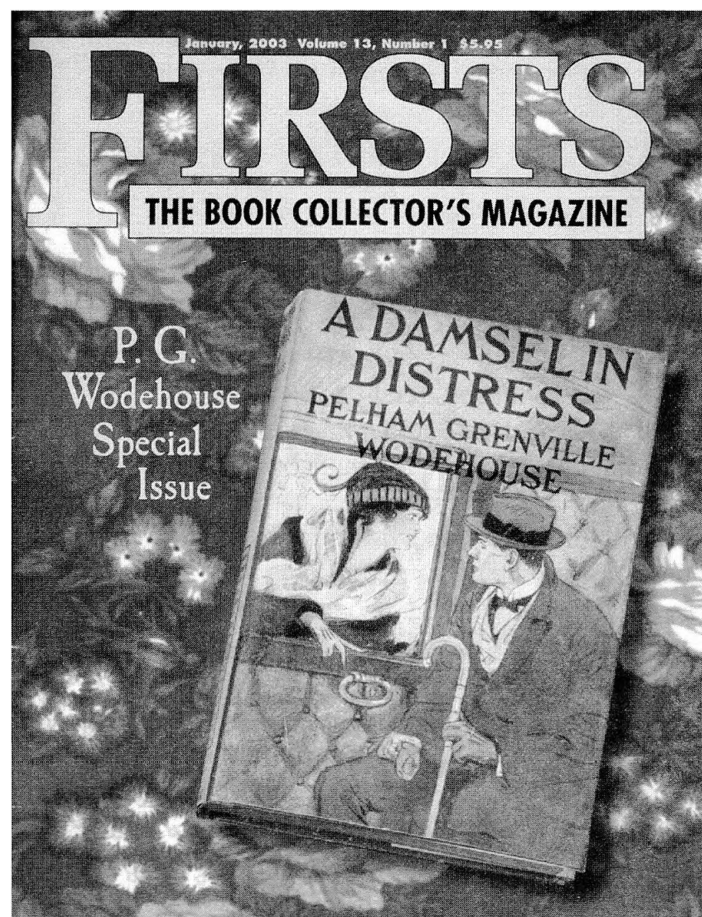
In 1953 [Greene] told [Evelyn] Waugh that he wanted to write about politics and not about God. Waugh waspishly replied: "I wouldn't give up writing about God at this stage if I was you. It would be like P. G. Wodehouse dropping Jeeves halfway through the Wooster series."

Firsts, The Book Collector's Magazine, and its P. G. Wodehouse Special Issue

BY JOHN GRAHAM

FIRSTS, the premier monthly magazine in the U.S. about book collecting, devoted nearly its entire January 2003 issue to the works of P. G. Wodehouse. Now in its thirteenth year of publication, *Firsts* is widely read around the world by collectors of rare books and modern first editions. Actually, this is not the first time the magazine had written about Plum. Back in its very first year of publication (August 1991), *Firsts* ran a four-page article entitled "Wodehouse a la Carte," by Charles Gould, the dean of Wodehouse book dealers. That short article, while entertaining and informative, hardly managed to exhaust the topic of collecting the vast output of The Master. So this time around, *Firsts* devoted a full 28 pages to Wodehouse in a series of four well-written, informative, and knowledgeable articles by its editor, Kathryn Smiley, herself a long-time fan of Plum's works. In addition, the magazine devoted its regular monthly two-page feature, "Books into Film," (written, as always, by its publisher Robin H. Smiley—a self-confessed Wodehouse neophyte) to the 1919 book and 1937 film version of *A Damsel in Distress*. Indeed, a magnificent color photo of the 1919 Doran first edition in a fine dust jacket graces the front cover of the magazine.

What makes this special issue of *Firsts* particularly desirable to TWS members and all Wodehouse collectors is that the articles are accompanied by more than 70 black and white photos of American and English first editions, mostly in their original dust jackets. The ownership of all of these superb books and jackets is not explicitly acknowledged, but it is hinted at on the magazine's final page. Therefore, I think it is no real secret to reveal that they belong to erstwhile TWS member and Hollywood writer/director/producer (of *Taxi*, *Cheers*, and *Frasier*) David Lloyd, whose collection of first editions is legendary. As Kathryn Smiley says of David's Wodehouse library:



"They're all there, they're all complete, they're all beautiful." Perhaps the sensation on first seeing David's collection is even better captured by Wodehouse himself in this passage from *Bill the Conqueror* (found on page 48 in the 1924 Doran first edition):

The library of Mr. Cooley Paradene at his house at Westbury, Long Island, was a room which caused bibliophiles on entering it to run round in ecstatic circles, prying and sniffing and uttering short excited whining noises like dogs suddenly plunged into the middle of a hundred entrancing smells.

I suspect that many of the dust jackets pictured in *Firsts* will be familiar to readers of *Plum Lines*, either from their own book shelves (especially since Herbert Jenkins thankfully reused the first edition artwork on their reprints) or from the color plates in McIlvaine (*P. G. Wodehouse, A Comprehensive Bibliography and Checklist*, New York: James H. Heineman, Inc., 1990). But even a long-time collector like myself should have a few surprises



in store, as there are three extremely rare jackets not even pictured in McIlvaine. These include *Their Mutual Child* (page 31), the Methuen first of *The Little Nugget* (page 40) and the American first of *Love Among the Chickens* (page 24). It is easy to overlook this last one since it has the same artwork as the book's front cover, but it really is a dust jacket. (I should know. When I was just starting to build my own first edition collection, a dealer in Ohio offered this very jacket to me but I turned it down because it had a large chip on its spine. I figured I could easily wait for a better copy to come along—the biggest mistake I ever made. Fifteen years later, I'm still waiting.)

Once the initial drooling over the dust jacket illustrations has subsided, the reader will want to dig into the four meaty articles themselves. The first, "By Way of Introduction," offers a four-page overview of Plum's life, his character and his characters—intended primarily for those (hopefully few) readers of *Firsts* who may be new to Wodehouse. This is followed by an eleven-page biography "A Brief History of a Long Life," with references to important book or magazine publications and spiced with frequent Wodehouse quotations. Kathryn Smiley clearly knows her subject matter, demonstrating a good working knowledge of books both by and about Wodehouse. The only blatant error I could detect was in her geography—for some reason, she places Le Touquet in southern France. Otherwise, I think this is an excellent short biography, particularly strong on Plum's early life and career up to the publication of *Something New*.

Jeeves Whiz

BY ANDREW KLAVAN

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Heavy Weather, by P. G. Wodehouse. New York: Overlook Press. 321 pages. \$16.95. *Laughing Gas*, by P. G. Wodehouse. New York: Overlook Press. 286 pages. \$16.95. *The Mating Season*, by P. G. Wodehouse. New York: Overlook Press. 272 pages. \$16.95.

THE icy hand of intellectualism strangles those art forms that lose the protection of the public's love. Painting and poetry were throttled in their beds and replaced at dead of night with the naked emperors who now strut through academia in their name. So, more recently, has "literary" fiction come to look suspiciously less like its rattling good self and more like a hip poseur at a ladies' lunch. Once there was Dickens and a depth of feeling; now there's, say, Paul Auster—mere ideas. Maybe it really is bloody murder, or maybe it's something more

The third article is "Strategies for Plum Collecting," about which I'll have more to say in my new "Collecting Wodehouse" column elsewhere in this issue of *Plum Lines*. (See page 12.) Finally, there is an eleven-page checklist of virtually all US and UK first editions along with a selection of omnibus volumes. There is not always enough information given here to identify first editions, but readers are advised to consult McIlvaine, "the *ne plus ultra* for Wodehouse collectors." *Firsts* provides estimates of current market value (for very good to fine copies in dust jackets) for all books published after 1919. If, however, you want to price your fine copy of *The Globe By The Way Book*, you are simply out of luck. Unfortunately, but perhaps wisely, the editors simply indicate NVA (no value assigned) for all books published prior to 1920.

I predict that over time this issue of *Firsts* is likely to become a collector's item in its own right, so you may want to add a copy to your own collection as soon as possible. Only a few good antiquarian bookstores around the country sell *Firsts* in their shops, but fortunately, the publishers maintain a stock of back issues which are easily obtained by phone, fax, email or website. The cost is \$6 plus another \$3 for mailing within the United States (obviously higher postal rates apply for mailing overseas). You can pay by VISA, MasterCard or American Express. If you phone *Firsts*, the number in Arizona is (520)529-1355; the fax number is (520)529-5847. If you email, the address is firstsmag@aol.com. The website is www.firsts.com.

similar to diseases of old age, a natural process in which sterile intellection invades a moribund form like bacteria a failing body. But either way, we, the audience, must grieve and move on to better things. It's life we love in our entertainments, and we look for those artists who make amusing things so vital they reduce ideation to dust.

No one—except perhaps Shakespeare—crumbles the old ideation like P. G. Wodehouse. Shakespeare outstrips the deep thinkers by virtue of the fact that he said so much, said everything, in fact. Try to smother him under a single viewpoint, you only expose your own prejudices. But Wodehouse did the bard one better. In a literary career spanning more than seventy years and producing, among more than ninety books, some of the greatest farces in the English language, Wodehouse said absolutely nothing. He meant nothing. He intended nothing. His cripplingly

funny comedies make *Seinfeld* look significant. His best characters—Bertie Wooster and his manservant Jeeves, the peers and knaves of Blandings Castle, the drones of the Drones Club, *et al.*—play out their silly lives in an Edwardian England and Jazz Age America so distant from reality, so unchanging, and so essentially ridiculous that these settings are relieved of almost every trace of satire or commentary. Even his occasional offhanded lampoons—of psychotherapy or fascism or highbrow literature—seem inspired by the fact that psychotherapists and fascists and highbrows just never do get the joke. In the end, there are no papers to write about these novels, nothing to teach, not even that much to discuss. All one can do with them, really, is read them and laugh like an idiot.

To assist you in this, the Overlook Press (appropriately located on Manhattan's Wooster Street) is marking the twenty-fifth anniversary of Wodehouse's death by publishing a set of clothbound collector's editions of the master's work. They're beautiful books, much welcome. Like the inclusion of fine crime novels in the Library of America, they deliver posthumous respect to a kind of writing too often dismissed at its original publication. Comedy especially, I think, gets short shrift from the critics simply because it defies critical dissection. In being observed, it ceases to be itself.

So Wodehouse's best stories are filigree, not meant to bear the weight of meditation. In *The Mating Season*, for instance, Wooster, the idiotic man-about-town, strives to find someone to impersonate his pal Gussie Fink-Nottle so that Gussie's girlfriend won't find out he's in jail. "You can't go about London asking people to pretend to be Gussie Fink-Nottle. At least you can, I suppose, but what a hell of a life." In the end, of course, the job falls to Bertie himself. Doors open and close, escapes are narrow, true love triumphs. It's not that you *couldn't* say something intelligent about it all, but what sort of wretched ass would?

Such books are sniffed at by those who, for some inexplicable reason, think it matters whether they discuss a

P.G. WODEHOUSE

LAUGHING GAS



work or not. "[Shakespeare's] tragedies are better than his comedies," as William Hazlitt put it, "because tragedy is better than comedy." But is it? I once quoted that line to Douglas Adams, author of the Wodehousian *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* series. Adams replied, "Oh, no. Shakespeare's tragedies are better than his comedies because Shakespeare wasn't funny." Which seems nearer the truth. As any number of actors are said to have remarked on their deathbed, "Dying is easy. Comedy is hard." In fact, when you consider how few artists really are funny—and how small a percentage of those are funny, like Wodehouse, without the merest whiff of seriousness—you realize that *pure* comedy is one of the greatest and most difficult of forms.

"Plum" Wodehouse seemed heaven-made for it. His father, a magistrate in Hong Kong, shipped him to England in 1883 when he was two years old. He was raised there by a humorless nanny until age five, then packed off to boarding school. But whereas other great writers—Saki, Kipling, Maugham—agonized over similar childhoods, Wodehouse (as Frances Donaldson notes in her biography), responded with jovial insularity. He had few real friends. His conversation was mostly writing and sports. And he was almost always working. Usually his bemused detachment and inconsequent naïveté served him well. It found its perfect overexpression in Bertie Wooster's blithe stupidity. The interplay between this jolly idiot and his brilliant, dignified servant Jeeves is Wodehouse's highest achievement.

But in 1940, the author's unworldliness led him into serious error, and his reputation has suffered for it ever since. Wodehouse, then fifty-nine, was living in northern France. "I was strolling on the lawn with my wife one morning, when she lowered her voice and said, 'Don't look now, but there comes the German army.'" He was arrested and sent to an internment camp. Released, he was trans-

P.G. WODEHOUSE

JEEVES IN THE OFFING



ported to Berlin and there coaxed by a “friend” into making five broadcasts on German radio. In the UK and the US he was denounced as a traitor, a second Lord Haw Haw. But in retrospect, his own assessment—“I made an ass of myself”—seems correct. The broadcasts are merely droll descriptions of what was obviously a terrifying experience. (“Young men, starting out in life, have often asked me, ‘How can I become an Internee?’”) They put forward no pro-Nazi or anti-British sentiments and even include a few sly pokes at his captors. He was a sixty-year-old man separated from his wife in enemy territory and a political simpleton to boot. Compared with more serious and intelligent men (Heidegger and de Man, say) he didn’t really do so badly after all.

And unlike those others, his actions, I believe, leave his work untainted. The books of P. G. Wodehouse consti-

tute a world of their own. To read them is to add to your store of bliss, which is a good *per se*. They are uproariously funny. They are expertly constructed. They are great literature—with no point, no purpose, no message but themselves.

Members of a Wodehouse society can buy these books at 25% off list by calling Overlook Press directly at 1-800-473-1312 and identifying themselves as members. Overlook began this set in 2000, is publishing eight Wodehouse titles each year, and expects to complete the canon in eighty volumes. I decided to buy the set recently when I saw how many of my books were in tatters. I have a dozen now and look forward to more.

—OM

Plum Bobs

BY SOCIETY SPICE

The appearance of several new columns in *Plum Lines* has been noted by Society Spice, who, eaten up with jealousy, here presents his own. —OM

OVER the years we have received many letters from perplexed readers seeking information about their favorite author. A plurality agrees that this is Shirley MacLaine, but occasionally a question about P. G. Wodehouse comes across our desk. We have not in the past responded to these queries because of the strict rule in the *Plum Lines Style Guide* forbidding staff to answer questions to which they do not know the answer. Thankfully, that draconian restriction has now been lifted, and we are free to inform and delight all those who thirst for knowledge.

R. B. J., Jr. of Ossining, New York (nom de Plum: Raskolnikov) sends the following inquiry:

Dear Plum Bobs,

At our regular P. G. Wodehouse Chapter meetings, the mere mention of orphreys and chasubles sends the members rolling on the floor in gales of laughter. As it happens, two schools of thought have arisen as to the meaning of these terms, and in the course of some light-hearted banter between those factions, a certain air of tension has ensued in the exercise yard. We hope you can settle our contretemps before it shatters the bonhomie which usually prevails.

The party which I favor, holds that Orphrey and Chasuble were a vaudeville team which played the Keith Circuit in the early 1920s and whose most famous routine

began: Orphrey: “My wife’s going to Lower California.” Chasuble: “I believe she will.”

On the other hand, the opposing faction in this quodlibet fiercely maintain that “orphrey” is an intensifier as when having committed a social gaffe one says, “Orphrey sorry my boys hadda bust yer beezer,” and that “chasuble” is an adjective applied to an attractive girl, as in, “She was a very chasuble girl, and I chased her for years before she gave in.” An *extremely* attractive girl, then, in their opinion, would be one who is orphrey chasuble. Who is right? Much depends on your answer.

Dear Raskolnikov,

I hope you won’t hold it against me, but I have to tell you that both you *and* your rivals are wrong. “Orphrey” and “chasuble” are ecclesiastical terms. “Orphrey” comes from the name of a popular fashion show on Radio Vatican called “Grand Ole Orphrey,” and “Chasuble” is an anagram for “Heal Cubs,” a litany recited in the Chicago diocese during the summer months. [Note for overseas readers: the Cubs are an American baseball club whose prospects rival those of the Jamaican Olympic Bobsled Team.]

Got a question? Send it to “Plum Bobs.” Next issue: what is a beezer?

Wodehouse and Wolfe

BY NORMAN MURPHY

Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
When a new planet swims into his ken;
Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes
He stared at the Pacific—and all his men
Looked at each other with a wild surmise—

Mr John Keats' words of approval of Mr George Chapman's translation of Homer, as echoed by Mrs Hignett (*Three Men and A Maid*) and Mr Bertram Wooster (too frequently to record).

HAVE you noticed, as you travel along Life's great journey, that there are more and more things you know that other people don't? While this is excellent for one's self-esteem, it occasionally, and annoyingly, happens that the same other people make it clear they don't care. And, even more annoyingly, it is occasionally forced to your attention that they know things you don't. And while, of course, one dismisses these as unimportant, they leave a nagging doubt in one's mind.

To illustrate my point, let us review the detective fiction of the last hundred years. I am not a member of the Sherlock Holmes Society, but I would stand up to the fiercest of their members and argue about Doyle's medical training, about where Holmes and Watson first met, and about Doyle's cricketing achievements. The trick is, when you are losing the argument on whatever aspect of Holmesiana it is, to say "Oh, maybe so. But the important thing here is to look at— (whatever aspect of Conan Doyle you hope/know/suspect you know more about than they do)."

I had studied and absorbed, as one does, Agatha Christie, Ronald Knox, Edmund Crispin, Carter Dickson, Ernest Bramah, and most, if not all, of their colleagues. I had even discussed his methods of work with Michael Innes. And, at Oxford, I found a good pick-up line was to announce in a loud voice: "Just imagine. It was on this very spot that Peter Wimsey proposed to Harriet Vane." (My only failure was when a girl from Somerville [Dorothy L. Sayer's old college] told me in equally strident tones that I was on the wrong side of the road. Ah well!)

I had also paid due tribute to the New World by enjoying Ellery Queen, Raymond Chandler (a Dulwich boy, never forget), Dashiell Hammett, Erle Stanley Gardner, and many other American detective writers of the time. I have to admit here that I still prefer Miss Marple to Sam Spade.

The result of all this classical education is that I raised one eyebrow and then, like Beach, raised two when I began to note Wodehouse's comments on Rex Stout and his cre-

ation, Nero Wolfe. Who was this character? I'd vaguely heard of him, no more. What was all the fuss about?

I found references to Rex Stout and Nero Wolfe in *Joy in the Morning*, *Plum Pie*, *The Purloined Paperweight*, *No Nudes is Good Nudes*, *Jeeves and the Tie That Binds* and *Aunts Aren't Gentlemen*, but I had no idea why.

In *Jeeves and the Tie That Binds*, Bertie Wooster, anxious to get back to his Stout, finds Aunt Dahlia has grabbed it:

The old ancestor was on the chaise longue with it in her grasp, and I knew I had small chance of wresting it from her. No one who has got his or her hooks on a Rex Stout lightly lets it go....She looked up, and I noted a trace of annoyance in her demeanour. I assumed that Nero Wolfe had come down from the orchid room and told Archie Goodwin to phone Saul Panzer and Orrie what's his name, and things were starting to warm up. In which event she would naturally resent the intrusion of even a loved nephew whom she had often dandled on her knee—not recently, I don't mean, but when I was a bit younger.

Wodehouse clearly had a high opinion of him, but I had never read him in my life.

That all changed eighteen months ago. Regular readers of *Plum Lines* will be aware that was when I deprived the Wodehouse Society of its then-president, Miss Elin Woodger, by persuading her to marry me. Although it is a word not often heard today, she brought her dowry (or *dot* as the French call it) with her, or, to be more accurate, sent them over in large boxes, and my already bulging bookshelves in north London bulged even more. (Or do I mean sag? Yes, sag is the *mot juste*, or the mot juster, if you prefer.)

We know from Wodehouse that Beach's powers of observation and suspicion were developed by the vast cache of thrillers bequeathed to him by Freddie Threepwood. Freddie, you will recall, got married in England, and left his thrillers behind when he went to live

in Long Island. When Elin was gracious enough to marry me, I am delighted to report that she took the opposite view. Full of missionary zeal and no doubt anxious to ensure she had something to read, she married me on Long Island and came to live with me in England and brought her thrillers with her.

Thank Heaven she did. There are forty-two Rex Stouts looking down at me as I type this, and I've read all of them, many of them twice or more.

Among Wodehouse's unusual features was his kindly habit, when he had read a book he enjoyed, of writing to the author to tell him so. And, shortly before Stout died in 1975 (the same year as Wodehouse), his biographer John Macaleer received a letter from Wodehouse: "He [Stout] passes the supreme test of being rereadable. I don't know how many times I have reread the Nero Wolfe stories, but plenty. I know exactly what is coming and how it all going to end, but it doesn't matter. That's *writing*."

Like Wodehouse, I found myself rereading Rex Stout's books, sometimes only two months later. This was highly

unusual; I reckon to look at Miss Christie or Miss Sayers again every five years or so. With Nero Wolfe I remember the basic outline, I remember who the baddie was. But I still enjoy them as much. Why do I reread them so soon? So, as a good husband should, I consulted my wife.

"Easy," said Elin. "Think about it. You know all the narrators of the other stories. It's Watson or Hastings or some other acolyte, just admiring what the mastermind does. With Rex Stout, it's different. His stories are narrated by Archie Goodwin, a young man who tells the story with humor, with style. He grumbles about Nero Wolfe, but sees the funny side of things and the reader sees his world through his eyes.

"What other narrator do you know who can amuse you, make you see the world through his eyes, and sometimes grumbles about the mastermind of the household who solves all the problems? Think about Bertie and Jeeves."

She was right. *That's* what it was. No wonder I find them far more enjoyable than Chapman's Homer!

I'm Breaking Up Because You Won't

BY DAVID LANDMAN

Dear Jane,

Lord knows how I've tried and I've tried
To stifle a grievous complaint,
But how much can a martyr abide?
(And, my dear, you know I'm no saint);
So I must, though you're all I desired,
And you look a right centerfold,
Regret our romance has expired,
For Wodehouse, you say, leaves you cold.

I kept faith when you choked on your bagel
And collapsed on the floor in a heap
Convulsed with a good one by Hegel,
And it did not cut me so deep.
I complied when you fell in hysterics
At the gags in Wagner's *Rheingold*,
Shared your glee at the lapses of clerics,
But recant when Plum leaves you cold.

When Nanook—because she was toothless—
Set grandma adrift on a floe,
I never considered you ruthless
When you whooped as it started to snow.
And when together we mourned at a torn
And they lowered the box in the mould,
I indulged your loud "ba-da-boom!"
But lament that Plum leaves you cold.

I stopped both my ears to the rumour
That our cronies whispered aside,
That you had a queer sense of humor,
And I swallowed the pill and my pride,
For I thought that I was your Tristan
And you were my fair queen Isolde.
Still it did funny things to my system
When Wodehouse, you said, left you cold.

If Ralph Emerson's yucks you insisted
Could never be quite over-sold
Together we might have persisted,
But you added that Plum left you cold.
And a play Sartre wrote called "No Exit"
Once afforded you mirth uncontrolled,
Well, exit or no, this guy legs it,

So tinkerty-tonk,
Leopold

PS: I consider my mansions mere hovels,
My silver and gold so much brass;
Just send me my paperback novels
To the Y—"Contents: Books"—all First Class.

P. G. Wodehouse: Stage to Screen

BY BRIAN TAVES

IN ADDITION to his novels, short stories, and articles, P. G. Wodehouse also had a prolific stage career, with some fifty shows to his credit as author, co-author, adapter, and lyricist—and much of this work has appeared on the screen. Wodehouse's work for the musical comedy theater was even brought to the silent screen: *Oh, Boy!* (1919) and *Oh, Lady, Lady* (1920), both from book and lyrics by Wodehouse and Guy Bolton for Kern musicals; *Oh, Kay!* (1928), from the Bolton–Wodehouse book for the Gershwin musical.

The play *Sally* was descended from an original draft entitled *The Little Thing* in 1916, and was finally mounted by Florenz Ziegfeld in 1920 as a vehicle for star Marilyn Miller, but Wodehouse was away while Bolton and Kern redrafted their original play, which used little of the Wodehouse material. (The “Sally” of the play is unrelated to the “Sally” of Wodehouse stories.) In 1925, *Sally* was first brought to the screen with Colleen Moore in the lead, and remade four years later in sound with Miller returning to recreate her stage role. The 1929 version of *Sally*, on which Wodehouse did not receive credit, was an astonishingly dull film. The movie was presented in the stilted manner that plagued many early musicals; emblematic of the pacing is the fact that the first song, “Look for the Silver Lining,” is not performed until 21 minutes into the movie.

Rather than his work as a novelist, it was probably Wodehouse's reputation on the stage, then considered the medium closest to “talkies,” that led to his hiring as a screenwriter at M-G-M in 1930. Even the one novel the studio bought but never produced reflected this same tendency. M-G-M paid \$25,000 for the rights to the new Wodehouse novel, *If I Were You*—which he had written, from a play co-authored with Guy Bolton, during spare time on the M-G-M payroll. Similarly, his assignment to such projects as *Rosalie* and *Candle-Light* that he had been involved with on stage further reflect this conception of what he had to offer the studio.

The most frustrating assignment Wodehouse received in Hollywood was to the musical *Rosalie*. He had already been involved with the stage version, contributing lyrics with Ira Gershwin. Inspired by the recent American tour by Queen Marie of Romania, *Rosalie* had been a stage hit with Marilyn Miller in the title role, running for a year in New York. Work on the film version began in 1928, and the picture, starring Marion Davies, went into an aborted production. Other than deciding it should be rewritten for the screen, there was little consensus about the project. On August 16, 1930, a temporary complete screenplay was



Marilyn Miller in the stage version of *Rosalie* (1928)

produced, from a treatment by Hans Kraly, revised by Robert Z. Leonard, with dialogue by Wodehouse, Markey, and Fred Niblo, Jr.

In October, Wodehouse's contract was renewed for another six months, and Thalberg outlined his own proposed adaptation at a story conference in Santa Barbara, commissioning Wodehouse to write *Rosalie* as a novelette. Assigning a noted writer to such a version was not common but hardly an exceptional practice, allowing the publication of a literary tie-in with the film's planned release to gain extra publicity by the name of its author. To Wodehouse, the task was onerous, and by then he was calling *Rosalie* “a perfectly rotten picture.” Wodehouse turned in the completed work at the end of January 1931, and it remains unpublished.

In the novelette two West Point cadets, Runt O'Day and wealthy Bob Warwick, are vacationing in Romanza, a

principality desperately in need of cash. Although Princess Rosalie is to marry for reasons of state, her mother Honoria, who rules the royal household, would be content for her to marry Warwick. He avoids a reception in his honor to visit the Liberty Festival instead. There he sees a girl in danger from mashers and rescues her, not realizing it is Rosalie, angry with him for avoiding her earlier. They meet for an idyllic day on an island and fall in love, and then a misunderstanding separates them. They next meet when Bob is assigned to escort the family on a tour at West Point, and the two resolve to marry, Rosalie deciding to give up her throne for love.

Hardly vintage Wodehouse, the novelette lacked the layered plot and character interaction typical of even his short stories. Nonetheless, considering the constraints involved in working from an outline, the result has his typical charm, despite the predictability of the story. He takes advantage of the prose form to recast some of the story, for instance adding the day on an island to confirm their love, rather than having them simply meet briefly at a festival. Wodehouse also suggested that Rosalie be shown on parade in Romanza, rather than relying on the standard scenes of West Point that Thalberg preferred. The story reads like a regular romance, without the sense of a need for breaks for songs or musical numbers.

Rosalie was cancelled by the studio as musicals seemed to be in decline, and when it was finally filmed in 1937, it deviated significantly from this outline. *Rosalie* became a dancer, and the plot began and ended in the United States, with a section in Romanza in the middle; only the ending at West Point had anything in common with the outline Wodehouse had known. Similarly, the play's original songs were replaced with new Cole Porter compositions.

At the beginning of 1936, Paramount released *Anything Goes*, although the credits did not mention Wodehouse; Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse had won sole credit for their revision of the Guy Bolton-Wodehouse book when the play opened on Broadway in 1934. *Anything Goes* was subsequently reissued for television in a shortened version under the title *Tops is the Limit*, eliminating the title song. A sea-going vessel is the setting for the antics of a man (Bing Crosby) who 1) accidentally remains aboard while seeing his boss off on a trip, necessitating disguise; 2) falls in love with a woman who seemed to be in danger (Ida Lupino), 3) is helped in his romance by another woman (Ethel Merman) who loves him, and 4) becomes involved with a gangster disguised as a minister (Charlie Ruggles). While the diverse plot strands and the songs merge surprisingly well, neither Lewis Milestone's direction nor the cast have the necessary panache or style required for a memorable example of the musical comedy genre. The picture moves from scene to scene with little logical motivation, and only Merman is ideally cast



Bing Crosby and Ethel Merman in the 1936 film version of Anything Goes

(repeating her Broadway role); Lupino is merely decorative, while Ruggles is unbelievable as anything more than a bumbler. Arthur Treacher plays Lupino's protector, a stiff Englishman eager to learn American slang, in a foreshadowing of the Jeeves role he would undertake shortly at Fox. *Anything Goes* was only modestly profitable at the box-office.

During the 1950s three new versions of *Anything Goes* appeared on the screen. An hour-long version was made for television in 1950, for the NBC series *Musical Comedy Time*, with Martha Raye in the Ethel Merman role. Another NBC version of similar length, broadcast on February 28, 1954, for *The Colgate Comedy Hour*, starred an aging Merman in her original role, this time opposite a miscast Frank Sinatra in the gangster role; it survives in kinescope form and provides a lesson in the inherent drawbacks of paring back a musical to a mere three-quarters of an hour, emphasizing the songs. The dialogue is minimized, leaving the surviving characterization and humor sillier than it would otherwise seem, although a few moments of verve sporadically triumph over the compressed, quick staging. However, unlike the movie versions, this more closely resembles the original stage play.

Finally, a new movie version of *Anything Goes* was remade exactly twenty years after the 1936 original with the same star, Bing Crosby, in an adaptation even less faithful to the play. Although this time Wodehouse was credited, and five instead of four of the Cole Porter songs were retained, the comedic content was further diminished by replacing the original plot with a trite story of two show-business stars who search for an appropriate feminine lead in their new production.

IN ADDITION to his work for the musical comedy stage, Wodehouse transformed many foreign plays that also proved popular, thanks to his touch, on the English-speaking stage. Of all these plays, none has had as many screen incarnations as his version of Jacques Deval's *Dans sa cadeur naive*, which Wodehouse and Valerie Wyngate adapted as the stage play *Her Cardboard Lover* for producer-director Gilbert Miller. It opened on Broadway on March 21, 1927, running 152 performances. Jeanne Eagels was the feminine lead Simone, and Stanley Logan and Leslie Howard were the philandering ex-husband Tony and cardboard lover Andre, respectively. Wodehouse was so confident in his rewriting that, prior to the opening, he bought a one-third share for \$10,000 and was soon making \$2500 a week profit.

The Cardboard Lover was first brought to the screen the next year, in 1928, in a 71-minute silent version crediting the original Deval source. However, as adapted by Carey Wilson, the gender base is switched; instead of two men fighting over a woman, it is two women dueling for a

champion tennis player, Andre. (Probably this was the reason for the title modification from *Her* to *The*.) Marion Davies stars as Sally, a flapper on tour in Monte Carlo, where she becomes determined to secure the tennis player's autograph. This leads her to follow him and learn of the flagrant infidelity of his amour, Simone, in this case to an aging opera singer whose inscription in her autograph book she tears out because it was ungentlemanly. Continuing her pursuit, Sally calls "Bunko!" in the casino and finds herself \$50,000 in debt. Andre saves her, but only after securing her promise to help keep him from Simone. But it is a pledge he wishes she would forget, for Simone has him firmly in her grip; even a vicious parody of her mannerisms, with Sally in a costume evoking Simone, fails to turn him. Simone need only announce she is on her way for Andre to once again become her slave, until she walks out when Sally appears in pajamas and brushing her teeth as if she had taken up a liberal residence with Andre. Not until Sally finally punches Andre, and he pushes her in response so that she falls, does he realize he loves her and only her. She takes her time about her recovery, knowing she has won all his love as she is surrounded by flowers and gifts. Davies gives a riotous performance, and it justifies her reputation as a skilled comedienne. Nils Asther fits the role of Andre, as does Jetta Goudal as Simone, and the movie steadily builds momentum as it captures the essential silliness and delight of the play under Robert Z. Leonard's direction. *The Cardboard Lover* was almost in release when the play opened in England on August 21, 1928, with Tallulah Bankhead taking the feminine lead.

The first sound film production of Wodehouse was *Her Cardboard Lover*, released by British Photophone in England in April 1929. This five-minute short, directed by Clayton Hutton and shot in Berlin, featured a scene in which Bankhead as Simone undressed while talking on the telephone.

Shortly after Wodehouse left M-G-M following his unsatisfactory year as a screenwriter, production began on another version of the play. Released in 1932, the new film was retitled *The Passionate Plumber* (a separate French version, *Le Plombier Amoureux*, was also produced), with Irene Purcell appearing as the feminine lead, here named Patricia Jardine. Buster Keaton and Jimmy Durante headed the cast, the first of the three pictures in which they were paired. The picture was filmed in a mere nineteen days, and placing Keaton in this property was a measure of his importance to the studio; he was still a box-office draw, but well aware that he was miscast. Initially, Keaton and Durante seem imposed on the structure of the play, with it taking secondary importance to their antics. The casting becomes less intrusive as the movie's plot develops in Laurence E. Johnson's adaptation. As "Elmer," played by Keaton, falls in love with Patricia, taking on the play's role



Leslie Howard and Tallulah Bankhead in the 1928 London stage version of *Her Cardboard Lover*



Irene Purcell, Gilbert Roland, and Buster Keaton in
The Passionate Plumber (1932)

of her “cardboard lover,” he eventually wins her heart and saves her from a liaison with caddish Tony Lagorce (Gilbert Roland).

In 1942, after Bankhead had replayed the lead role the previous year in a summer stock revival in the United States, M-G-M remade *Her Cardboard Lover*. It was the last Wodehouse movie made in Hollywood. George Cukor, who had previously directed the play on stage, helmed the picture, the only production he did in both mediums. The movie is amusing in its first hour, as songwriter Terry Trindale (Robert Taylor) impulsively puts himself in monetary debt to radiant socialite Consuelo Croyden (Norma Shearer) to announce his love. To pay off his debt, she hires him as her secretary and asks him to pose as her fiancé, because she finds roguish suitor Tony Barling (George Sanders) irresistible despite knowing he is a cad. Since Consuelo is drawn toward both Terry and Tony, the plot is not amenable to a ready resolution in a series of farcical boudoir situations. The script places Taylor in awkward positions, such as the pajama scene, that in the hands of Marion Davies in the 1928 version had been so delightful. Veering in new plot directions, the delicate balance necessary to the comedy collapses in the last half-hour, leaving a sense of disappointment in the viewer.

Several of the plays Wodehouse revised were adapted from the Hungarian. In each, Wodehouse used a translation, the original serving primarily as a plot source. In Chapter 3 of *Bring on the Girls*, he writes, “You know what stinkers these Hungarian books are. I had to invent practically a new story.”

At the end of 1930, while under contract to M-G-M, Wodehouse sold the studio all his rights in *Candle-Light*. The studio also bought the remaining screen rights for Wodehouse’s own 1929 adaptation of the Siegfried Geyer play. The Broadway version adapted by Wodehouse for producer Gilbert Miller at The Empire Theater in New

York had starred Gertrude Lawrence, Leslie Howard, and Reginald Owen. Wodehouse was assigned to prepare a screenplay version starring John Gilbert.

Candle-Light defies all the conventions associated with Wodehouse. It is frankly continental in its outlook, concerning several attempts at seduction, most notably by the valet, Josef, who believes Marie is a titled married woman, a type which has always held a secret appeal for him. Josef impersonates his employer, Prince Rudolf Haseldorf-Schlobitten, for Marie’s benefit, and when Rudolf unexpectedly returns home early, he sympathetically tries to help Josef by pretending to be him. Marie secretly reveals to Rudolf that she is in fact only Mitzie, the maid of Baroness Von Rischenheim, who is also married and is secretly being courted by Rudolf. Marie, based on her believed social affinity with Rudolf, makes a play for his affections, which he is on the verge of accepting twice despite his assurances to Josef that he respects his servant’s clear affection for her. The only aspect of *Candle-Light* typical of Wodehouse is the mixture of classes, with master and servant becoming involved in the affairs of the other. There is a moral at the end, with Rudolf saying, “Take it from me, Josef, if a woman is the right woman her rank doesn’t matter a hang.” However, this is the only moral in *Candle-Light*, whose title is reputedly an old maxim, “Choose neither women nor linen by candle-light.”

The play was finally filmed at Universal in 1933 as *By Candlelight*. The project arrived at the studio in a manner that must have inspired Wodehouse in his short story, “The Castaways”: Universal traded to M-G-M its rights to Rider Haggard’s *She* for *Candle-Light*, then discovered it didn’t own *She* after all, and had to pay cash for *Candle-Light*. Robert Wyler, the director who had convinced the studio to make *Candle-Light*, was replaced after a week of shooting by the studio’s horror ace, James Whale, who proceeded to complete the picture in a month. This was one of the last years *Candle-Light* could have been transferred to the screen; its sexual immorality would have been discouraged or banned outright by the new production code that was shortly to provide Hollywood’s self-censorship.

By Candlelight is initially amusing, as the audience sees the well-practiced interplay between prince and butler to ensure the success of a lady’s seduction, with the butler Josef hoping to be like his master one day, imitating all his lines and moves in a mirror. The prince, as played by Nils Asther, is much harsher and less sympathetic than in the play. Paul Lukas, as Josef, although far from optimal casting, proves better in the role than his persona would lead one to expect. Elissa Landi, in the feminine lead, as Marie, the servant imitating nobility, fails to realize the role’s potential. The movie, by concentrating simply on the central gag of the valet imitating the prince, loses its focus in shifting away from the play’s sophistication to examine the

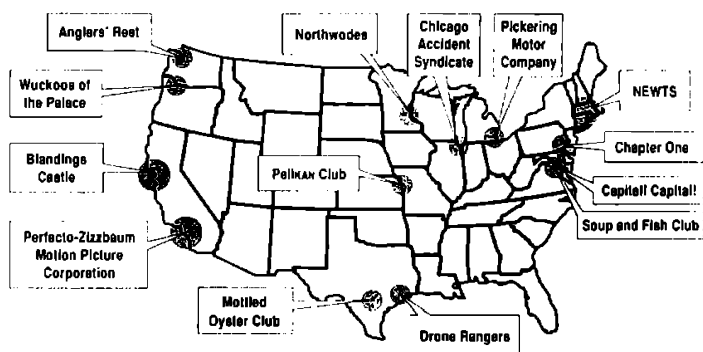
results of the exchanges of identity on all of the characters and the parallel couples. It was this complexity that had sustained the length of the play, and with its loss, *By Candlelight* gradually comes to resemble a Cinderella story more than a Lubitsch-style farce. In the play, Wodehouse had sought to erase class differences by demonstrating their interchangeability through the similar behavior and instincts at all levels. In the movie, this playfulness is absent, and what works for the prince does not work for the butler; the importance of class difference is reinforced and justified. Subsequent television adaptations include two in 1953 for *Broadway Television Theatre* and *Kraft Theater*. Another in 1955 for the ABC series *Pond's Theatre* includes a situation similar to one in *Brother Alfred*, proving an imagined person's non-existence when their reputation switches from a convenience to become troublesome.

Ironically, one of Wodehouse's unproduced plays, *Arthur*, had its only appearance on television, as a 1960 segment of the hour-long anthology series *Ford Startime*. Retitled *Dear Arthur*, it was based on Wodehouse's adaptation of a Ferenc Molnar play, and starred Rex Harrison, one of the few actors the easy-going Wodehouse openly detested. Harrison's persona was the opposite of the types Wodehouse had created in his own musical comedies. Yet he could have asked for no better actor in the role of Arthur.

Dear Arthur, as adapted for a one-hour television format by Gore Vidal, is a surprising story of a father and daughter, both of whom are blackguards. Sarah Marshall plays the golddigger, a widow whose husband had left her an income from a tin mine. Her father, as played by Harrison, is a smooth ex-convict who passes himself off as her attorney, and, with their true relationship a secret, the two are widely suspected of a romantic involvement. Harrison concocts a plan for the ultimate marriage of convenience to Arthur, an explorer perpetually away from home—a non-existent man whose history he invents. Soon others come forward as former acquaintances of Arthur, including a woman who says her daughter is his illegitimate son. Jealousy over Arthur adds to a wealthy young American's ardent wooing of the supposed neglected wife, and helps to bring them together. Although the play reaches a natural conclusion at this point at the end of the third act, there is a fourth act in which complications ensue after an apparent lover's rift. In the fourth act, the plot expands from simple romantic comedy to include a political dimension, and Arthur is reported to have broadcast a speech denouncing Prince Rainier and urging democracy for Monaco. This was perhaps Wodehouse's jibe at his own World War II German broadcasts; in the original play it was radio speeches by both left and right. Ultimately Harrison must succeed in killing off his own imaginary creation to enable the union of the couple.

Supplementing the story as a type of Greek chorus is wealthy socialite Angela Baddeley, who ends as the perfect next victim of Harrison's latest scam. The program as directed by Bretaigne Windust and Gordon Rigsby is amusing and delightful, with many lines reminiscent of Wodehouse, including his adage that a man has no use for brains—they just unsettle him (coming from Harrison as advice to his daughter).

Not considered here is the frequent process by which Wodehouse's plays became novels and vice-versa; some movies were from plays coauthored from his own stories, such as *Brother Alfred* (1932) and *Leave It to Me* (1933). Screen adaptations of Wodehouse plays offer larger questions of authorship since his hand was only one of several involved in the original. Yet the range of such films demonstrates both the rich inspiration they provide as well as the many directions in which Wodehouse's theatrical work took him.



Chapters Corner

CONDUCTED BY NEIL MIDKIFF

Our chapters are listed in alphabetical order below. The lack of a news report may not indicate an inactive chapter, but perhaps may serve to spur chapters to appoint a special correspondent to keep *Plum Lines* readers informed of their activities.

Anglers' Rest

(Seattle and vicinity)

Contact: Susan Collicott

Contact: Jan Kaufman, president

At our recent winter meeting at Kathy Haug's, Nancy Leone brought a paperback mystery which deals with the theft a Wodehouse first edition as a part of the convoluted plot about a London publisher. The author is Julie Kaewert and *Unbound* is part of her series on various crimes connected with book collecting. *Unbound* describes *Indiscretions of Archie* and mentions the misprint in the first American edition on page thirty-one of "friend" instead of "fried potatoes." There are still some mysteries connected to this edition, as McIlvaine describes it as having a dust wrapper with a colored drawing of a couple on a golf course, but *Unbound* says "Under the pristine plastic-covered jacket, on the orange cloth spine, is a drawing of Archie in his boxer shorts, looking surprised." Later, the hero offers his beloved some Wodehouse to read. "She said brightly, 'It would be wonderful to simply read through an entire book, with nothing more to worry about than when I had to stop reading.' 'It's settled then. *The Crime Wave at Blandings*. Nothing more demanding than Lord Emsworth and his pig.' 'I like it already,' she said."

Photo by Jan Kaufman

Contact: Erik R. Quick, president

Contact: Susan and Daniel Cohen

New members were welcomed, important announcements made. Everyone was told about the release of the *Wodehouse Playhouse* videos and where and how to order them. It was fun on this winter day projecting ourselves into summer, imagining ourselves at the Toronto convention having a grand time. The Chaps can hardly wait for the big biennial bash.

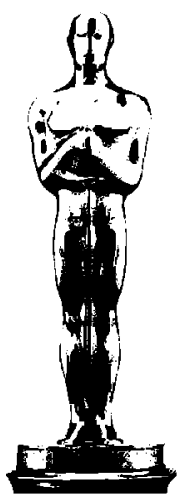


The *Everything Golf Mini Book* and a videotape of the 1936 one-hour version of *Thank You, Jeeves* were given as door prizes, winners smiling as they grabbed their loot. We toasted Hal Cazalet and his fiancée. The one sad note of the day was the announcement that Michael Harwood, former owner of our restaurant, a man who helped Chapter One in many ways when we were first getting started, had died in December.

The day's talk, "Expletives and Wodehouse," presented by Walter Stevenson, alias Egbert Mulliner. Making his point via "The Smile that Wins," Egbert illustrated how, unlike many modern writers, Wodehouse was able to achieve the effect of swear words without using any. A well placed "Pooh" exceeds a — any day. "An overfed bohunkus," a "dash my buttons," or "silly ass" is as lacerating as —. And if you really want to out-obscure the obscene try the five letter "Tchah!" Pronounced properly, or should I say, improperly, it will make your enemies reel. Egbert did an excellent job and received a much deserved strong round of applause. To which I can only respond with two four-letter words: Hear! Hear!

We began our March 23 meeting on a somber note. Ed Whittaker, Chapter One's Gally Threepwood, died on Valentine's Day, the same day P. G. Wodehouse died on in 1975. Ed was one of the founding members of Chapter One, a long-time member of TWS, and a devoted TWS convention-goer. Witty, clever, with the world's greatest laugh, Ed was a very special person and a good friend. A donation from Chapter One has been made to the American Diabetes Association in his memory. A lovely note from Karen Byrne, Ed's wife, was read aloud. We hope she will join us again soon. Since no one can ever take Ed's place we are retiring his nom. Ed Whittaker will forever be Chapter One's only Gally Threepwood.

One of the bright spots of the meeting was announcing that we raised ninety dollars for the care and feeding of our adopted newts who live in the lap of luxury at the Philadelphia Zoo.



Since our meeting was held on the same day the Academy Awards were given out we had our own Wodehousian version of the Oscars called: AND THE WINNER IS. The moment for glamor arrived. A huge cut-out of an Art Deco gold figure who simply had to be related to Oscar was set up.

Dave McDonough gave one of his learned speeches, including a Wodehouse Oscar trivia question. He mentioned golf story two-reelers. A German Wodehouse movie. *Summer Lightning* done in

Swedish, featuring a swine named Helen of Troy. Boris Karloff in *The Prince and Betty*. There were silent PGW musicals. *A Damsel In Distress* is probably the best-known PGW movie. And he had much more fascinating stuff.

Next, Plummies brought out their movie lists. Some of their choices of best actor and actress to play a Wodehouse character were absolutely inspired. How about Hermione Gingold as Aunt Dahlia? Or Diana Rigg as Lady Constance? Alistair Sim as Lord Emsworth? Or Jimmy Stewart? Adolphe Menjou as Gally? A young Vincent Price as Jeeves? Or William Powell? Danny Kaye as Bertie? Noel Coward as Psmith? Peter O'Toole as Uncle Fred? Jack Carson as Stinker Pinker? Charles Laughton as Sir Roderick Glossop? Louise Brooks as Bobby Wickham? Or Carole Lombard? Miranda Richardson as Madeleine Bassett? Joan Crawford or Prunella Scales as Aunt Agatha? The suggestions kept coming. We were as sparkling as a Hollywood gala.

Though the competition was tough and the originality high, no one worked harder or came up with more intriguing possibilities than Carolyn Pokrivchak. Consider this: Laughing Gravy, a dog in an Our Gang movie, as Oscar the Wonder Poodle. So Carolyn won the prize. Not a gold-plated statuette. Rather, she won a book about him, *The Academy Awards Handbook: Winners and Losers from 1927 to Today*. Nothing at that meager event in Los Angeles the same evening could equal this.

Our next meeting will be Sunday, May 18th, 1:00 p.m., Dark Horse Restaurant. New members always welcome.

The Chicago Accident Syndicate

(Chicago and thereabouts)

Contact: Daniel & Tina Garrison

No chapter news received, but please note Dan's new e-mail address; the old "nwu.edu" one will no longer reach him.

The Clients of Adrian Mulliner

(for enthusiasts of both PGW and Sherlock Holmes)

Contact: Marilyn MacGregor

The Drone Rangers

(Houston and vicinity)

Newsletter: *Dronestar*, edited by Toni & Bill Rudersdorf

Contact: Toni Rudersdorf

At our monthly meeting Jan. 31 a good time was had by all. We met at Barnes and Noble, where they supply us with hot coffee, a comfortable meeting place, and discounts on the books. One of the managers is the beautiful and generous Elizabeth. I say generous because she kindly told everyone about the Overlook books on sale for half-price at Half Price Bookstores. We always have a good time, but last night everyone joined in to discuss *Meet Mr. Mulliner* and that does raise the enjoyment level considerably. There have been meetings when Lady Constance and Sally seemed to be doing a duet. Lady Constance claimed to have written a paper on the book in question, however it looked, to this reporter, that she quoted Wodehouse in the introduction twice and then proceeded to quote two pages of sentences from the stories for people to guess the story from which they came. The "speech" went over pretty well since, as I said, it was 99% Wodehouse. It ended with a page of cryptograms that most had to take home. The *pièce de résistance* of the evening, however was an original talk, with hours of research, no doubt, on what the man about town was wearing. Our very handsome and very own man about town John Moore did the honors. Afterwards everyone gathered around the table, browsing, sluicing (coffee only, very unWodehouselike) and generally having a good time.

—reported by Anne Bianchi

The New England Wodehouse Thingummy Society (NEWTS)

(Boston and elsewhere in New England)

Contact: Anne Cotton, president

The Northwodes

(St. Paul, Minneapolis, and vicinity)

Contact: Kristine Fowler

The Perfecto-Zizzbaum Motion Picture Corporation

(Los Angeles, California, and vicinity)

Contact: Melissa D. Aaron

We continue to have our meetings at 12:30 on the second Sunday of every month, at Vroman's Bookstore, 695 E. Colorado Blvd., Pasadena. Our future selections are:

May: *Full Moon*

June: "Bingo and the Peke Crisis" and "Sonny Boy," from *Eggs, Beans and Crumpets*

Our spiffy website can still be found at <http://www.lahacal.org/wodehouse>. Wodehousians interested in our meetings and special events should proceed to our website and get on to our mailing list. We have a calendar which sends reminders about meetings, books and events.

The Mottled Oyster Club

(San Antonio and South Texas)

Contact: James P. Robinson III

The Pelikan Club

(Kansas City and vicinity)

Contact: Sallie Hobbs

The Pickering Motor Company

(Detroit and vicinity)

Contact: Elliott Milstein

As before, our motor car specialists are working hard to make the August 2003 TWS Convention in Toronto a memorable experience. Help their planning! Register early!

Also note that Elliott's email has changed since previous announcements of the Convention; please use this yahoo.com address until further notice.

The Soup & Fish Club

(northern Virginia area)

Contact: Meredith Mengel

The Wuckoos of the Palace

(greater Portland, Oregon area)

Former president: Dennis McDougall

Obituary

"We thought he was immortal"

Edward Whittaker, a resident of New Britain, Pa., known for years in TWS by the nom Gally, died on Valentine's Day, 2003. A man of many interests, Ed loved covered bridges, picnics, carousels, and being with people. He is remembered for his sense of humor which sustained him and his family to the end of his life. A devoted fan of P. G. Wodehouse, Ed was an early member of TWS and a founding member of Chapter One in Philadelphia. His wife, Karen Byrne, also an avid Wodehouse fan, remains a member of TWS and Chapter One. Until Ed became ill, he and Karen regularly attended TWS conventions. In honor of Ed, Chapter One will retire his nom. He will always be Gally to us. If there is a special place for people who die on Valentine's Day, then Ed Whittaker has joined P. G. Wodehouse at whatever passes as the Anglers' Rest there.

Membership Survey

Among the many enclosures mailed with this issue, be sure to find a copy of the membership survey. Our officers are eager to hear from you so that we can make our Society and its journal even more enjoyable and useful!

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Don't keep our friends in The Pickering Motor Company in suspense!

Help our Detroit chapter plan for the TWS Convention, August 8-10, 2003, in Toronto, Ontario, Canada by registering today. A convention registration form is enclosed with this issue.

Volunteer Officers

President of The Wodehouse Society:

Susan Cohen

Information and new-member inquiries:

Amy Plofker

Dues payments and changes in contact information:

Gary Hall and Linda Adam-Hall

Original contributions to *Plum Lines*:

David Landman, SS

Other contributions to *Plum Lines*:

Ed Ratcliffe, OM

Photos, illustrations, chapter news for *Plum Lines*:

Neil Midkiff, GW

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

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