Plum Lines

The quarterly journal of The Wodehouse Society

Volume 39 Number 1 Spring 2018

The Times of P. G. Wodehouse

BY CHRISTOPHER W. DUEKER, MD

TWS CONVENTION, WASHINGTON D.C.
OCTOBER 21, 2017

REVIEWED BY SAFE PLACES PROTOCOL
TO ENSURE AVOIDANCE OF TRIGGER WORDS

This is the first of several talks we'll be publishing from the 2017 Mr. Wodehouse Goes to Washington convention of The Wodehouse Society. Dr. Dueker (nom de Plum Anatole) has entertained and educated us at several prior conventions, with talks on diverse topics such as fish ("Remembrance of Fish Past," Hollywood, 2005) and mumps ("Of Mumps and Men," Chicago, 2013). Chris's dry wit and well-researched information make him a popular Wodehousean speaker.

Time is one of the world's foundational phenomena. Its passage can be seen in our gardens, our pets, and the faces of our friends and relations.

Man in his hubristic, fallen state has attempted to understand and control time. We have had a variety of calendars that won't work even with leap years. Timepieces must be adjusted down to leap seconds. The equinoxes and solstices miss by days. Deep thinkers thought the world would collapse as we entered 2000. We are left with the international Ponzi scheme of Daylight Savings Time.

Any author writing a series of books will be affected by time and its passage. The skilled author uses time to improve his writing and increase his popularity. The hack writer moves his work to airport bookshelves or writes for television (especially for news programs). Writing sagas introduces problems of aging characters and sequencing of events. Ngaio Marsh, in an essay on detective development, cited an unnamed source who had calculated that Hercule Poirot was more than 140 years old when he retired.

P. G. Wodehouse wrote with care and skill for over 75 years and produced more than 90 books. Naturally, time affected his writings.

My initial goal was to study time science and then to observe its applicability to Wodehouse. Very soon, I began to appreciate the complexity of time study. Einstein worked extensively in the science of time. Long ago, I had learned to avoid studying anything that Einstein found interesting. My plans narrowed. I was able to find several time theories used by Wodehouse. Often, he utilized theories that had not yet been formally identified. Some of these theories are illustrated here.

The vastness of PGW's world precludes a complete recap of his time-related or time-affected writings. Here you will find a Whitman sampler with examples from history, time travel, and short stories and sagas.

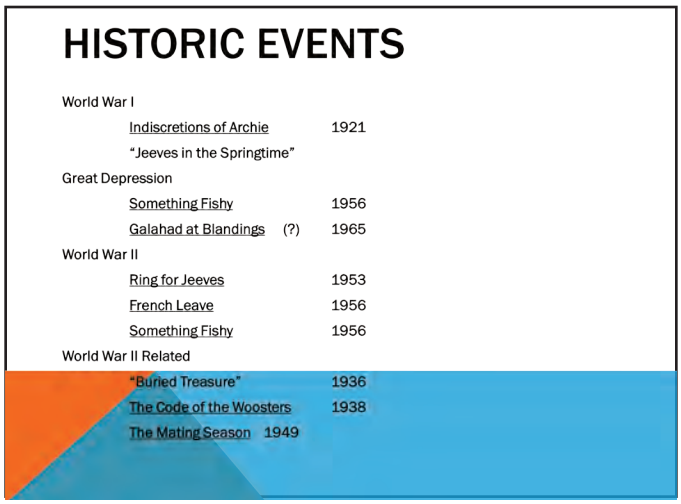
History

History results from the progression of time. Authors can embrace it or ignore it. Wodehouse did both. His early stories involved contemporary events. Later, he wrote of historical and contemporary times. Wodehouse was not in England after the 1930s. Any later stories set there involved artificial reality.

One of my original goals was to find historical references by Wodehouse. I had the impression that PGW did not pay much attention to history. My idea was shared by others. In his excellent introduction to *What Ho! The Best of P. G. Wodehouse* (2000), Stephen Fry said that "Wodehouse wrote throughout the First World War, yet not a mention is made of it."

This is not quite true. The First World War was frequently referenced in *Indiscretions of Archie*. This book is what the literati call an episodic novel: several short stories are modified and linked to form a novel. Eight of the book's chapters have WWI connections.

Something Fishy (1957) is Wodehouse's most precisely dated novel. It involves a marriage tontine conceived on September 10, 1929, weeks before the market crash that led to the Great Depression. The book's modern times begin on June 10, 1955. Both time and the deprivations of war have depleted the ranks of the participant bachelors. The female lead, Jane Benedict, was taken to the United States early in England's participation in WWII.



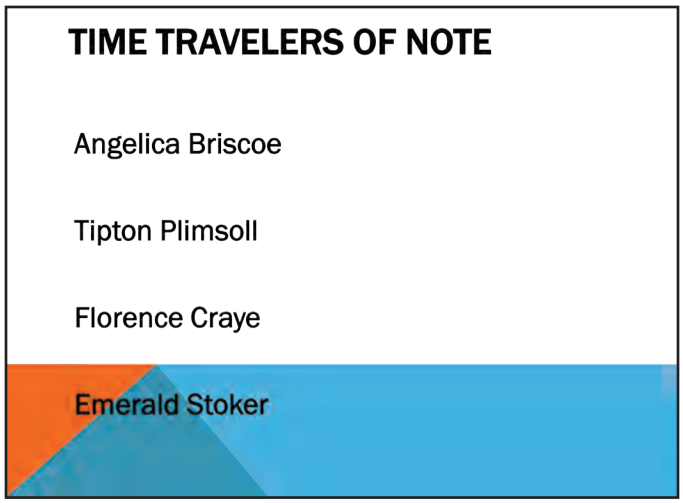
There are confusingly vague references in *Galahad at Blandings* (1965) that might refer to the Great Depression.

WWII was indirectly and directly referenced in novels and a story. The hero of *French Leave* (1956) had been active in the war. *Ring for Jeeves* (1953), the only Jeeves novel without an appearance by Bertie Wooster, includes topical notations that suggest a post-war time. *Ring for Jeeves* has unique features which weaken it as a reference book. Jeeves is asked about his activity in WWI and he replies, "I dabbled in it to a certain extent, m'lord." And yet, Jeeves's employment history and remarks from "Jeeves Takes Charge" (1916) make WWI military activity unlikely.

Time Travel

Some scientists, and many free thinkers, believe that time travel will be possible. Many of Wodehouse's characters appeared several times over the years.

Angelica Briscoe, daughter of Rev. Briscoe of Maiden Eggesford, first appears in "Tried in the Furnace" (1935). She manipulates both Pongo and Barmy while she is engaged to her second cousin. Each Drone later recalls Angelica: *Barmy in Wonderland* (1952) and *Service With a Smile* (1961). Angelica last appears in *Aunts Aren't Gentlemen* (1974). She remains an attractive troublemaker.



Tipton Plimsoll, an American Drone, travels a complicated course of romance from 1947 (*Full Moon*) to 1974 (*Aunts Aren't Gentlemen*). In *Full Moon*, he meets Veronica Wedge at Blandings and they become engaged for a formal wedding. In "Birth of a Salesman" (1950), Lord Emsworth is in New York for Tipton's wedding. *Galahad at Blandings* (1965) begins with Tipton in a New York City jail after attending the wedding of Lady Constance. He is bailed out by Lord Emsworth and returns to Blandings with the intention of marrying Veronica. Confusion ensues. The happy couple elopes to a registry office in London. Then, *Aunts Aren't Gentlemen* (1974) begins with Bertie afflicted with spots. He recalls that Tipton once had spots and he calls him for a medical reference. On the previous night, Bertie had attended a London celebration of Mr. Plimsoll's engagement to Veronica Wedge. We shall never know the conclusion of Tipton's romantic life.

The earliest Wooster/Jeeves story, "Jeeves Takes Charge" (1916), finds Bertie engaged to Florence Craye. She turns out to be the daughter of a former employer of Jeeves. Florence began her literary life in a Reggie Pepper story, "Disentangling Old Percy" (1912). Over the years, she will have several engagements to Bertie and others. Florence's last appearance involves a failed engagement in *Much Obliged, Jeeves* (1971).

The charming Pauline Stoker is an only child in *Thank You, Jeeves* (1934). In *Stiff Upper Lip, Jeeves* (1963), her younger sister, Emerald, elopes with Gussie Fink-Nottle. Emerald's amazing young life stands alone in the annals of obstetrics and pediatrics. During this episode of time travel, Bertie has aged less than five years.

Blandings Castle

The Blandings saga began with a novel, *Something Fresh* (1915), and continued as a mix of novels

and short stories. At the time of his death in 1975, Wodehouse was working on a Blandings novel. Many of the time complications in the saga require use of my Unifying Theory.

Wodehouse began to paint himself into a corner in *Something Fresh* when he had Lord Emsworth be at Eton in the 1860s. That would have made him over seventy in the first novel. In the preface to a revised edition of *Something Fresh*, PGW acknowledged this problem. Later novels give 60 or 61 as his age based on specific assertions or recollections.

Butler Beach never has a precise age. His service time is a puzzle. He was with Major-General Magnus in 1912 and the context suggests he was in a responsible position such as butler. His Blandings service is usually stated as 18 to 20 years. It seems to be a stable period. Does time stand still in Blandings?

Short Stories

The short stories appeared first in magazines and were then in book format. The stories were published in the United States and England. Multiple publications furthered the variations. Tony Ring, in *A Simplified Chronology of P. G. Wodehouse Fiction* (2011), notes that book collections could lag several years behind initial magazine publication. For Blandings, this means that short stories (e.g., "The Custody of the Pumpkin" [1924 magazine, 1935 book]) might either precede or follow novels like *Summer Lightning* (1929).

Changes from magazine to book can cause complications. The book form of "The Custody of the Pumpkin" refers to Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal. These references are not present in the magazine version. The New Deal is briefly noted in the U.S. book version of "The Crime Wave at Blandings" but not in the English magazine or book. Oddly, *What Ho!* (an English imprint) reproduces the American version.

"Birth of a Salesman" (1950) is a Blandings story without Blandings. It contains incompatible references. Freddie is said to have been married three years (wed in the 1924 story "The Custody of the Pumpkin"). Lord Emsworth is limited in how much money he can take out of England; that was a post-WWII law.

A Pig in Time

For many enthusiasts, the Empress of Blandings is Wodehouse's most appealing character. A Berkshire pig, she breaks Lord Emsworth's heart in "Pig-Hoo-o-o-o-ey!" (1927), and she stays on through the remaining episodes of the Blandings saga.

The Empress wins first prize at the 87th Shropshire Agriculture Show in the aforementioned story and repeats this feat in the two successive shows. Mark Hodson's annotations at Madame Eulalie explain that the 87th Shropshire Show would have been in 1962. PGW never thought anyone would bother to figure that out when he shot an arrow in the sky for dates.

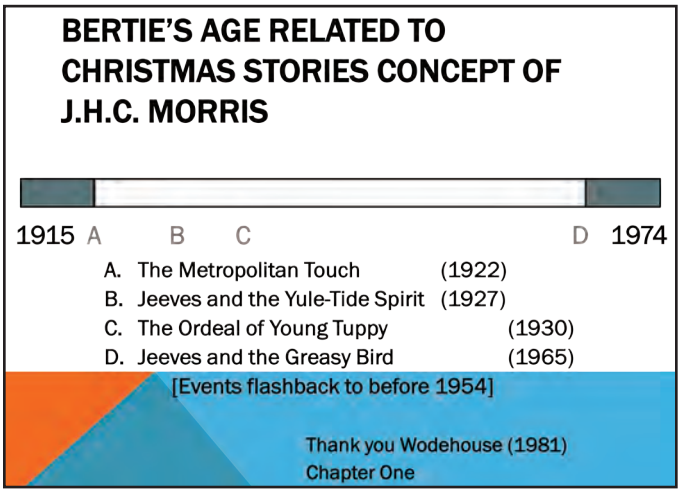
Galahad at Blandings would have been the fourth contest for the Empress. She did not compete. Perhaps Lord Emsworth had lost his competitive edge. The Empress may have retired to write her reminiscences or to move into a new career as a time-traveling pig.

Wooster and Jeeves

The Wooster/Jeeves saga began with short stories in 1915 and moved to novels in 1934; after that, only two more short stories featured the pair. There were 35 stories. The unofficial *Enter Jeeves* (1997) collects the first eight Wooster stories and all the Reggie Pepper stories. This is a convenient volume for orientation to the saga. Publication dates and sources are provided, but Neil Midkiff has determined that most citations are not correct. Though most of the Wooster stories have fewer time complications than those from Blandings, the revisions of some stories for *The Inimitable Jeeves* (1923) altered the time sequence. Some short stories (e.g., "Leave It to Jeeves," 1916) may last a year.

Bertie's Age and Time

Determining the age of Bertie Wooster seems to be one of the most popular pastimes for fans of the saga. J. H. C. Morris, in *Thank You, Wodehouse* (1981), based a system on the Christmas stories. Because of its prominence, I have illustrated his scheme. You can quickly see the problems.

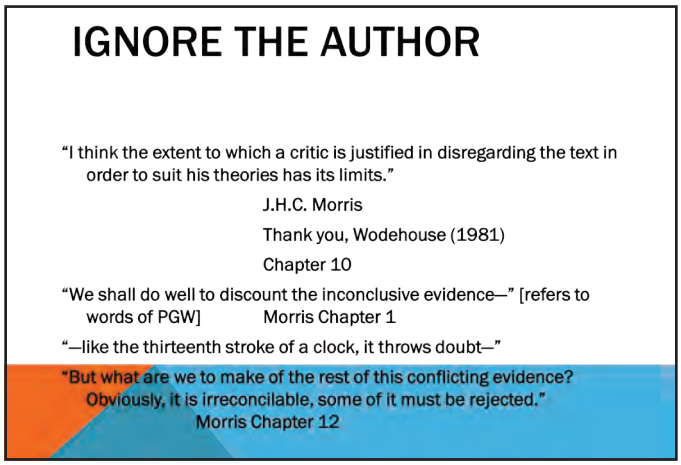


The time bar is open at the ends. Events before or after the cited stories are not included. The last Christmas story is "Jeeves and the Greasy Bird" from 1965. However, this is a flashback story which precedes

Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit (1954). Thus, any event after 1954 will not be included in the Morris scheme. There are four novels after *Feudal Spirit*.

Morris had intended that the scheme would match the duration of the saga. It does not. We simply do not know the duration. It starts with spats and ends after their demise. It includes two world wars and the birth and maturation of Emerald Stoker.

Bertie's age at the time of "Jeeves Takes Charge" can easily be determined as 24. In *Aunts Aren't Gentlemen*, Orlo is 27. Bertie was at Oxford with him. Bertie is approximately 27 when the saga ends. This demonstrates either a total disconnection of age with events or one of several alternative theories, including the variable passage of time or the related belief in episodic expansion and contraction of time. J. H. C. Morris feels that we must simply ignore the contradictions and soldier on.



Gussie

The adventures of Gussie Fink-Nottle illustrate time problems and solutions. We know Gussie as a shy newt fancier who becomes a prize-giver and suitor of Madeline Bassett.

A prominent scholar has written that the Fink-Nottle story occupies a year, or less. This belief shows the difficulty of reconciling facts of time progression. In *Right Ho, Jeeves* (1934), Gussie becomes engaged to Madeline. *The Code of the Woosters* (1938) continues the rocky romance in an autumn identified as the one following the prize-giving. Comments about splitting the atom identify *Code* as a pre-war story. Gussie appears again in *The Mating Season* (1949). This novel is well marked as a postwar tale by references to A. Duff Cooper. The season is spring. Finally, we reach *Stiff Upper Lip, Jeeves* (1963), separated by three other Wooster novels and thirteen publication years. In this summer, Gussie elopes with Emerald Stoker. Madeline becomes engaged to Spode after a close escape by Bertie.

After 29 years, including a world war, how can we condense the trials of Gussie into a year? Support comes from just a year of seasons. But, the spring and second summer are not linked to the first summer. What happened to winter? Interestingly, Sir Watkyn Bassett comments, "It's only a month or so ago that he and that aunt of his stole my cow creamer" (Chapter 23, *Stiff Upper Lip*). Could this be time going backwards?

Most likely, the story of Fink-Nottle represents event time being unrelated to calendar time.

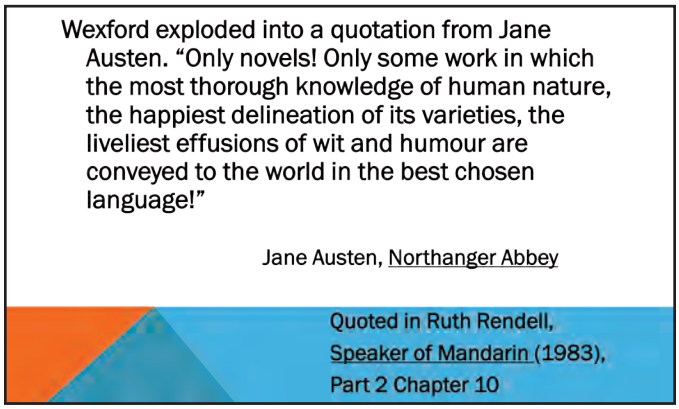
The Unifying Theory

We have now completed a short survey of P. G. Wodehouse's long engagement with time and its progression. He recognized many of the hazards and dealt with them using skill and imagination, as was his wont. The careful reader will notice complications that remain and that should be of concern. Fortunately, my Unifying Theory can be applied. The basis of this theory has been reported by others, but not its specific application to time science.

The pioneering librarians did a great service by putting Wodehouse's works in the fiction section of their facilities. Fiction makes most complications irrelevant.

What of the factual foundations of Wodehouse so carefully illustrated by Norman Murphy and others? Let's just say that fiction builds on truth and need not diminish truth.

Is fiction somehow less valuable than nonfiction? Not according to many experts. Emerson believed that "fiction reveals truths obscured by reality." Leonard Greenstone believed that life is fictional. C. S. Lewis knew that "scripture can be smuggled in by the use of fiction." Finally, consider the words of Jane Austen:



Dr. Chris Dueker and brother David at the TWS convention

Wodehouse and the Class Divide

by Todd Morning

I was intrigued when I saw David Cain's summary in the Winter 2015 *Plum Lines* of a column by Ben Macintyre titled "Upper Class Saved by Code of P. G. Wodehouse's Woosters." The column was first published in the *Times* (London), and Mr. Cain spotted it when it appeared several days later in the September 26, 2015, *Australian*. Readers of *Plum Lines* may remember that several years ago ("Wodehouse and the Spies," Summer 2013), I tried to nail down the veracity of Macintyre's claim (in his book *Double-Cross: The True Story of the D-Day Spies*) that Wodehouse was a friend of Johann "Johnny" Jebsen, a crucial spy for the Allies in World War II. Here was Macintyre again with the even bolder assertion that Wodehouse saved the British upper class by making it seem nicer than it was: "With a masterful use of language and comic timing, he set out to portray the English upper class as dotty and lovable when he knew it was nothing of the sort." This made me wonder if anyone else had joined Macintyre in accusing Wodehouse of making things easier for the British upper classes by smoothing their rough edges.

It didn't take much searching before finding a column (https://tinyurl.com/jord-pgw) by Sam Jordison in the May 14, 2014, *Guardian* called "Did P. G. Wodehouse Succeed in Creating a World Beyond Class?" Jordison's column is a sort of "book club" for comments by readers on the topic of the week. In this installment Jordison and his readers tackled the issue of Wodehouse and the British class system. One reader said: "To try to talk about [Wodehouse's work] without referencing class would be like trying to talk about *Moby-Dick* without mentioning the sea," and continued: "Some say that the First World War precipitated the gradual decline of the English privileged class system. If it did, it had considerable help from P. G. himself, whose books were a hall of mirrors far too funny to be anything but subversive." Another reader had this take: "It occurred to me how this (purposeful) affectation in the writing endears the reader to the text. This is gentle mocking, nothing hurtful or cynical, and the reader is invited to push aside any prejudices against the casual degeneracy of the idle rich characters in the book."

At the end of the article, Jordison gave his own view: "Indeed, I hope it isn't going too far to say that there's a curious sort of political wisdom in books like *The Code of the Woosters* and *Leave It to Psmith*. They mock silliness. They encourage good humor and understanding."

Both Macintyre and Jordison referred to George Orwell's famous 1945 essay, "In Defense of P. G. Wodehouse." A portion of this essay, as advertised in the title, is a response to the attacks on Wodehouse that came after the 1941 Berlin broadcasts, principally by William Connor, a columnist for the *Daily Mirror*, who denounced Wodehouse with many falsehoods in a July 1941 BBC broadcast. Much of the essay, however, is an examination of Wodehouse's attitude toward the British class system. Orwell reached the same conclusion as Macintyre: "Bertie Wooster, with his spats and his cane, is the traditional stage Englishman. But as any Englishman would see, Wodehouse intends him as a sympathetic figure, and Wodehouse's real sin has been to present the English upper classes as much nicer people than they are."

A weakness of this essay is that Orwell, by his own admission, was not up to date on his reading of Wodehouse. Consequently, he makes this misstatement: "Nowhere, as far as I know, does [Wodehouse] so much as use the word 'Fascism' or 'Nazism.'" He would, no doubt, have left out that sentence if he had read *The Code of the Woosters*, published in 1938, which featured the satirical portrait of the British Union of Fascists leader Oswald Mosley under the guise of the bully Roderick Spode. Wodehouse himself commented on Orwell's lack of timeliness in a 1955 letter to Richard Usborne:

> Have you ever noticed that all these "evaluators" like George Orwell always select for examination *Something Fresh*, which I wrote in 1915? Why not something more recent?

In a 1951 letter to Denis Mackail, Wodehouse made it clear that he didn't care for Orwell's essay:

> Another book I have re-read is George Orwell's *Dickens, Dali and Others*, in which he has a long article entitled "In Defense of P. G. Wodehouse" which is practically one long roast of your correspondent. Don't you hate the way these critics falsify facts in order to make a point? It is perfectly all right for him—or any other critic—to say that my stuff is Edwardian and out of date. I know it is. But why try to drive it home by saying that my out-of-touchness with English life is due to the fact that I did not set foot in England for sixteen years before 1939? If only these blighters would realize that I started writing about Bertie Wooster and comic Earls because I was in America and couldn't write American stories and the only English characters the American public would read about were exaggerated dudes. It's as simple as that.

This is a good place to slip in a quote from Orwell's essay with his view that American readers misinterpreted Wodehouse's views on class:

> The Earl of Emsworth is funny because an earl ought to have more dignity, and Bertie Wooster's helpless dependence on Jeeves is funny partly because the servant ought not to be superior to the master. An American reader can mistake these two, and others like them, for hostile caricatures, because he is inclined to be Anglophobe already and they correspond to his preconceived ideas about a decadent aristocracy.

The notion that Wodehouse painted a false picture of British society for Americans was mentioned by William Connor shortly after his BBC broadcast in an interview with *Time*: "There are Americans who still think English people are Bertie Wooster calling each other 'Milord.'" Connor said that he thought Wodehouse's picture of British society damaged Britain's cause in World War II by playing into the hands of American isolationists (although there is no evidence that this was the case).

A much more recent "evaluator" of Wodehouse and the British class system is Roz Tuplin. In her essay "A Fairly Unclouded Life: Upper-Class Masculinity in Crisis in the Early Jeeves and Wooster" (published as a chapter in the book *Middlebrow Wodehouse:*

P. G. Wodehouse's Work in Context, edited by Ann Rea, The Routledge Press, 2016), Tuplin has a different take on Wodehouse's views of the class system. She asserts that his stories and novels appealed to middle-class British readers because they showed the upper classes losing their grip:

> Although not entirely indistinguishable from one another, the young upper-class males in the early Jeeves and Wooster are a uniform type. They are physically and mentally weak, passive, lazy, and vulnerable. In this way, they represent a disruption of upper-class masculinity perceived by the middle class at the end of the First World War. By ridiculing the lifestyle of privileged young men and showing them failing to meet the expectations and responsibilities of their rank in society, the stories entertain a middle-class fantasy of declining aristocratic power.

David Cannadine, in his book *Aspects of Aristocracy: Grandeur and Decline in Modern Britain* (Yale, 1994), approaches the subject of Wodehouse and the class system from an entirely different angle. According to Cannadine, Wodehouse and a few other British authors are responsible for the desire so many of us have to clomp through stately homes when we visit their country:

> Only since the turn of the century has the worship of the country house become a national obsession. One way it can be traced is in the writings of such novelists as Francis Brett Young, D. H. Lawrence, Evelyn Waugh, P. G. Wodehouse, and Vita Sackville-West. In many of their books, it is the mansion, rather than the inhabitants, which dominates the story, and one of their favorite stylistic devices is to describe the scene when the hero or heroine first comes

> unsuspectingly upon the house, and to do so in enraptured prose, straining every literary artifice for high-flown effect.

Those familiar with Wodehouse's works know that his characters are more likely to view their estates as money pits. Many Wodehouse aristocrats can't wait to unload their crumbling mansions. It could be argued that on this issue Wodehouse is a social realist, accurately describing the precarious position of the twentieth-century British landed gentry. Benny Green makes this point in *P. G. Wodehouse: A Literary Biography* (The Routledge Press, 1981):

> It may safely be taken as a general rule that, heroes like Lord Emsworth apart, wherever two or more members of the landed gentry are gathered together, they are found to be trembling with eagerness to get their hooks into the nearest gaggle of rich Americans. For the English by now are sadly impoverished, reduced by the sting of death duties and the inroads of inbreeding to the unfortunate predicament of men raised in the expectancy of an unearned income which no longer exists, and which they are debarred from replacing by the very congenial dottiness which is the hallmark of their breeding.

Fairly early in his career, Wodehouse himself gave his own views on the subject of humor and the British class system. In an interview with Joyce Kilmer ("Trees"), published in the *New York Times* on November 7, 1915, Wodehouse spoke about why his fellow British humorists failed to bridge his country's class divide. He began the interview saying that he felt that American humorists such as Franklin P. Adams, George Ade, and Ring Lardner were superior to anything that Britain had to offer, because they appealed to a broad cross-section of the American public, unlike their brethren in Britain: "The English humorist leads a sheltered life. Generally he is born in the private income class." Wodehouse felt that the British humorist rarely wrote something that appealed to both the prosperous businessman and his chauffeur: "The American humorist . . . is not sheltered in this way. As a rule he is a newspaper man. He has knocked about, mixed with all sorts of people, and been in all sorts of places." The war, according to Wodehouse, was beginning to change attitudes to humor in Britain:

> The classes are being forced to know each other better than ever before. They are discovering that they have many things in common, and one of these things is the sense of humor. This general sense of humor has been there all the while, but class distinctions have kept it from being recognized as a common possession.

In the end, I think this last statement best sums up the relationship between PGW's writing and the British class system. Wodehouse didn't care whether he was propping the system up or tearing it down. He simply wanted to give readers of every class humorous stories that would become a common possession. In this, he succeeded brilliantly.

Harold Piety

The Plum Crazies of South Central Pennsylvania report with sorrow the loss of one of our founding members. Harold Piety was many things: Navy veteran, journalist, public-relations man, devoted husband, father, grandfather, great-grandfather, raconteur, baker of excellent pecan pies and chocolate-chip cookies, and our dear friend. Harold was a voracious reader, usually devouring two books at a time, with a diverse taste and a longtime fondness for the works of H. L. Mencken. It was not until rather late in life that he found his way to the works of Wodehouse and TWS. This came to pass through the electoral system of Cumberland County, Pennsylvania. As a local judge of elections, Harold was called to pass long days at the polls for each general and primary contest. The slow hours between brief rush periods were passed in talking, knitting, eating, and reading. On one such occasion, Harold noticed one of his crew laughing out loud as she read a collection of Mulliner stories. Always interested in an enjoyable read, he inquired about the source of amusement. The title was revealed, the book was shared, and for Harold there was no turning back. He quickly evolved from a novice to a true Plum addict. Prevented from attending conventions by domestic responsibilities, Harold nonetheless made his own special contribution to the Chicago convention: three dozen jars of his homemade plum jam. We will miss Harold's pies, his cookies, his jam, his stories, his humanity, and his wit.

Just How Did Wodehouse Really Feel About Cats?

asks Murray Hedgcock

Wodehouse was an animal lover all his life, according to The Man Who Knew Almost Everything, the much-loved Norman Murphy. In his invaluable *A Wodehouse Handbook*, Norman recorded that when Mr. and Mrs. W. moved to Bellport, Long Island, after their marriage, they soon acquired two cats, one dog, and two parrots.

Poonah, Blackie, Ginger, and Spotty were the names of some of the cats that the Wodehouses had at Remsenburg in their last years. Their married life had begun with two cats that they adopted in 1914. PGW knew cats from soup to nuts, and he wrote somewhere about trying to work at Remsenburg and having to get up to let a cat out, then having to get up five minutes later to let it in again, and then having to get up five minutes later . . . He knew that, like Pekes, cats are bossy animals who believe the household belongs to them. But when you study their place in his writings, it can be difficult to decide if Plum is truly on the side of the cat.

A trawl through the works of Wodehouse reveals an extraordinary range of cat involvement between 1902, when the *Public School Magazine* recorded "The Tabby Terror," and 1974. It is notable that cats play a significant part in the plotlines of several Wodehouse tales—more so than dogs, which is curious in itself. Overall, they get a distinctly raw deal: They are sat on, trodden, hurled from balconies, shot at with arrows, plugged with bananas, confronted by dachshunds, kidnapped, wakened when they wish to sleep, involved in ferocious brawls, introduced to the dubious delights of excessive alcohol, dispatched to a cats' home under sentence of death, shelled with lump sugar, threatened with being made into a rug, forced to charge up chimneys to escape dogs, and continually receiving various other forms of abuse, intentional and not.

In "Jeeves and the Impending Doom," Bertie announces: "For when it is a question of a pal being in the soup, we Woosters no longer think of self; and that poor old Bingo was knee-deep in the bisque was made plain by his mere appearance—which was that of a cat which has just been struck by a half-brick and is expecting another shortly."

And in "Aunt Agatha Takes the Count," Bertie compares himself to "the cat on the garden wall who, when on the point of becoming matey with the cat next door, observes the boot-jack sailing through the air. If he stays where he is, he gets it in the neck; if he biffs, he has to start all over again where he left off."

While Bertie is a fan of cats, as are some other characters, there are many who are at best lukewarm and often actively hostile about them. And then there are even interspecies connections. *Aunts Aren't Gentlemen* offers a horse with a deep affection for a feline. This epic offered so vital a role to a cat that it appeared in the United States as *The Cat-Nappers*.

In this tale, published as late as 1974, it may be that PGW decided cats deserved better than he had allowed them in early days. As he spins the yarn, Bertie suggests that his biographers might well term it "The Curious Case of the Cat Which Kept Popping Up When Least Expected."

The first (English) edition offers an Osbert Lancaster jacket depicting a truculent landowner named Cook, a racehorse, and a cat, confronting a slightly uneasy Bertie. And of course the cat, though not very comely, is clearly friendly.

Bertie has left the bustling city on a doctor's recommendation (to clear spots unwittingly acquired) for the country calm of Maiden Eggesford, temporary home of Aunt Dahlia, where he learns that the local talking point is the forthcoming contest at Bridmouth-on-Sea between Colonel Briscoe's Simla and Mr. Cook's Potato Chip.

Invited to the Briscoes' at Eggesford Hall, Bertie by mistake reaches Eggesford Court, home of Cook, to be welcomed by "a cat of rather individual appearance, being black in its general color scheme but with splashes of white about the ribs and also on the tip of its nose. I chirruped and twiddled my fingers, as is my custom on these occasions, and it advanced with its tail up and rubbed its nose against my leg in a manner that indicated clearly that in Bertram Wooster it had found a kindred soul and one of the boys."

Bertie sets out his credo: "Ask any cat with whom I have had dealings what sort of a chap I am cat-wise, and it will tell you that I am a thoroughly good egg in whom complete confidence can safely be placed. Cats who know me well, like Aunt Dahlia's Augustus, will probably allude to my skill in scratching them behind the ear."

It turns out that this cat is the bosom companion of Cook's horse, Potato Chip, which goes off its tucker if deprived of the cat's company. Aunt Dahlia, amoral as ever, decides her investment in Simla must be assured by removing the cat, so it is kidnapped by the local poacher, improbably known as "Billy" Graham.

The animal is juggled back and forth for various reasons until the race, which is marred by the arrival of the cat on the racecourse; this causes Colonel Briscoe's Simla to shy, unseat his rider, and allow Potato Chip first past the post. A steward's inquiry finds that the cat had been brought to the course in Cook's horsebox, and the race is awarded to Simla—Aunt Dahlia duly painting the village red.

Probably the best-known feline in Wodehouse is Webster, the bishop's cat, who changed Lancelot Mulliner's life by looking at him disapprovingly and indicating displeasure with his rackety existence. This tale begins with the deep philosophical pronouncement that "Cats are not dogs!" in the bar parlor of the Anglers' Rest. The Pint of Bitter expands on his theme:

> "Cats are selfish. A man waits on a cat hand and foot for weeks, humoring its lightest whim, and then it goes and leaves him flat because it has found a place down the road where the fish is more frequent."

Fellow drinkers join in complaining of cats, such as those thought to be male who suddenly produce kittens, and the cat jumping on a chap clumsily feeling for the keyhole after a late night. Mr. Mulliner as ever sets his fellows to rights.

> "The real objection to the great majority of cats is their insufferable air of superiority. Cats, as a class, have never completely got over the snootiness caused by the fact that in Ancient Egypt they were worshipped as gods. This makes them too prone to set themselves up as critics and censors of the frail and erring human beings whose lot they share."

Mr. Mulliner tells how artist Lancelot Mulliner, required to provide a home for the cat dear to the heart of his uncle (now Bishop of Bongo-Bongo), discovers that Webster's saintly upbringing has imbued him with a high moral tone which he proceeds to impart to his host. Webster remorselessly transforms Lancelot's bohemian life: the lad dresses neatly, shaves daily, gives up smoking, and becomes engaged to a totally conventional young woman, approved by Webster.

Gladys Bingley, his erstwhile fiancée, rushes back from holiday to warn Lancelot that he must choose between them, so drastic a dilemma that he reaches for a lifesaving drink—only to meet Webster's expression of quiet rebuke. "Scarcely what I have been accustomed to at the Deanery," the cat seems to be saying. But help is at hand: abashed, Lancelot drops the bottle, Webster discovers the spreading pool of whisky, and glances at Lancelot with

> a quick smile—so genial, so intimate, so full of jovial camaraderie, that the young man found himself automatically smiling back, and not only smiling, but winking. And in answer to that wink, Webster winked, too—a wholehearted, roguish wink that said as plainly as if he had spoken the words, "How long has this been going on?"

Webster is transformed: "The Demon Rum now had him in an iron grip." Lancelot is freed from his moral dictatorship and the young man's happiness with soulmate Gladys Bingley is assured.

The sequel, "Cats Will Be Cats," is less familiar but even more sprightly, recounting how "from the moment when he went on that first majestic toot, this once saintly cat became a Bohemian of Bohemians. His days started early and finished late, and were a mere welter of brawling and loose gallantry."

True, his exchanges with the local fauna left their mark, notably an abbreviated ear and flanks short of several patches of fur. "He looked like the late Legs Diamond after a social evening with a few old friends."

The situation is complicated when the Bishop returns from Bongo-Bongo and is reunited with his cherished Webster. The Bish is horrified at the battered appearance of his pet, but after much to-and-fro-ing, Webster cleans up the obnoxious cat owned by the woman plotting to become Mrs. Bishop, earning his owner's freedom. Lancelot is rewarded with a handsome check.

"Never," proclaims the Bishop, "have I esteemed Webster so highly as at this moment. I consider him a public benefactor, a selfless altruist." It is a rare Wodehousean accolade for the feline community.

A more typical reflection of the general Wodehouse attitude to cats comes in the classic but worrying short

story "Goodbye to All Cats." Cats suffer throughout, although even the fan of felines must admit this is very funny because of the way Freddie Widgeon is hounded endlessly, maybe even deliberately, by cats.

The account begins with the Drones club kitten sauntering into the smoking room, leading Freddie Widgeon to walk out "in a marked manner" with the scathing comment, "I had supposed that this was a quiet retreat for gentlemen. As I perceive that it is a blasted zoo, I will withdraw."

Freddie was lately back from Matcham Scratchings, where he had hoped to seal his love for Dahlia Prenderby, but her family "was one of those animal-loving families. . . . As far as the eye could reach, there were dogs scratching themselves and cats scratching the furniture."

The trouble begins when Freddie discovers a large tortoise-shell cat on his bed, kneading his shirt with its paws. He flings it into the garden, where "an elderly gentleman" (Freddie's host, Sir Mortimer) receives a direct hit and complains that "it's raining cats."

Later, in the dining room, "there suddenly appeared from nowhere his old acquaintance the tortoise-shell cat. It seemed to offer to him a means of working off his spleen. Taking from Lady Prenderby's plate, accordingly, the remains of a banana, he plugged the animal neatly at a range of two yards. It yowled and withdrew."

Then, in the drawing-room, Freddie made

> a dive for one of the aunts trying to find a place to put her coffee-cup . . . And bounding forward with the feeling that this was the stuff to give them, he barged right into a cat. "Oh, sorry," he said, backing and bringing down his heel on another cat. "I say, most frightfully sorry," he said. And, tottering to a chair, he sank heavily onto a third cat.

Freddie's challenges continue, as he sloshes one in the ribs while waving his arms about, finds a hostile Alsatian on his bed, and finds himself eventually sitting on a dead cat. "He leaped up as if the corpse, instead of being cold, had been piping hot. . . . He had never seen a deader cat." Attempting to remove the evidence by flinging the remains out the window, Freddie again pings his host. Finally, the family concludes that Freddie must be the culprit ("He's been throwing cats all the evening") and Freddie wisely departs.

An informed Drone explains:

> [Frederick Widgeon] had a broken heart and blisters on both heels. And in that broken heart was that loathing for all cats of which you so recently saw so signal a manifestation. I am revealing no secrets when I tell you that Freddie Widgeon is permanently through with cats. From now on, they cross his path at their peril.

There is in this story a total indifference to the rights of the animals and a rejection of their claim to a rewarding and satisfying lifestyle.

Freddie is not the only young man to fall afoul of a cat-loving family. Even cat lover Bertie suffers through similar misunderstandings and accidental cat abuse in "Without the Option." Bertie is visiting the dreadful Pringle family, in the guise of his jugged friend Oliver Randolph Sipperley, and he hears Aunt Jane proclaim, "I remember Oliver. Nasty little boy! . . . He chased my Tibby all over the garden, shooting arrows at her from a bow"—and things go downhill from there. Fortunately, Bertie escapes (and avoids another romantic potential disaster) and all ends happily—in part thanks to the involvement of good old Cuthbert the cat.

The odd Wodehouse character is not shy of calling up cat support when useful. For example, there is the Bishop of Stortford and his old schoolfellow the Headmaster of Harchester ("The Bishop's Move"), who, when challenged while climbing the school's ivy-clad wall to effect an entry after lockup, claimed that they were merely cats belonging to the cook. (What an insult! We all know that no cat would burden itself with the rigors of an ivy-clad wall climb when it merely has to stand at the kitchen door, demanding to be admitted.)

In "Doing Clarence a Bit of Good," Clarence Yeardsley "can't bear mewing cats. A mewing cat gets on my nerves." In the parallel Bertie story ("Jeeves Makes an Omelette"), it's novelist Cornelia Fothergill's artist husband who says the same.

In "Sir Roderick Comes to Lunch," Sir Roderick Glossop declares his unease to Bertie about cat noises off. It turns out that there are three cats in Bertie's room and they start a "most frightful shindy" wherein "it sounded as though all the cats in London, assisted by delegates from outlying suburbs, had got together to settle their differences once for all." The menagerie had been stored by Lord Rainsby in his efforts with Bertie's cousins Claude and Eustace to earn admission to the Seekers. As Bertie flings open the door, he says, "I got a momentary flash of about a hundred and fifteen cats of all sizes and colors scrapping in the middle of the room, and then they all shot past me with a rush and out of the front door; and all that was left of the mob-scene was the head of a whacking big fish, lying on the carpet and

staring up at me in a rather austere sort of way, as if it wanted a written explanation and apology."

There is a jarring brutality about the treatment afforded cats in more than one Wodehousean reference. S. F. Ukridge is hardly a white knight among PGW characters, but his attitude to Edwin, the beautiful purebred Persian in *Love Among the Chickens*, is positively ruthless. When Mrs. Ukridge announces the imminent arrival of the cat Edwin, Ukridge defines him as a "beast of a cat." He proceeds to record Edwin's prior sneaking of a dog's bone, and says that, if Edwin seeks to steal the food of Bob, the resident dog, "we will have Edwin made into a rug."

Even in fantasy, Wodehouse cats get it in the neck. Psmith, posing as Ralston McTodd (*Leave It to Psmith*), seeks to explain to Eve Halliday why he had broken up with wife Cynthia, Eve's former schoolmate. "Her temper in the mornings was incredible. I have known her to lift the cat over two chairs and a settee with a single kick. And all because there were no mushrooms."

On the other hand, *Psmith, Journalist* brings us the character of Bat Jarvis, who (as Norman Murphy wrote) was "particularly fond of cats." Says Jarvis, "I'll beat up any guy dat gets gay wit a kit' . . . in my neck of de woods." Mr. Jarvis, when not running his gang, deals in animals, birds, and snakes from his Bowery base, where he keeps "23 cats whose necks were adorned with leather collars." When introduced by Psmith to Mike Jackson ("possibly the best-known of our English cat-fanciers. Comrade Jackson's stud of Angoras is celebrated wherever the King's English is spoken, and in Hoxton"), Jarvis inspects Mike with "silent admiration" and then proceeds to quiz him on matters such as the origin of the word "catnip" and the health of cats eating beetles.

"The Man Who Disliked Cats" introduces us to the Frenchman Jean at the Café Britannique, who is amiable enough until he kicks at something on the floor, his eyes gleaming angrily. The restaurant cat is seen in dignified retreat. It turns out that Jean has a bit of a history with cats. As a youth, obliged to take a post as cashier at his rich uncle's luxury hotel, he encounters guests like an American woman who adores her cat Alexander, and is so ill-advised as to place him on the desk of Jean, a pet-hating and toothache-stricken cashier. Jean recalls:

> I rose. I was terrible. I seized 'im by the tail. I flung him—I did not know where. . . . My uncle, on whom I am dependent, is passing . . . He has received the cat in the middle of his face.

Eventually in the course of the story, Jean steals a cat, sending it to a cats' house with instructions that it is to be destroyed immediately. Jean's dastardly plot is revealed. Jean is last seen as secretary to an author who is writing "his great work": "a 'istory of the cat in ancient Egypt."

Quite different in mood is "The Tabby Terror," which appeared two years after Plum left Dulwich, and is set in just such a public school. At St. Austin's school, we meet the housemaster's cat, which has just made away with sardines from the study shared by Smith and Montgomery.

> The Tabby Terror had begun. . . . No one seemed to know exactly what to do. Montgomery spoke darkly of bricks, bits of string, and horse ponds. Smith rolled the word 'rat poison' luxuriously round his tongue. Shawyer, who was something of an expert on the range, babbled of air guns.

The cat (Captain Kettle) goes on a reign of food-stealing terror, though he is described at one point as "good to look upon. His black heart was hidden by a sleek coat of tabby fur, which rendered stroking a luxury. His scheming brain was out of sight in a shapely head." Eventually, though, he eats a caged canary and moves on to other locales. "The Tabby Terror was at an end."

The Ukridge adventure "Buttercup Day" sounds charming but turns out to contain the most savage planning for cats in the whole oeuvre. Ukridge tells friend Corky that his latest scheme will produce the capital needed for a cat ranch out in America.

> You collect a hundred thousand cats. Each cat has twelve kittens a year. The skins range from ten cents each for the white ones to 75 cents for

> the pure black. That gives you twelve million skins per year to sell at an average price of thirty cents per skin, making the annual income at a conservative estimate three hundred and sixty thousand dollars. . . .
>
> To feed the cats, you start a rat ranch next door. The rats multiply four times as fast as cats, so if you begin with a million rats, it gives you four rats per day per cat, which is plenty. You feed the rats on what is left over of the cats after removing the skins, allowing one-fourth of a cat per rat, the business thus becoming automatically self-supporting.

It is so unkind—not to mention impractical—that it is a relief when Ukridge's South Sea Bubble crashes to the ground, thanks to the intervention of a couple of much sharper con men who loot the house and steal the dodgy Buttercup Day takings.

Cats, other than Bat Jarvis's enthusiasm for same, do not figure largely in Wodehouse's American tales. But an American cat rates rare star billing in the story "Black for Luck" from *The Man with Two Left Feet*: "Obviously in reduced circumstances, he had nevertheless contrived to retain a certain smartness, a certain air—what the French call the *tournure*."

Francis the janitor reports that he is a stray, and Elizabeth announces that she will keep him, to Francis's assurance that "black cats bring luck." We learn that the setting is New York, and Elizabeth writes for magazines which sometimes accept her work, but more often do not, so that a lucky mascot seems a good investment.

Given the name of Joseph, the cat "settled down amazingly. By the end of the second day, he was conveying the impression that he was the real owner of the apartment, and that was it was due to his good nature that Elizabeth was allowed the run of the place. Like most of his species, he was an autocrat."

Joseph at one point decamps to the flat of a young man across the way (James Renshaw Boyd), who claims that this is his cat Reginald, owned since 4 o'clock that afternoon. After some debate, James admits that this is indeed Elizabeth's cat, but that he (James) had also taken its arrival as a good luck pointer to prospects for his first play, now in rehearsal.

James and Elizabeth agree to share Joseph/Reginald for his luck-giving powers. Friendship develops, misunderstandings ensue, and finally romance flowers. But the cat moves on, the vagabond animal taking up residence in the apartment of boy novelist Paul Axworthy Briggs, thrilled that a black cat has arrived, which must surely change his luck.

What do modern Wodehouseans think of cats? Let's hear from the entertaining online reporter Honoria Plum (Jen Scheppers). She recently mused on the message of "The Tabby Terror":

> I was attacked in my own kitchen by a not dissimilar animal, this very AM—a large, Churchillian beast with a decidedly high opinion of himself. He insisted upon the best chair from the moment of his arrival, and I expect will soon take to smoking cigars.

Honoria cites Mr. Mulliner's verdict on cats (the gods-in-ancient-Egypt theory) and mulls over various cat characters in the Wodehouse record, before concluding:

> I must go. The malevolent feline of my household, of whom I spoke earlier, has returned and is giving me a meaningful eye. I'm sitting in his chair—and the consequences of thwarting this dictatorial example of his species are more than I can bear.

I, too, must move on, to the kitchen, where junior cat Matilda waits for her evening meal, the necessary preliminary to her second insulin injection of the day for diabetes—treatment which has cost vast sums over the years, as Britain, for all its excellent social care system and traditional love of animals, has not yet established a free National Health Service for cats.

So what are we to make of this hodgepodge of love and hate for cats, the bricks and kicks, as well as the acceptance and love of the cat's self-assumed superiority? Did Wodehouse live on the edge, ready to fling a cat who interrupted his writing one too many times? Or would cats, if given a chance, allude to Plum's skill in scratching them behind the ear? While Wodehouse the animal lover draws it both ways, I strongly suspect that his heart was on the side of the cat.

> "Do you keep a cat, Mr. Wooster?"
>
> "Eh? What? Cat? No, no cat."
>
> "I was conscious of a distinct impression that I had heard a cat mewing either in the room or very near to where we are sitting."
>
> "Probably a taxi or something in the street."
>
> "I fear I do not follow you."
>
> "I mean to say, taxis squawk, you know. Rather like cats in a sort of way."
>
> "Sir Roderick Comes to Lunch" (1922)

Letters & Comments

Max Pokrivchak's admirable article on Reggie Pepper in the Winter 2017 issue left out a few minor bibliographical details. First, Wodehouse wrote American and British versions of each of the seven stories for magazines, but only four of the British versions made it into *My Man Jeeves*, and only three of those, still British, made it into the U.S. edition of *The Man with Two Left Feet*. Details on the different versions of the stories and where they are collected can be found on my website at https://tinyurl.com/pgwstory. I also clarify which versions were reprinted in *Enter Jeeves*—not always the same as the sources cited in that book itself!

One other resource I want to point out is the Series Characters page at Madame Eulalie's Rare Plums, http://madameulalie.org/CharacterMenu.html.

Even if we discount recurring schoolboy characters like Pillingshot, Charteris, and Mike and Psmith, that page shows us that Plum had got the series habit well before Reggie Pepper, with characters like Joan Romney, James Innes, and Kid Brady. And the lists on that page are live links to the stories themselves on Madame Eulalie, with illustrations from the original magazines for your additional enjoyment.

Neil Midkiff

****

In Wodehouse's *America, I Like You*, in the chapter "Put Me among the Earls," he talks about his rather specialized fan base, which, based upon a cursory review of his correspondents, includes dog stealers (actually, he was swanking a bit; it's really only one dog stealer), invalids, and convicts. With regard to the convicts, he says, "I have had so many letters over the years from convicts that I have begun to think that the American criminal must look on one or more of my works as an essential part of his kit. I seem to see the burglar's mother sending him off for the night shift":

> "Have you everything you need? Gat? Brass knucks? Wodehouse novel? Oxyacetylene blowpipe? Trinitrotoluol? Mask?"

Bernie Rhodenbarr, a fictional burglar created by author Lawrence Block, eschews every item on the above list except for one: he does bring his Wodehouse novel. In *The Burglar Who Thought He Was Bogart*, Bernie enters an apartment, without the knowledge or consent of its owner, because he needs to "sack out for the next seven or eight hours" while waiting for a propitious time to obtain illegal entrance to a different apartment in the same building. It's not a very comfortable place to wait because it's empty, but at least he has something to read—he'd had the forethought to tuck a P. G. Wodehouse paperback into his bag.

Bernie gets to Chapter 6 of his novel before his flashlight gives out, and then spends an uncomfortable night trying to sleep on the floor—"as snug as a bug on a bare floor, and there's a reason that metaphor has not become part of the language." In the morning, he picks up his Wodehouse again. "I went back to Bertie Wooster, and everything he did and said made perfect sense to me. I took this for a Bad Sign."

I wanted to think that Mr. Block is a PGW fan and that he had his burglar carry Wodehouse deliberately, having read *America, I Like You*. I wrote to him and asked—and he replied that it wasn't intentional, that while he's "read a good handful of PGW's books over the years, there haven't been that many." Ah, well, so this really is just a case of Art imitating Art.

Karen Shotting

A Few Quick Ones

Len Powell found a couple of spiffy references to Wodehouse. In the June/July 2017 issue of *First Things*, Robert Novak Journalism Fellow Matthew Walther argues that the now-little-known Robert Knox was the greatest writer of English prose in the last century—with the exception of P. G. Wodehouse. Plum gets the gold, and Mr. Knox receives the silver medal, albeit over Forster, Waugh, Faulkner, Updike, and others.

Len also sent along page 200 of *My Paper Chase* by Harold Evans, wherein Mr. Evans paraphrases Wodehouse saying that "arrival in New York City is like going to heaven without the bother and expense of dying."

****

Evelyn Herzog found an article in the December 9, 2017, *Spectator*, in which Harry Mount complains of the transformation of the artistocracy into "just another arm of the international, rich, celeb glamocracy." His contention is that "Wodehouse and Evelyn Waugh, who made comic hay by placing clueless, fey, artistic, ironic, upper-class Englishmen among blunt, money-obsessed Americans, would get no more comedy out of the situation" nowadays. [*Actually, we might contend that Wodehouse and Waugh, with their great talent and adaptability, could find the humor in any shape of human behavior.*]

Nobel Oblige

by Tomas Prenkert

Tomas is a member of WodehouseSällskapet (the Swedish Wodehouse Society) and has an opinion or two about a potential candidate for the Nobel Prize for Literature.

On December 10, 2017, the 2017 Nobel Prize for Literature was awarded to Mr. Kazuo Ishiguro. The secretary of the Swedish Academy, Mrs. Sara Danius, gave the honoring speech to Mr. Ishiguro. In her speech, Mrs. Danius mentioned Wodehouse: "*The Remains of the Day* is probably [Ishiguro's] most famous novel. It starts out like a book by P. G. Wodehouse and tells us about a British butler on his way to an old friend. Before we know it, we are also on our way, right down into the abyss of existence."

It's encouraging when references to Wodehouse are broadcast worldwide (albeit in Swedish). Mrs. Danius clearly assumed that Wodehouse is so well-known that she could refer to him in an offhand fashion, even though her speech was mainly directed to a literary elite. The other literary titans she mentioned in her speech included Jane Austen, Franz Kafka, Charles Dickens, Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, Marcel Proust, James Joyce, and Virginia Woolf. Plum is in very distinguished company! Apparently, the Swedish Academy believes that Wodehouse belongs in that austere company.

I believe that she had good reasons to make the comparison. Perhaps she was thinking of Jeeves's eloquent language, and perhaps she was also considering Bertie, who often mixes highbrow language with slang.

In the first chapter of *The Remains of the Day*, the most obvious parallel with Wodehouse is the relationship between the butler and his master, in this case an American, Mr. Farraday. The butler, Mr. Stevens, still dwells in the greatness and nobility of the past, in the time of Lord Darlington. He is very anxious about manners, style, and dignity, and he knows, and is proud of, his feudal position. This we can see from his language. His new master, on the contrary, is a rich American who doesn't fully grasp the language and the behavioral codes of the British aristocracy. Mr. Farraday is sometimes a bit vulgar in comparison to the dignified way of his butler.

In the second chapter of the novel, Mr. Stevens gives us his views on what constitutes a great butler. Mr. Stevens is reflecting about the attributes that could be expected from a great butler: "I refer to things such as good accent and command of language, general knowledge on wide-ranging topics such as falconry or newt-mating." The newt reference alone would seem to indicate that Ishiguro is very familiar with the writings of Wodehouse, but Plum also wrote about falconry.

Mr. Stevens opposes the ideal that the butler ought to know everything: "In one regrettable case, which I myself witnessed, it had become an established sport in the house for guests to ring for the butler and put to him random questions of the order of, say, who had won the Derby in such and such a year, rather as one might to a Memory Man at the music hall." Also here the allusion to Jeeves is obvious, even if the event described doesn't occur in any Jeeves book.

For many years, the Swedish Wodehouse Society wrote to the Swedish Academy and suggested that they award the Nobel Prize posthumously to Wodehouse. But the Academy decided to give the award only to living authors. Our society then suggested that the Academy offer an honorary prize (without money) to worthy deceased authors who never received a Nobel Prize. Wouldn't Wodehouse be a suitable starter?

In her speech Mrs. Danius also talked about human memory. She argued that Proust and Woolf tried to "salvage the past," compared to Ishiguro, who sends down a diving bell to make "discoveries in the sea of forgetfulness." He shows us how we may handle the past.

While Wodehouse wrote in a fictitious past, a departed world, his purpose was to amuse, to make us laugh at all the affairs and nonsense of the characters in his world, and at the same time to invite us to embrace them with warmth and sympathy, in spite of their weaknesses. Plum always makes us smile, never makes us worry. Even if his characters appear in a lost world, they appear to modern readers as living characters. We often recognize ourselves and others in the characters of Wodehouse. The world has changed a lot, but human beings are basically the same, and it is easier to live in this challenging world when we have mirth to temper our worries. A writer of Wodehouse's stature and caliber, who can still bring characters to life to the modern reader, well deserves to be acknowledged by the Swedish Academy!

> This part of a prize-giving is always apt rather to fail to grip the visiting stranger. I mean, you know how it is. You're told that J. B. Brewster has won an Exhibition for Classics at Cat's, Cambridge, and you feel that it's one of those stories where you can't see how funny it is unless you really know the fellow.
>
> *Right Ho, Jeeves* (1934)

Wodehouse's Peers in Comedy, Part One

by Michael Dirda

Michael Dirda is a 1993 Pulitzer Prize winner as a book-review columnist for the Washington Post. *At the recent TWS convention, he spoke about writers whom we could consider on their own merit as alternatives to Wodehouse: that is, writers you might read when you're not reading Wodehouse. We'll offer Michael's talk in parts over the next few issues, making a nice 2018 column out of this great collection of information. Enjoy!*

Let us begin with some calculations. The writer we honor tonight, Pelham Grenville Wodehouse, wrote—shall we say—roughly 100 books. It might be 93, it might be more. But 100 is a solid, dependable number, easy to keep in mind. To that, let us add various biographies, bibliographies, collections of letters, critical studies, and other supplementary works of homage, perhaps another fifty Wodehouse-related titles. This makes a total of 150 volumes of compelling interest to nearly all of us here tonight.

But stay, our calculations are not yet over. Let us suppose your devotion to the Master leads you to read one book by or about him every week. This seems a modest number, given that *Leave It to Psmith*, *The Small Bachelor*, *The Code of the Woosters*, *The Mating Season*, and all the story collections about Jeeves and Wooster or the various Mulliners are well-nigh unputdownable. This means—and I urge you to pay strict attention here—this means that in merely three years you will have read everything worth reading by or about Wodehouse. Let us pause while each of you takes in this stark truth, this salient fact. In a mere three years you will have come to the end of new Wodehouse books or related material about them or their author.

Of course, Plum and his world are inexhaustible. Sentences such as "He had just about enough intelligence to open his mouth when he wanted to eat, but certainly no more" are infinitely rereadable. They never pall. And yet it is just possible that before you were to begin a second or third voyage through the Wodehouse universe, you might wonder—and here I tread on dangerous ground—if there might not be other comic masterpieces worth reading from that half-imaginary, golden afternoon of English life, the period between 1885 and 1925, when—day after day—the dappled sunlight shone down on Blandings Castle.

As a matter of fact, there are.

Being by trade a reviewer and essayist with a particular interest in late 19th- and early 20th-century popular fiction, I've compiled a list of eight entertaining precursors, rivals, and imitators of Wodehouse, restricting myself to British authors of roughly his generation. With a couple of exceptions, none possesses the sheer verbal wit of Wodehouse, but all of them create situations of comic mayhem that rival those in the tales of Uncle Fred or the Drones Club. Note that I haven't included what one might call highbrow comic novelists, wonderful though they are. So, I leave aside Thomas Love Peacock, Norman Douglas, and Aldous Huxley, though *Crotchet Castle*, *South Wind*, and *Crome Yellow* are all wonderfully amusing in their way.

Without further preamble, then, let us begin our trek through my chosen authors. Since the list is numbered, the more alert members of tonight's distinguished audience—that is, those not sunken into food comas or barely conscious from one bottle too many of Moët & Chandon '64—can keep track of how close I have come to the end of my talk, after which we can all move on to the better part of this evening, the after-dinner digestifs, if that's the word I want.

(1)

Thomas Anstey Guthrie (1856–1934)—better known by his pen name **F. Anstey**—once ranked among England's most celebrated writers. Never heard of him, you say? Well, you know his novels, or at least the central ideas that drive their plots.

In 1882, Anstey—only in his mid-twenties—published *Vice Versa*. One of the most popular late Victorian novels, it is generally regarded as a classic tale of identity transferral or soul-switching, a comic take on a relatively common theme in the age of spiritualism when astral bodies wandered freely. In fact, the portly, self-satisfied, middle-aged banker Paul Bultitude and his fourteen-year-old schoolboy son Dick don't exchange bodies or minds à la *Freaky Friday* or Wodehouse's *Laughing Gas* or—to cite a more contemporary example—Arthur Conan Doyle's "The Great Keinplatz Experiment." In fact, Paul inadvertently wishes, while holding the magical Garuda Stone and talking to his recalcitrant son Dick, that "old as I am and much as you envy me, I only wish, at this very moment, I could be a boy again, like you. Going back to school wouldn't make me unhappy, I can tell you."

At that moment the talisman renders him into the identical twin of his son. A short time later, Dick—afraid of his father, dreading the return to Dr. Grimstone's

school, and hoping to kick up his heels—then murmurs "I wish I was a man like you were just now." And, presto, he is.

Interestingly, Anstey doesn't alternate chapters, showing the mix-ups that accompany Paul and Dick as they now enter alien worlds. In fact, *Vice Versa* focuses largely on Paul and is essentially a school story, like so many of Wodehouse's early works. Throughout, Anstey keeps the reader turning the pages through his gift for narrative pace.

His minor characters are clearly Dickensian, starting with a Cockney cabman named Clegg, who is described as "a burly, red-faced man, with a husky voice and a general manner which conveyed the impression that he regarded teetotalism, as a principle, with something more than disapproval." Then there's the stern Doctor Grimstone: "I'll have no mutineers in my camp. I'll establish a spirit of trustful happiness and unmurmuring content in this school, if I have to flog every boy in it as long as I can stand over him!"

Anstey also shows a flair for unexpected, almost Wodehousean, simile. We hear of "Greek verbs that seemed irregular to the verge of impropriety." Still, the salient attribute of *Vice Versa* remains frustration. Paul's every attempt to assert the truth about himself is thwarted by one misfortune after another. Anstey excels in showing how school itself wears down the middle-aged man's sense of self. One feels that if he'd had to stay another week or two at Crighton Abbey he would have forgotten all about being a prosperous businessman and become the boy that everyone thinks he is.

Anstey wrote a great deal. In *The Brass Bottle* (1900), a well-meaning "jinnee"—an elderly fellow named Fakrash—causes all sorts of mischief and havoc in the life of hapless architect Horace Ventimore. In *Only Toys* (1903), a bored brother and sister are shrunk to Lilliputian size by Santa Claus. Irene and Torquil then discover that not only are their toys alive but that their dolls, tin soldiers, and other playthings regard themselves as completely human. Myriad adventures and mishaps ensue.

As these examples show, Anstey's imagination was both fertile and charming. my own favorite of his books is *Tourmalin's Time Cheques* (1891). On board a ship called the *Boomerang*, Peter Tourmalin wishes the time would pass more quickly. A mysterious fellow passenger duly tells him about the Anglo-Australian Joint Stock Time Bank, in which one can deposit unwanted minutes and hours. Whenever subsequently required, increments of time can be withdrawn through the use of special "cheques."

Tourmalin sets up an account and, months later, when he needs respite from his sternly intellectual fiancée—"Sophia discouraged rapture; but, on the other hand, no one was better fitted to inspire and sustain an intelligent interest in the wonders of Geology"—he gradually uses his cheques to escape back to the *Boomerang*. During these periodic quarter-hour visits to an unrealized past, Tourmalin discovers that he would have grown entangled in two increasingly delightful, then dangerously serious, shipboard flirtations. Eventually, what "might have been" and present "reality" begin to collide. As well as being an important early example of time travel, Anstey's little novel is nearly as silly and wonderful as vintage Wodehouse.

(2)

Jerome K. Jerome, who lived from 1859 to 1927, produced what most people would agree is the greatest of all Victorian comic novels: *Three Men in a Boat (To Say Nothing of the Dog)*. First published in 1889, this serenely silly account of a summer boating holiday on the Thames opens with George, Harris, and J—apparently Jerome himself—talking about how seedy they've all been feeling. J admits that he is frequently out of sorts:

> It is a most extraordinary thing, but I never read a patent medicine advertisement without being impelled to the conclusion that I am suffering from the particular disease therein dealt with in its most virulent form. The diagnosis seems in every case to correspond exactly with all the sensations that I have ever felt.

Just recently, a liver-pill circular has convinced him that there's something wrong with his liver, especially since one of the symptoms is "a general disinclination to work of any kind." His own disinclination to work, J explains, has been a lifelong affliction:

> What I suffer in that way no tongue can tell. From my earliest infancy I have been a martyr to it. As a boy, the disease hardly ever left me for a day. They did not know, then, that it was my liver. Medical science was in a far less advanced state than now, and they used to put it down to laziness.

Before long, the three young men—to say nothing of the dog Montmorency—have decided they need a holiday. What could be better than to rent a boat and

row merrily up the Thames toward Oxford? From the first, they suffer one light-hearted comic disaster after another. On one of their first days on the river, Harris

> proposed that we should have scrambled eggs for breakfast. He said he would cook them. It seemed, from his account, that he was very good at doing scrambled eggs. He often did them at picnics and when out on yachts. He was quite famous for them. People who had once tasted his scrambled eggs, so we gathered from his conversation, never cared for any other food afterwards, and pined away and died when they could not get them.

Alas, "the result was not altogether the success that Harris had anticipated." Meals, in fact, prove to be uncommonly difficult. When the trio land on Monkey Island for a picnic of cold beef, they realize that they have failed to pack any mustard:

> It cast a gloom over the boat, there being no mustard. We ate our beef in silence. Existence seemed hollow and uninteresting. We thought of the happy days of childhood, and sighed. We brightened up a bit, however, over the apple tart, and, when George drew out a tin of pineapple from the bottom of the hamper, and rolled it into the middle of the boat, we felt that life was worth living after all.

Needless to say, they have forgotten to bring a can opener. Their vain attempts to open the tin of pineapple nearly result in George's death, while Harris gets off with just a flesh wound.

Periodically, however, one or other of the three friends reflects more seriously about life. Work is a recurrent theme: "I can't sit still and see another man slaving and working. I want to get up and superintend, and walk round with my hands in my pockets, and tell him what to do. It is my energetic nature. I can't help it."

One night, toward the end of the trip, the trio—to say nothing of the dog—camp out on a wet night. They play a listless hand of cards, then sip some toddy, as the rain soaks them through and through. In due course,

> George told us about a man he had known, who had come up the river two years ago, and who had slept out in a damp boat on just such another night as that was, and it had given him rheumatic fever, and nothing was able to save him, and he had died in great agony ten days afterwards. George said he was quite a young man, and was engaged to be married. He said it was one of the saddest things he had ever known.

Not to be outdone, "that put Harris in mind of a friend of his, who had been in the Volunteers, and who had slept out under canvas one wet night down at Aldershot, 'on just such another night as this,' said Harris; and he had woken up in the morning a cripple for life. Harris said he would introduce us both to the man when we got back to town; it would make our hearts bleed to see him."

While Jerome is now chiefly remembered mainly for *Three Men in a Boat*, much of his other work remains worth reading. His low-keyed wit leaps forth from his very first book, *On the Stage—and Off* (1885): "There comes a time in everyone's life when he feels he was born to be an actor. . . . I was at the theatre one evening seeing *Romeo and Juliet* played, when it suddenly flashed across me that that was my vocation. I thought all acting was making love in tights to pretty women, and I determined to devote my life to it." Jerome's *The Idle Thoughts of an Idle Fellow* (1886) collects some of his best essays. At one point in "On Idleness," he imagines himself taking a rest cure at a spa:

> I should get up late, sip chocolate, and have my breakfast in slippers and a dressing-gown. I should lie out in the garden in a hammock, and read sentimental novels with a melancholy ending, until the book should fall from my listless hand, and I should recline there, dreamily gazing into the deep blue of the firmament, watching the fleecy clouds, floating like white-sailed ships, across its depths, and listening to the joyous song of the birds, and the low rustling of the trees. Or, on becoming too weak to go out of doors, I should sit propped up with pillows, at the open window of the ground floor front, and look wasted and interesting, so that all the pretty girls would sigh as they passed by.

Stay tuned in subsequent issues for descriptions of the other authors to whom Michael called our attention. It will be an enjoyable affair throughout 2018! We'd be grateful to hear of other writers of humor who you believe would be of interest to our readers.

Chapters Corner

What is your chapter up to these days? Tell the Wodehouse world about your chapter's activities! Chapter representatives, please send all info to the editor, Gary Hall (see back page).

Please note that our webmaster, Noel Merrill, tries to keep chapter activities posted on the society website. So, it's a good idea to send information about upcoming events to Noel on a timely basis. His contact information is on the last page of this issue.

Anglers' Rest
(Seattle and vicinity)
Contact: Susan Collicott

Birmingham Banjolele Band
(Birmingham, Alabama, and vicinity)
Contact: Caralyn McDaniel

Blandings Castle Chapter
(Greater San Francisco Bay area)
Contact: Bill Franklin

The Broadway Special
(New York City and vicinity)
Contact: Amy Plofker

Capital! Capital!
(Washington, D.C., and vicinity)
Contact: Scott Daniels

Chapter One
(Greater Philadelphia area)
Contact: Herb Moskovitz

Despite freezing temperatures, fourteen Chaps gathered on the second floor of Cavanaugh's on Head House Square for our January 7 meeting.

President Herb Moskovitz (Vladimir Brusiloff) reported that it was time to collect funds to feed Gussie, our adopted newt at the Philadelphia Zoo. A hat was passed around and $65 was collected—the exact amount needed to feed a hungry newt for one year.

Bob Rains (Oily Carlisle), Norma Frank (The Bishop of Bongo-Bongo), and Bob Nissenbaum (Anthony, Lord Droitwich) showed the 2013 BBC adaptation of Plum's 1936 story "The Crime Wave at Blandings," starring Timothy Spall as Lord Emsworth. Afterwards, Norma and Bob N. led a lively discussion about the story and the adaptation.

The next meeting will be held on Sunday, March 18, at noon, at Cavanaugh's.

Chicago Accident Syndicate
(Chicago and thereabouts)
Contact: Daniel & Tina Garrison

This post-D.C. convention missive from your faithful scribe on behalf of the Chicago Accident Syndicate shall be succinct and to the point. But keep a firm grip on your b. and splash for the teaser at the end.

Our assemblage in early December found us at the home of Dan and Tina Garrison. The principal thread of the afternoon (after the serious business of browsing and sluicing was done) was recounting the experiences of those in attendance in D.C. Dean Miller joined us with an authentic English bobby's helmet (see photo). He assured us no actual bobbies were harmed in the securing thereof. Dan also entertained once again with a reading from the Master.

Dean Miller sports his bobby's helmet, for which he apparently did not have to give up five days without the option.

And, you ask, the aforementioned teaser? Well, through a series of events gladly recounted to anyone willing to stand yours truly to something bracing, I've come into the company of a fellow Wodehousian who's not a member of our Society. Not only that, but Den's (his name, short for Dennis) mom was also a fan. And this mom was not shy about writing to her favorite authors (yes, Plum included). The end result is that Den has inherited a cache of correspondence in Plum's own hand.

At this writing, we have no more information than that. No idea how many letters, over what period, or any notion of what topics. You may expect a preliminary report of the findings in a future *Plum Lines* issue.

The Clients of Adrian Mulliner
(For enthusiasts of both PGW and Sherlock Holmes)
Contact: Elaine Coppola

The Den(ver) of the Secret Nine
(Denver and vicinity)
Contact: Jennifer Petkus

The Drone Rangers
(Houston and vicinity)
Contact: Carey Tynan

The Flying Pigs
(Cincinnati area and elsewhere)
Contact: Susan Pace or Bill Scrivener

The Flying Pigs of Cincinnati are gearing up to show you a good time at the next TWS convention in 2019. We'll have a working dinner on March 11, with a bit of fun on the side. Any would-be Pigs who haven't connected should realize that now is the time to come to the aid of your chapter. Just let Susan Pace know you'll be attending and she'll add you to the list. The food and drink tend to be quite fabulous.

Friends of the Fifth Earl of Ickenham
(Buffalo, New York, and vicinity)
Contact: Laura Loehr

The Melonsquashville (TN) Literary Society
(Tennessee)
Contact: Ken Clevenger

The Mottled Oyster Club / Jellied Eels
(San Antonio and South Texas)
Contact: Lynette Poss

Jim Thompson, our Oyster from Harlingen, Texas, provided this poetic incident report for the Mottled Oysters/Jellied Eels Christmas Party:

> 'Twasn't quite Christmas, but 'round Liz's house
> Not a creature was stirring, except for the mouse.
> Martinis were set by the chimney to dry
> In hopes that the Oysters would give them a try.
> (One theory holds it's thanks to the bottles
> That Oysters have come by the sobriquet Mottled.)
> On Jan! On Cecilia! On Clark and Lynette!
> On Craig and on Deepa! On Bryan, Janet!
> The biryani went fast. So did the ham.
> The shrimp ran out, and the candied yam.
> The barbecue—truly, a couple of beeves—
> Would have cheered Bertie or Reginald Jeeves
> More than a perfuméd French casserole
> Cooked up by the wizardly chef Anatole.
> What a feast we all had! Twelve dishes at least!
> So much Plummy pudding! The stuff never ceased!
> Then Oyster beds beckoned, from surfeit of joy.
> Each Oyster then answered, "Me voy! Me, me voy!"
> They heard Bryan's Siri and drove out of sight:
> "Merry Christmas to all and have a nice night!"

The Mottled Oysters/Jellied Eels of South Texas meet on the first Thursday of each month, around 7:30 pm at La Cantera's Barnes & Noble, second-floor history section, or first-floor media area. If you are a Wodehouse fan living in or near San Antonio, or just visiting, we'd love to see you. Food and drink not being far from our minds, we are usually at a nearby Emsworth Arms (the Cheesecake Factory) at 6-ish.

The New England Wodehouse Thingummy Society (NEWTS)
(Boston and New England)
Contact: Lynn Vesley-Gross

The Northwodes
(St. Paul, Minneapolis, and vicinity)
Contact: Mike Eckman

For 2½ hours on January 7, the Northwodes had an entertaining and high-spirited book salon. Topics ranged from where to buy a prescription monocle (Warby Parker), to which Michael Caine movie involving a tontine to watch ("The Wrong Box"), to insight into *Captain Billy's Whiz Bang*, a notorious humor magazine. After new members Jon and Lisa Lewis, Diane Madlon-Kay, Jennifer Lang, and Frederick and Monica Muschenheim were welcomed, we turned to our literary subject: *Something Fishy* aka *The Butler Did It*.

In this novel, PGW departed from his usual archetypal portrayals. None of the characters quite fell into the category of "silly ass." Also striking was that the book mentioned actual dates and events. This realism, which included information on WWII deaths and the sounds of a TV, detracted slightly from the humor for Mike Eckman (reporting in absentia).

Everyone commented on the crossword clues which so vexed Uffenham. Our crack researchers Holly Windle and Richard Rames brought solutions and the tortured logic behind them. They solved all seven and claimed that "the ointment in short has no point" is spikenard. This is an essential oil which also goes by the name "nard." When the word has no point (spike), you have the shortened nard.

Maria Jette suggested that the wonderful Barribault's is Claridge's Hotel. It is here that Jane Benedick re-meets her childhood hero, Bill Hollister, who saved Jane from the bullying spoiled-child Roscoe Bunyan in a Long Island pool during Jane's WWII evacuation. According to Mike Engstrom, this was the best falling-in-love moment that he had ever read.

Our next book will be *The Small Bachelor.*

We ended our meeting on a sad note, saluting the loss of Bill Farmer, a founding member of The Northwodes, who passed away in late December. He had a long career as a columnist for the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* and was, as we say in these parts, a heck of a guy.

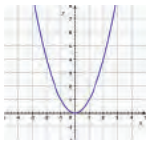
The Orange Plums
(Orange County, California)

Authors sometimes adopt noms de plume. Many members of The Wodehouse Society have adopted noms de Plum; we Orange Plums have adopted noms de Plum too. We use these names only locally because some of us have chosen noms that are currently in official use by other members of TWS. We use the names of some of our favorite characters in our monthly meetings and in correspondence with each other. Unlike authors whose noms are sometimes used to conceal their true identities, I think that ours reveal something of our true selves.

For example, one of our members spends her afternoons ferrying her children from one afternoon activity to another. She has chosen Bobbie Wickham as her local nom de Plum. I wonder if Bobbie appeals to her because instead of driving from lacrosse practice in a Chevy Suburban, she would rather be expressing her *espièglerie* in a scarlet roadster. Or our university professor, who has chosen Billie Dore—does she dream of playing at the Regal and marrying a lord? Our former high-school English teacher has chosen Miss Postlethwaite because, rather than correcting essays and analyzing literary greats, Miss P. gently corrects the grammar of the patrons of the Anglers' Rest, and blithely attends first nights at the Bijou Dream.

Bobbie, Billie, Miss P., Minna Nordstrom, Flick Sheridan, Dame Daphne Winkworth, Angus McAllister, Jill Mariner, the mysterious Orlando Maltravers, and Admiral George J. "Fruity" Biffen are all well-loved characters who are always ready to come out and play. Thus proving PGW's sentiment that "There is no surer foundation for a beautiful friendship than a mutual taste in literature." ("Strychnine in the Soup")

The Pale Parabolites
(Toronto and vicinity)
Contact: George Vanderburgh



The PeliKans
(Kansas City and vicinity)
Contact: Bob Clark

The Perfecto-Zizzbaum Motion Picture Corporation
(Los Angeles and vicinity)
Contact: Doug Kendrick

The Pickering Motor Company
(Detroit and vicinity)
Contact: Elliott Milstein

After several months of inactivity the Pickerings gathered at Larry Nahigian's house in December. I think this was the first meeting since May. Summer

vacations, inertia, sloth, and the national convention made scheduling difficult. Larry served the traditional holiday dish "shakshuka," made with baked eggs and other good things. Look up a recipe online and try it. It's worth the effort.

Elliott Milstein told us all about the convention and why we should all go to the next one. Elliott and Curtis Armstrong are hard at work on a book about Wodehouse. Publication dates and plot details will be revealed as events unfold.

Because this was more of a holiday gathering than a regular meeting, there was no reading assignment. Instead there was a long discussion about dogs, a topic dear to PGW's heart. David and Luann Warren are looking for a new dog, and there was much discussion about breeds.

The next meeting will be on March 29, 2018. We will meet at the Bloomfield Township Library instead of at a member's house. We are going to make an effort to be more serious and literary. The reading selections are "Comrade Bingo," "The Great Sermon Handicap," and "The Purity of the Turf," three short stories that can be found in the volume titled *The Inimitable Jeeves*.

The Pittsburgh Millionaires Club
(Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania)
Contact: Allison Thompson

The Plum Crazies
(Harrisburg, Pennsylvania and vicinity)
Contact: Betty Hooker

In November, the Plum Crazies met at the Oyster Mill Playhouse to see *Jeeves Intervenes*, Margaret Raether's delightful play based on the plots of two Wodehouse short stories, "Jeeves and the Hard-Boiled Egg" and "Jeeves Takes Charge." Raether's other Wodehouse stage adaptations include *Jeeves in Bloom*, *Jeeves Takes a Bow*, and *Jeeves at Sea*.

The primary plot (Bertie loans his flat to a pal so that the pal can impress a wealthy relative) is drawn from "Jeeves and the Hard-Boiled Egg." Bertie's engagement to a girl with a love for Nietzsche and an eye to molding Bertie is taken from "Jeeves Takes Charge." Raether creates additional drama by adding her own unique plot twists—an ill-fated dinner party, the revelation of Aunt Agatha and Sir Rupert Watlington Pipp's youthful romance, and Bertie's clumsy attempt to hang wallpaper incognito—to reach a satisfying conclusion.

The Plum Street Plummies
(Olympia, Washington and vicinity)
Contact: Thomas L. R. Smith

The Right Honorable Knights of Sir Philip Sidney
(Amsterdam, The Netherlands)
Contact: Jelle Otten

At the regular meeting of the Amsterdam chapter on October 7, 2017, we were given a presentation of a new Dutch translation of *The Mating Season* by Leonard Beuger. The title in Dutch is *Jeeves and de Liefde*, which translates roughly to something like "*Jeeves and Love*."

Another pair of translators, the Duk twins (Ronald and Donald Duk), sons of the late Wim Duk, presented two different translations of "Something to Worry About" from *The Man Upstairs*.

But the most exciting highlight for the Right Honorable Knights of Sir Philip Sidney was undoubtedly the announcement of the First Wodehouse Film Festival on November 18, 2017, in Amsterdam. Honorable Knight Rob Sander, who is managing director of the Theater Perdu in Amsterdam, invited the Dutch Wodehousians to attend the film festival. Together with Peter Nieuwenhuizen he had assembled a very attractive program of films. The festival started with the documentary film *Wodehouse at Work* (2017) and was interspersed with film fragments from *Piccadilly Jim* (1936), *A Damsel in Distress* (1937), *The Girl on the Boat* (1961), and *Heavy Weather* (1995). After all that, we were treated to a "real" Wodehouse film—*The Nodder* from 1976—which is set in Hollywood in the 1930s. There was yet another treat: the 2017 documentary film *Jeeves and Wooster on Stage* (2017). In this film, the actors Hugh Laurie and Stephen Fry (from the *Jeeves and Wooster* TV series) told humorous anecdotes about the making of the series.

Several other film and theatrical play fragments were shown at various times during the festival, including *Thank You, Jeeves* (1936), *The World of Wooster* (1965), *By Jeeves* (1996), and *Perfect Nonsense* (2013).

All in all, it was an extraordinary and successful event, and the attendees were thrilled to watch and discuss the various films.

One of the several movies shown at the inaugural Wodehouse Film Festival in Amsterdam.

The next regular meeting of the Knights will be on June 16, 2018, at 1 PM, in Restaurant Szmulewicz, Bakkerstraat 12 (off Rembrandtplein) in Amsterdam.

Rugby In All Its Niceties
(Rugby, Tennessee Region)
Contact: Donna Heffner

The Size 14 Hat Club
(Halifax, Nova Scotia)
Contact: Jill Robinson

The West Texas Wooster
(West Texas)
Contact: Troy Gregory

International Wodehouse Association: Social Media Development

BY JENNIFER SMITH

Jennifer, representing the best and the brightest of the young Wodehouse advocates, gave a short presentation at the TWS D.C. convention about the efforts to connect the Plummy dots across the Internet.

GOOD AFTERNOON. My name is **Jennifer Smith**. You may remember me from such places as the registration table at the Psmith in Pseattle convention. I'm here today on behalf of Jen Scheppers (aka Honoria Glossop), who was unfortunately unable to attend. We both wish she were here right now.

The International Wodehouse Association is embarking on a new project to promote Wodehouse and his work on social media. The goal is to reach a new, wider audience of readers (and potential society members). The social media committee reps are:

Jen Scheppers: U.K., Chair
Jennifer Smith: U.S.
Peter Nieuwenhuizen: Netherlands
Mike Swaddling: U.K.
Stefan Nilsson: Sweden
Kris Smets: Belgium

We're also getting assistance from Ashok Bhatia in India.

So far the committee is:

- researching and compiling a database of existing internet resources on Wodehouse. (You may have seen some research questions if you follow the Fans of P. G. Wodehouse page on Facebook.)
- looking at different pieces of social media software so there can be some continuity in material posted across the various member sites.
- brainstorming different social media outreach options: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.
- considering conducting a member survey to find out members' social media habits/preferences.
- spreading the word to society members and asking members to follow us on Twitter.
- tweeting from Jen's (aka HG's) account and the new U.K. society Twitter account and trying to build a following.
- developing content on the Plumtopia blog specifically for new Wodehouse readers, and encouraging society membership.

So, where do you come in? Well, the project is unfunded, so we're relying on our members to get involved. As I mentioned earlier, share, share, share Wodehouse-related content on your own social media pages. And then, if you will, follow these accounts/pages:

The Wodehouse Society Facebook Page
The Wodehouse Society's Convention Facebook page
@Bally_aunts on Twitter
@PGWodehouseUK
@HonoriaPlum
www.honoriaplum.wordpress.com

The committee's next step is to create some community campaigns. If you have any ideas or interest in helping, please email mrsplum@hotmail.com.

A Tribute to Norman Murphy

by Hilary Bruce

Norman was the Remembrancer of The P G Wodehouse Society (UK) and a great inspiration to so many Wodehouseans around the world. Hilary, who was Norman's successor as Chairman of the U.K. society, and who also was Norman's good friend, delivered this tribute to Norman at the recent convention of The Wodehouse Society in Washington, D.C. We regret we cannot reproduce the opening sound effects.

This was one of Norman's pipes. He always used to use his pipe to call our meetings to order, like so [ting! ting!] and when I succeeded him as Chairman, he bequeathed his gavel to me. And so, ladies and gentlemen . . . [ting! ting! ting!]

I'm proud to have been asked to present a short tribute to Norman Murphy, who died on October 18, 2016.

As I thought about Norman in the context of this Wodehouse Society convention, I was wondering: What *was* it about Norman? People all over the world knew him, remember him, and will continue to do so, but he seemed to be a particularly big hit here in America and, naturally, especially at Wodehouse conventions.

He looked the quintessential Englishman, of course, although even in England we don't see that many pipe-smoking, trilby-wearing gents with tightly furled umbrellas these days, much less a gentleman punctilious about raising said trilby in greeting, or leaping to his feet if a lady entered the room. And he had a particular wiry thinness that spoke of discipline and a military background. Both of those were clearly apparent when he wore his mess kit at these very dinners, a trim and snappy outfit that also showed off his nifty hoofing to best advantage.

But it wasn't just the look of him. As Bob Rains said to me, "You always knew when Norman was in the room." He was a force of nature and took up quite a lot of space in the world. Sometimes you could practically see a force field round him. In any conversation where facts—any facts—were involved, Norman tended to look as if he might burst at any moment, for there was always another crucially interesting piece of information that must urgently be conveyed. Described in obituaries as "blithely unselfconscious," "untroubled by inhibitions," and my favorite, "constitutionally quaint," Norman could, fairly reasonably, be accused of a certain obsessiveness. But that was what made his research so thorough, his books endlessly interesting, and his famous Wodehouse Walks in London and around the English countryside so compelling.

Norman Murphy's Wodehouse Walks were quite famous; he could do a good turn on the dance floor, too.

Of course, Norman talking was quite something. I have, truly, lost count of the number of times I've been privately consulted by baffled Wodehouseans—Brits as well as Americans—confiding that they couldn't quite understand what Norman was saying. Me neither. It was the clipped accent, and of course the legendarily high-speed delivery: those facts again, bursting to come out, brain going so fast and words tripping over each other as they tried to keep up. Once, Norman and another Wodehouse scholar, mature gents both, got chucked out of the Reading Room of the British Museum for swapping Wodehouse gags at top volume. Oh, the shame!

We knew Norman for his scholarship. Wodehouse cheered him up at an anxious time in world events and thus also in his work, and he decided to put his theory—the one about Wodehouse not inventing characters and locations, but using ones he knew—to the test with hours, weeks, in fact decades of research. And what a gift that was to the world of Wodehouse, and to us all, here today. Seven Wodehouse books—eight if you count the two-volume one—and a sought-after London guide book highly rated by London's Blue Badge guides; he updated it twenty years on. What a legacy. They mean that, even though we can no longer walk—well, sprint, more like—the streets of London with a voluble and rather eccentric Englishman brandishing his umbrella, we can still follow in his footsteps through his books, the more recent of which are still in print.

Norman was lucky: he had a good life, with two happy marriages, his last fifteen years shared devotedly with Elin. He had an interesting military career in

which, notwithstanding the possibly rather dry subject matter, he seemed to manage to express himself pretty fully. Norman had, and has, a worldwide fan club, and he enjoyed robust good health until just a few weeks before he died at 83.

And we are lucky, too, because we knew Norman. He fascinated us, entertained us, informed us, and he will stay with us. Ladies and gentlemen, please stand and raise your glasses and more importantly, raise your hearts for the force of nature that was Norman Murphy.

> "Though deprived of Mr. Plomer, we have with us this afternoon Mr. Fink-Nottle. I am sure Mr. Fink-Nottle's name is one that needs no introduction to you. It is, I venture to assert, a name that is familiar to us all."
>
> "Not to you," said Gussie.
>
> *Right Ho, Jeeves* (1934)

Het Meisje in de Taxi *with Fred Astaire (*A Damsel in Distress*, 1937), shown at the inaugural Dutch Wodehouse film festival (see Chapters Corner's Honorable Knights article on page 21)*

Contents

Officers & Volunteers

President
Tom Smith

Vice President
Bill Scrivener

Treasurer (dues payments):
Indu Ravi

Membership Secretary (new-member inquiries, contact information changes):
Ian Michaud

Contact Ian electronically at http://www.wodehouse.org; click on the Membership tab for contact forms.

Editor in Chief and Oldest Member:
Gary Hall

Proofing Editor: Elin Woodger

Final Proofreading & Technical Assistance, Printer/Mailer Liaison, Rosters, Dues Sheets: Neil Midkiff

Website address: www.wodehouse.org
Webmaster: Noel Merrill

Quick Ones (unless otherwise credited) courtesy of John Baesch and Evelyn Herzog.

We appreciate your articles, research, Quick Ones, tales of My First Time, and other observations. Send them to Gary Hall via e-mail or snail mail at the addresses above. Deadlines are February 1, May 1, August 1, November 1. If you have something that might miss the deadline, let me know and we'll work something out.