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"Had he [PGW] written nothing else, his name would have gone down on the scrolls of time, writ in burning and indelible letters." ...Robert Strunsky, reviewing Uncle Fred Flits By. \* \* \* \* \*

The supplement to the August PLUM LINES, "Sir Pelham Grenville Wodehouse, LL.D., Historian," caused no ripples in the great calm which normally prevails in our editorial sancta, comments from our members, pro or con, being zero. Its author, gratified that his scholarly dissertation was not questioned by other authoritative scholars, promises to provide other papers of equal or greater brilliance in a future PL issue if properly approached by our staff.

MOVED - NO FORWARDING ADDRESS We lose two or three members a year this way. PLEASE let us know....

OMISSION: We neglected to list Grover J. Askins, TWS, with our bookseller-members in the August PLUM LINES. Just Plum forgot...

OF PGW BOOKS: Richard Osborne, TWS, wrote in A Wodehouse Companion, "Nobody who studies the Wodehouse fictional oeuvre...can do without David Jasen's Bibliography and Reader's Guide to the First Editions of P. G. Wodehouse." A revised, updated edition is now available from The Spoon River Press, P. O. Box 3635, Peoria, IL 61614 or from Lionel Leventhal, Ltd., 2 - 4 Hampstead High St., London NW3 1QQ, UK...AND a card from Gideon Hill, MD, TWS, with info that The Purloined Paperweight has been reprinted by Paperweight Press. Order from L. H. Selman, Ltd., 761 Chestnut St., Santa Cruz, CA 95060 @ \$14.95. ..And Strand Book Store, 828 Broadway, New York, NY 10003 (212)473-1452, offers The World of Mr. Mulliner for \$6.95 plus \$2. s/h. Mention Item 804, Cat. 5 - 6. ..And Who's Who in Wodehouse, by Dr. Daniel Garrison, TWS, will be published early next year. Dan will have copies on hand at the TWS Convention in August,

QUESTION/ANSWER DEPT

Q: Why, sir, did you omit a quotation mark in your imaginary Bertie/Jeeves "conversation" on p. S-5, 15 August PLUM LINES? ...Grammaticus

A: Dear Grammy: In a typesetting situation which called for six quote marks, our typesetter (who is really highly skilled and can recite the alphabet forward and, he tells me, backward) found that he had only five, having failed to order the proper number. He is now pale and emaciated after three days on bread-and-water in solitary confinement.

Q: What kind of beans (string beans, limas, red kidney, etc.,) did Beans, of Eggs, Beans, and Crumpets order? ..Curious

PLUM LINE - Continued

A: *We may never know, alas! ...OM*

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*OM*  
The Oldest Member

[Doodling Space]

## ON ADAPTING WODEHOUSE

PAT HOOKER

Some weeks ago the gods blessed me with a glory that comes rarely in the life of a dramatist. No, not a ten-year run in the West End or on Broadway, nor the sale of rights in some play to Peter Spielberg. Nothing so trivial as that. Nothing less than a commission to adapt a Wodehouse novel for a full-length radio play.

There is in this country [England] a lamentable tendency to say of Wodehouse, "Oh, yes, of course he's very good, but I haven't read him since I was at school." Perhaps because of this, it is usually the short stories that are dramatised, and then in sit-com form - admirable productions in themselves, of course (it's going to be hard to find a better Bertie than Ian Carmichael) - but I have always believed that some of the major novels would make first-class classic plays.

Here I was given the chance to prove it - and with my favorite of them all, "Right Ho, Jeeves." Not only a perfect comic novel, but one in which all the action and most of the comedy is verbal, the characters are well-differentiated (an essential for radio -- you can't have the "Hello, Tom," "Oh, hello, Bill, is that George with you?" sort of dialogue for long - but who in their right mind would confuse Gussie Fink-Nottle, for instance, with Tuppy Glossop, or Madeline Bassett with Aunt Dahlia?), and in which the dialogue is incomparable - imagine the joy of hearing Bertie's unintentional proposal to "that Bassett disaster," or Jeeves' description of Gussie's hunted night upholstered in scarlet tights - never mind that immortal scene on the Market Snodsbury Grammar School prize-giving. So, for one week, I was on Cloud Nine.

When I start to adapt a book, I usually type out all the dialogue, and then use that as a first draft. At the end of that first week, I had ninety-seven pages of brilliant, crackling, sparkling dialogue, only awaiting the human voice to bring it to new life. What it got, of course, was my human voice - one of the darker sides of writing for radio or television is that you work to a strict time-limit, so the play has to be tightly timed - and you can only test its length by reading it all out loud.

So I read it all out loud (and it was, of course, good enough to survive even that!) - and discovered that that first draft ran exactly two hours, twenty-seven minutes - and the play length is ninety minutes.

So - an abrupt descent from Cloud Nine, and out comes the blue pencil. And the agony. Where do you cut, and what do you cut? Not scenes, of course. The first thing you learn when dealing with Wodehouse is that you can't cut scenes. A Wodehouse

## PLUM LINES - Supplement

novel is as carefully constructed as a Swiss watch. When you read it, it all bubbles along effortlessly - but when you come to dissect the craftsmanship - ! An English critic once said, "To criticise Wodehouse is like taking a spade to a souffle." I felt as if I were taking a hatchet to a crystal chandelier.

The dialogue, then. And my howls of agony could probably be heard in Alaska. Another week or so, and I had a script that looked as if it had had a chance meeting with a Mills bomb. And it still ran two hours, seven and a half minutes. It was at this stage that I realised the sombre truth behind Bertie's remark that he had once heard of a man who always had twenty-seven Martinis before dinner, and felt there was a good deal to be said for the practice.

Another three weeks - and I lost count of the number of Martinis. Still two hours, two and a half minutes. Then I had to face up to the awful truth. Something major would have to go. In short - Anatole. Not as a character, of course - the motivation of Anatole's cooking is central to the whole plot. But Anatole as a person would have to remain off-stage, like Uncle Tom - and that meant losing that marvellous scene when the hunted Gussie makes faces at him through his bedroom skylight. (It was at this stage that I began to picture myself surrounded by a hollow square of members of the Wodehouse Society, solemnly snipping off my fountain pen.) So, no Anatole.

And still another eight minutes to go. And that meant losing Jeeves' parrot. (You must remember that parrot - owned by a former employer, Lord Brancaster, who, observing that the bird appeared lethargic, offered it "a portion of seed cake steeped in the '84 port," with disastrous results.) And losing, too, Jeeves' cheerful little anecdote ( about the two men who set out to cycle to Brighton, and when the rescue party arrived, "It was discovered that they had been hurled together with such force that it was impossible to sort them out at all adequately. The keenest eye could not discern which portion of the fragments was Nichols and which Jackson. So they collected as much as they could and called it Nixon"), which he recounts to Bertie before sending him off on that nine-mile bicycle ride.

Another five minutes to lose. By this time I was cutting out the odd phrase, the individual adjective, the single word here and there. But still another two minutes. And there was only one place to find that - at Market Snodsbury Grammar School. No - not the prize-giving itself, but Jeeves' description of what happened after Bertie left. Which, on my timing, took exactly two minutes. It was at this point that, like the two eighteen-handicap golfers who, while playing for the dubious honor of marrying Agnes Flack, suddenly found themselves playing good golf for the first time in their lives, "the madness came upon me." One slash of the blue pencil - and at last, eighty-seven minutes, thirty seconds - which should be about right.

The script is finished now, and gone to its resting place - until such time as it is broadcast, and the phone starts to run hot with vituperation from Wodehouse lovers. Of whom I would be the first, if anyone else had done it. It works, as a play. It is extremely funny - nobody could destroy that. It is, if you like, the glittering skeleton of a masterpiece, waiting to be fleshed out by the voices of actors speaking that incomparable dialogue. At least, I sincerely hope so. And I hope too that among the thousands who listen to it, there might be a few who think, "There must be more to this bloke than I thought when I was at school," and go out and get hold of the original. If that does happen, all the agony won't have been in vain.

So, please - next time you see or hear a dramatisation of the Master, don't shoot the adapter. He (or in this case, she) has suffered even more than you have. #####

[Miss H. P. (Pat) Hooker, TWS, an Australian Plummy living in London, writes for radio and television. We sincerely hope that some of our U. S. radio stations will be astute enough to bring us Right Ho, Jeeves. Our Canadian members and Americans living within listening range from Canadian stations will doubtless...sooner or later...hear Pat's adaptation.]

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Phil Ayers, TWS tells all:

One day, in the Seattle Public Library, I came across a section of books by P. G. Wodehouse. I checked one out, and after reading it I was hooked. I couldn't wait until I could return and go through the whole section.

In 1982 I was fortunate to be able to go to England to combine my two affections: PGW and dogs. I went to Crufts Dog Show and to as many places associated with PGW as possible. Of several highlights, being at Dulwich College and seeing the Wodehouse Corner would top the list. The Head Librarian, Mrs. Slythe [TWS], allowed me to look at the original letters PGW wrote to Bill Townend. I came to feel a lot closer to PGW. To walk the same fields and halls as the schoolboy Wodehouse, to stand at the small gate to the cricket and rucker fields, to walk the streets of Dulwich was like walking the Streets of Gold. The School Porter was kind enough to show me around the school and made my trip more meaningful.

Another highlight was meeting Mr. and Mrs. Osborne and Barry Phelps. I learned so much about PGW from them that I shall always be grateful. I feel deeply indebted to them. I was able to travel around the countryside even though the train strike was on. I went to Guildford to see where Plum was born, then to the town of Emsworth and saw Threepwood House, and where King Hall School stood. I went to Shropshire and saw not only PGW's family home there, but also where N. T. P. Murphy [TWS] believes Blandings is set; I agree with him. I traveled back to London by bus, and so was able to stop at Droitwich and Bridgnorth.

I walked much in the Mayfair area, the home of the Drones and the well-to-do. It was hard to imagine how the area must have looked in the time frame of the turn of the century to the 1930s. I believe that I stood where Psmith offered the umbrella to Eve, where Bertie was picked up by Jeeves and escorted to his club, where Aunt Dahlia had her London home, where so much of the royal treasury of Wodehouse lore occurred, tried to find many of the sites where the young struggling author and the well-off accomplished author had lived.

(Concluded on p. S-5)

## RELIVING WODEHOUSE

N.T.P. Murphy, *In Search of Blandings*. Introduction by Tom Sharpe. Topsfield, Mass.: Salem House Publishers, 1986. Pp. xiv, 258. \$18.95

Particularly for American readers of Wodehouse who (like myself) have never lived in England, the kind of handbook painstakingly assembled by Norman Murphy will be a great eye-opener. This book picks up where biographers like Jasen and Donaldson and critics like French, Usborne, and Green have left off, digging a bit deeper for the sources of Plum's inspiration in the relatives, acquaintances, London clubs and neighborhoods, English counties, houses, castles, manors, and other unexplored byways of Wodehousiana.

In the hands of a lesser writer, such investigations could be trivial and boring, because Murphy offers little here which throws significant new light on how Wodehouse worked. As we would expect, Plum used whatever opportunities he had to draw his characters from life, sometimes combining a number of originals to create such major personalities as Ukridge, Jeeves, and Bertie Wooster. Some of his scenes, too, are composites of places where Wodehouse spent time, and Murphy sensibly avoids forcing one-on-one correspondences where it is more likely that the plastic imagination of the writer has moved locations, topographical features, and buildings to suit the requirements of his complex plots. One interesting constant in Murphy's investigations, however, is that buildings tend to be more definite in their source than characters. The case in point, which gave Murphy his title and his climactic final chapter, is Blandings Castle, whose identity is best revealed in Murphy's own account.

The altogether reasonable hypothesis on which Murphy's book is built is that Wodehouse did not fabricate his stories out of whole cloth but assembled them from components in his own experience: that is, from the real world. To go out and prove the hypothesis was not, like countless acts of Sherlock Holmes and Bertie Wooster, the work of a moment, but years of Holmesian detective work, much of it performed around the edges of the author's Army job behind a desk in Whitehall. Like Geoffrey Jaggard, Murphy enjoys filling in missing information on the basis of small hints in Wodehouse stories. He supplements these with letters, interviews, and considerable footwork. Much of the pleasure of reading *In Search of Blandings* comes from sharing in the process of discovery; Murphy's skill in retelling his investigations contributes to our pleasure in reading his book. This detective story is well enough told to make us feel like partners in the search.

Besides extensive footwork, Murphy has done his homework well, combing the Wodehouse opus for clues and taking full advantage of earlier finds by biographers and critics to open new ground. The essential preparation with books and public records could be done any time, but because Wodehouse's world is disappearing piece by piece as informants die off, buildings are torn down, and golf courses become housing developments, it was important that Murphy did his work when he did. Edwardian England is going fast, as is much of the England which existed before World War II.

Wodehouse lovers will find their own surprises in Murphy's pages. One of mine was to discover Bertie Wooster's athletic side. He is, after all, a smoker, he indulges rather freely in the pleasures of drinking (at the Drones, rendering him often needy of Jeeves' famous pick-me-ups) and of the table (Aunt Dahlia can always bribe him with Anatole's cooking), and he is easily intimidated by physical threats. The only personal achievements he can think of are schoolboy triumphs with a wildflower collection and scripture knowledge and a single literary masterpiece, the article on dress which he wrote for Aunt Dahlia's *Milady's Boudoir* in exchange for a packet of cigarettes. Granted, he once confidently bet that he could swing from one end to another of the Drones' pool on the rings (the Drones at that point, some time prior to the action of "Jeeves and the Yule-tide Spirit" (1927), being identifiable with the Bath Club at 34 Dover Street), only to be foiled when Tuppy Glossop tied back the last ring and Bertie, lacking whatever it took to swing back to his starting-point, was forced to drop into the pool in faultless evening dress. The sting of this humiliation is often remembered and counted against Tuppy in Bertie's book of life, but not necessarily because Bertie has been cheated of any proof of athletic prowess: for the most part, Bertie presents himself

as a sedentary counter-hero. We need think only of Bertie's "physical anguish in the billowy portions" after his eighteen-mile bicycle ride in Right Ho, Jeeves to be reminded how badly he takes to physical exertion. Murphy reminds us, on the other hand, that in Very Good, Jeeves Bertie looks forward to spending the Christmas holidays at Bleaching Court because Lord Witherspoon's stables "always contain something worth riding." Bertie on a horse?! What happens to his billowy portions? This equestrian dimension, it seems, has to do with one Lord Mildmay, a successful steeplechase amateur whom Wodehouse identified in a 1963 interview with Alistair Cooke as "very much the type of Bertie Wooster." Another athletic model reflected in Very Good, Jeeves is Victor Cazalet, brother of Plum's son-in-law Peter, who played rackets for Oxford and was four times Amateur Squash Champion. In "Jeeves and the Impending Doom" (1926) Bertie mentions with relish "my fast serve" and "my slow bending return down the centre-line" in a game of lawn tennis, and a year later in "Jeeves and the Yule-tide Spirit" he is a runner-up in the Squash Handicap at the Drones. Murphy points out that in The Mating Season we are told Bertie played rackets well enough at Oxford to get his Blue. Speaking of athletes, Murphy might have gone on to note that Bertie's man Jeeves got his name from a Gloucestershire bowler named Jeeves who was killed at the Somme in 1916, the same year the first Jeeves story appeared.

Wodehouse fans will learn much from Murphy's investigation of the people and places which have been in various ways cooked into Wodehouse fiction. Murphy himself has cooked years of painstaking detective work into an entertaining account of the creative process. The next time you go abroad, it will serve you well on your literary pilgrimages in search of Wodehouse's England.

Daniel H. Garrison, TWS  
Department of Classics  
Northwestern University

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(Continued from p. S-3)

There are other PGW sites that I missed the first time around; on a future trip I hope to meet Col. Murphy, who seems so knowledgeable. I took many pictures that I would be willing to share at the next Wodehouse Convention. I remember fondly my time with everyone at Cornell, and am looking forward to San Francisco.

[Phil and Amy joined TWS in 1981. Phil has come to two TWS Conventions, and we hope to meet both Phil and Amy at San Francisco next August. OM]

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PLUM LINES

Supplement

Captain William Blood,

12th September 1986

Dear Bill,

Greetings and salutations to all members of The Wodehouse Society. It is gratifying, in a rather sad way, that so many members are suffering withdrawal symptoms through the lack of Barry Phelps' Wodehouse catalogues. Alas this may remain the case and so the originals will continue to soar in price when illicitly traded in the back-rooms of the less scrupulous antiquarian bookdealers.

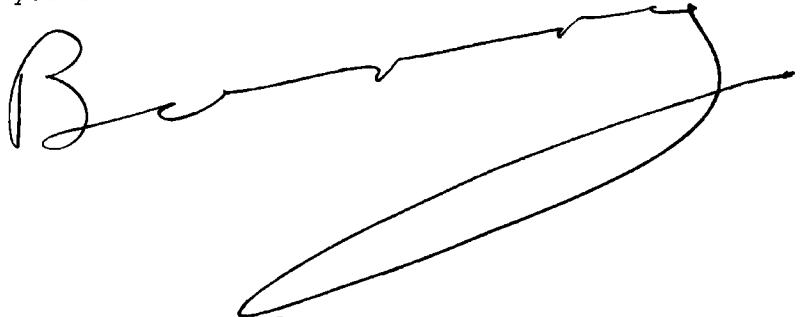
My venture into dealing in everything by and about The Master started because I was working in a job that gave me scant satisfaction and which - with a little applied intelligence and a lot of experience - I could do in three hours a day when it took my peers eight hours to do the same work. Its advantage was that it met my childrens' unreasonable desire to be fed, housed, clothed and educated.

Then, two-and-a-half years ago, I was tempted by gold (a.k.a. large quantities of pound notes) to enter financial public relations. This has given me a great deal of job satisfaction but does take ten to fourteen hours out of my day. Sadly this has eliminated the time I have for dealing in Wodehouse material. I keep my own Collection (housed in the P.G. Wodehouse Library at Dulwich College) reasonably up to date but that is all. I have a second collection at home and my daughter has a collection. That means that my once vast dealing stock no longer contains much of any great rarity.

So that is the sad and slightly pathetic story of the fall from grace of the once arrogant and egocentric leading dealer in all material by and about The Master. One of these days, in the dim, distant and dusty future, as an irascible, selfish, foul-mouthed and senile old-man I may be free to return to book dealing. Until then members of The Wodehouse Society will have to make do with Charles E. Gould Junior at Kent School, Conn, 06757. He has the advantages I lack of a scholarly mind, modesty, expertise, courtesy and a charming faith in the integrity of his fellow persons.

Best wishes to you all

Barry Phelps

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, starting with a prominent capital 'B' and ending with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke that loops back under the main body of the signature.