



Plum Lines

The quarterly journal of The Wodehouse Society

Volume 24 Number 2 Summer 2003

Right Ho, Toronto!!

BY ELLIOTT MILSTEIN

NOW THAT the latest Asian flu scare has finally receded from its shores, the city of Toronto stands ready to welcome hundreds of Plummies from all over the globe this August for the Tenth (or is it Twelfth? — more on this at a later date!) TWS Convention. For all those planning to attend the great event, this article is a must read. For those thinking of attending, this article is also a must read. For those who were toying casually with the idea of attending, this article is also a must read. For all those...heck, just read it, OK?

First, just the facts, in my own words, omitting no detail however slight: Date: August 8–10, 2003. Place: Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Site: St. Michael's College in the University of Toronto and the Sutton Place Hotel. Planners: The Pickering Motor Corporation (the Detroit-area chapter of The Wodehouse Society). Addresses, directions and contact names and numbers come at the end of this article.

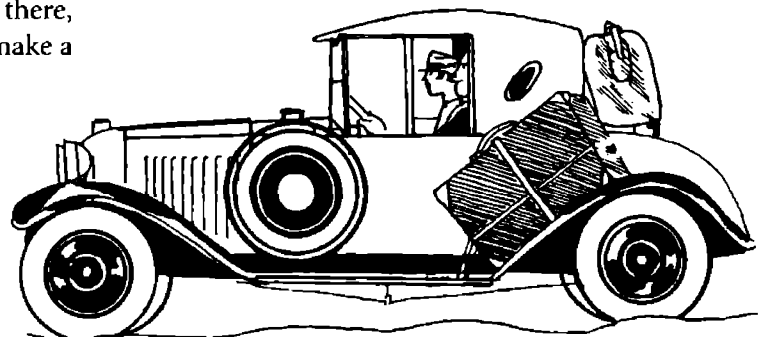
The TWS Convention has traditionally been described as a weekend affair, from Friday evening to Sunday morning, but in the latter years the good times could not be contained in such a short period of time, and so we have had significant spill-over of events into daytime Friday and even Thursday night. This convention will be no exception.

Many Wodehousians are also Sherlockians as well. (Why is that, by the way? An interesting article there, don't you think?) All such "combo" fans should make a

special point of attending this meeting, as Toronto is home to the largest Conan Doyle collection in the world. It is housed in the Toronto Reference Library, just a few blocks away from the hotel and convention site. The room is open to the public on Thursdays from 2:00 pm to 4:00 pm. Those who arrive in time on August 7 are encouraged to visit. In honor of our convention, the library will also be displaying selected Wodehouse collectables as well. In addition, our own Clients of Adrian Mulliner have been invited to attend a private tour of the collection on Friday at 3:00 pm, just prior to slinking off to a cozy pub nearby to hold their secret Senior Bloodstain meeting.

Speaking of cozy pubs, Thursday arrivals are invited to infest the Windsor Arms Hotel bar. No special arrangements have been made with the management of the hotel; we're just going to show up and give them the shock of their lives. I chose this site because it is truly a beautiful bar, it's close (just a stone's throw from St. Mike's and a somewhat longer lob from the Sutton Place), it has special memories for me personally (we won't go into that right now) and it is one of the few places in the tobacco-phobic city that has a cigar lounge (never fear, non-smokers; the oh-so-civilized Canadians have all public smoking confined to fully enclosed,

*Pack up the old Pickering
and point it toward Toronto!*



vented rooms). We will begin foregathering after dinner and won't leave till they kick us out.

Registration will begin on Thursday, some time in the afternoon (we haven't worked out all the details yet) in the Reading Room of the St. Michael's College Library. Registration will continue through Friday. Exhibitors will have tables there to browse through after registration or whenever. (Note: If you wish to exhibit, please contact Elliott Milstein—see below.) We are planning to have a television/VCR/DVD player there with stacks of Wodehouse shows, movies and documentaries to watch. For those who just want to sit and read there will be plenty of comfy chairs and, of course, books. I mean, come on: you're in a library! Actually, St. Mike's has a particularly large Wodehouse collection, the story of which I will share with anyone who will listen. Another exhibition of Wodehousiana will be there, including a copy of my 1976 thesis on Wodehouse, still moldering away in the St. Mike's rare book room. Oh joy.

Of course, no TWS convention is complete without a cricket game, and the TWSCC will be on hand Friday, doing its thing at Trinity Field, located at Trinity College nearby. Tea will be served to those who purchased a ticket, but all are welcome to come and watch cricket at its finest.

The Friday night Reception will be in the lovely Charbonnel Lounge at St. Mike's and the Saturday program will start at 9:00 am sharp at Alumni Hall. Snacks will be provided, but not lunch. Those who do not wish to leave the campus and make the trek to Yonge or Bloor in search of lunch can dine in the school cafeteria (the food's not bad—I lived on it for four years and no one ever said I was too thin—and pretty inexpensive). Arrangements must be made ahead of time, however, so please contact Elyse or me before July 15.

The Saturday program will end with a Wodehouse story reading by the Pickering Players, including those fine actors of stage and screen, Richard Scrimger and Curtis Armstrong. In a league with Laurie and Fry, Collins and Alderton, Richardson and O'Toole, we guarantee you will leave swearing you have never heard nor seen Ukridge and Corky done better.

In the evening, the program shifts to the Sutton Place Hotel for the Cocktail Party and Banquet, as well as the Sunday Brunch the following day. If you've been before, you know the routine: browsing, sluicing, singing, dancing, silliness and grand fun. If you've not been to a convention before, this is the one to start with.

FOR those of you unfamiliar with Toronto, it is one of North America's premier cities. A restaurant and city guide will be available at registration. There are vast underground malls, as well as great shopping on the

streets. Toronto also has a large number of fine bookstores and access to British publications, so there are many more Wodehouses available there than in the US. Books are not subject to duty coming back to the US, so load up. T.O. is a great theatre town too. Those interested in purchasing tickets to a play may go to the following website: www.torontoperforms.com.

Toronto has a terrific transit system and there is no need to rent a car. (Those of you driving to Toronto need to be careful: it has automated toll roads. You drive blithely along and then a few weeks later you get a bill in the mail.) You can even take the subway from the airport or train station to the hotel, if you wish to avoid the cost of a cab. Be sure to have adequate identification going through customs and immigration (a birth certificate is better than just a driver's license; passport of course is best).

If you have not registered, it is not too late. Please do so right away, though. Also, make your hotel reservations right now. Toronto is very popular in the summer and we have had to release our reserved rooms already to avoid penalties. See you there!

Important Data:

The Sutton Place, the headquarters hotel, is located at 955 Bay Street at Wellesley. Subway Stop: Wellesley. Walk two blocks west or take Wellesley bus west two stops to Bay Street.

St. Michael's College is one block north and one block west of the Sutton Place, on St. Joseph's Street, between Bay and Queen's Park. The John M. Kelly Library is on the south side of the street. Registration is in the Library Reading Room, on your left immediately after entering the library. For those staying on campus, check-in is at Elmsley Hall, Summer Residence Office. From St Joseph's Street, walk up Elmsley Place (right across the street from the Library) to the end. Walk to the left around the building in front of you. Elmsley Hall is on your left. Continue walking to the far doors right in front of you. This is the entrance to the Office.

Trinity College is across Queen's Park and to the north from St. Mike's. It's about a half-mile walk. If you want to take the bus, take the Wellesley bus west to the first stop after you go around Queen's Park. If you are walking, head north around Queen's Park (or walk through it, it's rather nice) and cross the street just north of it. Continue along for about a block. Trinity College is on your right.

The Toronto Reference Library is at 789 Yonge Street, just north of Bloor Street on the east side of the street. (This is about three blocks north and one block east of St. Mike's.) Upon entering, ask for the Conan Doyle Room.

The Windsor Arms Hotel is at 18 St. Thomas Street. St. Thomas is a little dead-end street that juts south from

Bloor, just east of Bay Street. The best way to get there, though, is by walking north off the St. Mike's campus, through the Victoria College Parking Lot, and bang, you're there. If this sounds too frightening, just head up Bay to Bloor, make a left and then turn right on St. Thomas.

Attention Exhibitors: There is no charge to exhibit at the convention, but space is limited, so call or write immediately. Also, please note that there will be two exhibit areas: the Reading Room on Thursday and Friday, and then Alumni Hall on Saturday. Alumni Hall is about 200 meters from the Library, but it is on the second floor (no

fear, there is an elevator). The Reading Room will be locked Thursday night, but must be vacated Friday afternoon. Saturday will be set up in the morning, and take down after the meeting. Call Elliott or Elyse for details.

Another attraction which our regular convention-goers will be eagerly awaiting: Friday night at 9:00 pm you may visit "The Land Where the Good Songs Go to Eat a Late Supper & Listen to Some Folk Music."

Award-winning songwriter Terry Kitchen (better known to us as NEWT Max Pokrivchak) and Canadian folksinger Eve Goldberg will be in concert at The Free Times Cafe, 320 College Street (2 blocks west of Spadina, just 1.8 km from Sutton Place), Toronto; Friday, August 8, 9-11 pm; \$7; full menu, call (416) 967-1078 to reserve a table; more information at www.thefreetimescafe.com.

Attention Poets: Convention Contest!

BY ELLIOTT MILSTEIN

TRAVELING to the Great White North for the TWS convention this summer, one's thoughts naturally turn to considering how many Canadians one can find in the Wodehouse oeuvre. Well, personally, I haven't a clue, except that I know 1) there aren't very many and 2) there's one really important one, *viz.* Ralston McTodd.

Anyone who is anyone knows that Wodehouse's best novel is *Leave It To Psmith* and anyone who has read *Leave It To Psmith* even once (though I personally can't see how one can read it only once—rather like eating one pistachio) knows that the plot centers on Psmith's impersonating "the powerful young singer of Saskatoon." Much is made of the poet's output. Certainly it earned him enough money to travel to England and enough fame to be invited to Blandings. But of his actual work, we have so little. In fact, there is only that one line of poetry, surviving today, like some scrap of papyrus bearing a single thought of a great ancient philosopher:

'Across the pale parabola of Joy...'

Psmith spent much time puzzling over the meaning of this opening line. So did Miss Peavey. And so have I, wondering what could possibly have followed. Haven't you?

I am sure you are all way ahead of me at this point. Yes, Plumies, I am here to announce

The Great Ralston McTodd Canadian Poetry Contest!

The object is to complete the poem, and the winner will be based on the following criteria:

Appropriateness. There are clues in the book as to Mr McTodd's style and subject matter. You should be faithful to the author's intentions.

McToddishness. We meet Mr McTodd in this book; Wodehouse also takes us into his head. And we hear much about him from third sources. How would such a man write? All great authors show part of themselves in their work. Where is McTodd the man?

Canadianness. Anyone who has taken a CanLit course, or even—can it be possible—read Canadian literature, knows that every Canadian writer, from Leacock to Atwood, can't help reminding you every three or four sentences that he is a Canadian writing about Canadians in Canada. I am sure McTodd was no different. Where are those Canadian references?

Humor. Not intentional humor, no no no, not our Ralston. But certainly his poem is likely to make us laugh in spite of itself. After all, didn't you laugh when you first read the first line?

Entries can be sent in ahead of time, or turned in at registration. Contest winners will be announced at the convention and required to read their works at the banquet. So abandon the hyperbola of Despair and unleash the reticulum of Creativity. And don't forget the giblets!

Thanks to Max Pokrivchak for the idea of this contest.



Wideawake Wodehouse—and the occasional nod

BY DAVID LANDMAN

This article, based on a talk given at the 1995 TWS Convention in Boston, was originally published in *Jeeves*, the journal of The Wodehouse Society Sweden in 2002. It is reprinted here by permission of Jacob Bagge, editor.

THE issuing of the CD, *The Land Where the Good Songs Go: The Lyrics of P. G. Wodehouse*, which features the voices of Sylvia McNair and Hal Cazalet accompanied by the piano of Steven Blier, is the grand overture to a reawakened appreciation of Wodehouse as a lyricist. For the first time it is Wodehouse the lyricist, not the composer, who is featured, and the McNair/Cazalet/Blier CD [referred to as MCB hereafter] contains at least ten of his songs not to my knowledge recorded in recent times—or, perhaps, ever. Welcome as this production is, it merely skims the surface of the over 300 songs for which Wodehouse provided lyrics, but the good news is that Plummies will be able, at least, to read those lyrics in Barry Day and Tony Ring's compilation scheduled for publication in 2003.

Wodehouse began by contributing lyrics for interpolated songs in British musicals. In America, where he did his most distinguished work, his career took off in earnest with *Miss Springtime* (1916). Wodehouse became a transatlantic commuter in 1909, and so captivated was he by the zest and inventiveness of the American idiom that in short order he was idiomatically bilingual. His light verse sounded English; his song lyrics American. ("Non-Stop Dancing" on MCB which contains "fortnight" and "curate" was written for a London show, *The Beauty Prize*, 1923.) So discriminating was his ear that in his Broadway lyrics he avoided even the most subtle anglicisms. For example, it seems clear that in the song "Bungalow in Quogue" (*The Riviera Girl*, 1917) he uses the word "bungalow" in the American sense of a lightly-built, inexpensive house rather than in the British sense of the time of a more substantial and specifically one-story building.

Verse:

Oh, let us fly without delay into the country far away,
Where free from all this care and strife,
We'll go and live the simple life.
How clear the voice of Nature calls.
I'll go and get some overalls,
And get a last year's almanac
To read at night when things are slack.

Refrain:

Let's build a little bungalow in Quogue,
In Yaphank or in Hicksville or Patchogue.
Where we can sniff the scented breeze
And pluck tomatoes from the trees,
Where there is room to exercise the dog.

How pleasant it will be through life to jog,
With Bill the bull and Hildebrand the hog.
Each morn we'll waken from our doze,
When Reginald the rooster crows,
Down in our little bungalow in Quogue.

With the same idiomatic accuracy, he used the word "flat" in "Nesting Time in Flatbush" (*Oh, Boy!*, 1917) in the American sense of a domicile a couple of steps below an apartment in elegance, rather than in the British sense of an entire floor of rooms which may, in fact, be quite elegant.

When it's nesting time in Flatbush,
We will take a little flat,
With welcome on the mat,
Where there's room to swing a cat.

The phrase, "room to swing a cat," is typical of Wodehouse's delight in the bounce of American idiom. Perhaps because he was a reserved Englishman who had slipped his tether, he revels in it.

The break from the schmaltz of Viennese operetta, from the "bestus man what am's" of the so-called "coon song," from the pseudo-Biblical and pseudo-Shakespearean diction of the sentimental ballad, like Edward Teschmacher's "Because God made thee mine, I'll cherish thee," was well under way when Wodehouse came on the scene. George M. Cohan at the turn of the century was a main force in inaugurating the vernacular movement, and Irving Berlin, who was seven years younger than Wodehouse, but who had begun turning out songs by 1909, followed. The rush was already on to collar the lingo of America and say it to music. Colloquial dialect is one of the most enduring characteristics of the American pop song, and Wodehouse joined the fun and pushed it mightily along.

He differs slightly from his contemporaries, though, in his choice of subject. As "Bungalow in Quogue" suggests, Wodehouse is the master of the contented couple song. Much of his lyrical output is about middle-class domestic bliss. Other composers of the day generally wrote about the ecstatic elation of first love or the disillusion of love gone sour. (A notable exception is Gus Kahn's lyric "My Blue Heaven.") The charm of "Bungalow" derives from the folly of naive urbanites idealizing the country life. It is all very much in the vein of *Love Among the Chickens*. They give

pet names to the livestock they will have to slaughter. And even the annoyances (“When we are sitting up at nights / comparing our mosquito bites” from the second refrain) appear delightful to the unbitten idealists. Do not be deceived by the clichés—“free from all this care and strife / we’ll go and live the simple life.” They are not careless work, but deliberately conceived to convey the folly of the idyllic vision the greenhorns have of farm life. In other words, the song is coherent in the way the best poetry is coherent: there is neither padding nor irrelevance; everything functions and blends to produce the ruling effect.

And it is this vigilant wide-awakeness, this active unifying intelligence that is for me the most important gift Wodehouse brought to the vernacular lyric in America. He did not innovate as much as he applied a keen, unflagging attentiveness to the comic possibilities of his subject, which was, thereby, never violated by excrescence in the form of inadvertent contradiction, lazy cliché or hackneyed sentiment. In brief, his lyrics are all of a piece, or to borrow one of his song titles, “rolled into one.”

This may not seem like much of an achievement today when we have the lyrics of Ira Gershwin, Lorenz Hart, and Oscar Hammerstein II to look back upon. But placed in the context of the fatuous pabulum which was then being spooned out on the musical stage, it is a significant achievement, indeed. Space permits only one example (for which I am indebted to Philip Furia) which will have to stand as typical. Adrian Ross wrote the following English verse for Lehár’s song “Home” from *The Merry Widow*:

The stormy world may be wild as ocean foam
We shall not care what the weary world may do.

Now which is it? A stormy world or a weary world? It cannot be both, especially in consecutive lines. It was Wodehouse who led the way to the greater literary coherence which marks the work of those great lyricists named above.

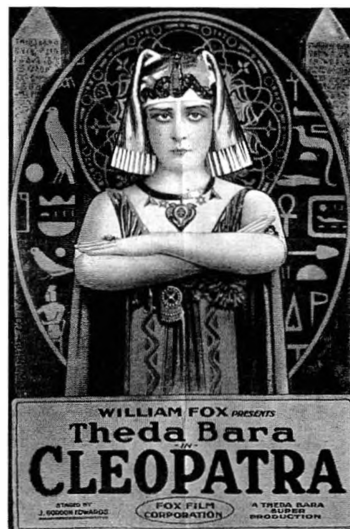
Another aspect of Wodehouse’s keen intelligence is his ability to contour a song’s intellectual level to character. Although Wodehouse/Kern show tunes are enjoyable in their own right, an added measure of fun obtains when the character for whom the song was written and the circumstances of plot are known. Take, for example, the clever novelty song “Cleopatterer” from *Leave It to Jane* (1917).

In days of old beside the Nile a famous queen there dwelt;
Her clothes were few, but full of style; her figure slim and svelte;
On every man that wandered by
She pulled the Theda Bara eye;
And every one observed with awe
That her work was swift but never raw.

The song is sung by Flora Wiggins, a love-starved girl who helps run her mother’s boarding house near Atwater College, the scene of the play. Flora is a simple girl who has been often courted and then jilted by college Romeos. She yearns to be a dominating vamp as she imagines was Cleopatra, but she doesn’t know much about history, and that’s where the deeper fun of the song comes in. Flora fantasizes that Cleopatra ditched an endless string of lovers by poisoning them.

She couldn’t stand by any means
Reproachful, stormy farewell scenes;
To such coarse stuff she would not stoop;
So she just put poison in his soup.

Cleopatra’s homicidal delicacy is not history; it is something Flora makes up because in her endearing ignorance she imagines the Egyptian queen in the image of what she does know, movie vamps like Theda Bara.



Poster for the
1917 Fox film of
Cleopatra
starring
Theda Bara

When out with Cleopatterer, men always made their wills,
They knew there was no time to waste
When the gumbo had that funny taste.

Flora doesn’t even know how to pronounce her role model’s name, which explains the title.

Thus the humor is subtler than appears at first hearing. “Cleopatterer” arises from the amorous longing of a naive and simple girl, and the comic contouring of the words to Flora’s limitations exemplifies what I mean by Wodehouse’s alertness. Such insight was the basis of the integrated show which Bolton, Wodehouse and Kern pioneered in the American theatre in which songs were delimited by situation and character. This alertness is what Richard Rodgers referred to when he wrote that “before Larry Hart, only P. G. Wodehouse had made any assault on the intelligence of the song-listening public.”

But while we must admire Wodehouse’s genius in writing lyrics, his musical aptitude was quite another thing. His

step-daughter Leonora records that “he’s not a bit interested in music and can’t play a note.” How, then, did he and Kern collaborate when they were so often apart? Leonora answers this question in an article, “P. G. Wodehouse at Home,” published in *The Strand Magazine* in January 1929 and reprinted in Frances Donaldson’s biography of Plum. Leonora writes: “A thing that has always amazed me about Plum is his ability to write lyrics, set them to music, and to carry a tune in his head that he had probably only heard three or four times....At the back of his mind the tune is there; with no knowledge of music he recognizes the rhythm, the short beats and the long beats. I remember when he was writing a musical comedy in America, the composer [Kern] would telephone Plum, probably a hundred miles away, put the telephone on the piano, and play the tune to him three or four times. And that night Plum would finish and send off a lyric which fitted the tune properly.”

A remarkable and often successful procedure, no doubt, but there is at least one instance when, if the telephone method was employed, it failed. I refer to the song “Land Where the Good Songs Go” from *Miss 1917*, a Bolton-Wodehouse-Kern review. I know of three renditions currently available from which the reader can judge my critique for himself. Sylvia McNair sings it to Andre Previn’s beautiful piano accompaniment on her CD *Sure Thing*. It can be heard on MCB, and also as sung by Pamela Myers on a double CD *Jerome Kern: Life Upon the Wicked Stage*.

There is in the music, it seems to me, a discrepancy between verse and chorus. This was noted by Neil Midkiff in his *Plum Lines* review of MCB (vol. 22, no. 4, Winter 2001). Midkiff writes, “Kern’s music for the verse is unstable both in harmony and in rhythm as Plum deplores the treatment of ‘dear old songs forgotten too soon; they had their day and then we threw them away.’ The chorus is painted in idyllic, restful tones, evenly gliding through the paradise that the old songs enjoy.”

Midkiff has, I believe, put his finger on a disconnection between verse and chorus and, what is more, between composer and lyricist, though he does not take the matter further. But it seems to me more than likely that Wodehouse misunderstood Kern’s intentions rather badly. Wodehouse’s lyric treats the music for its charm throughout. Kern, on the other hand, uses the verse for harsh criticism of the day’s popular songs, and thus, his melody breaks into two opposed ideas: the bad songs parodied in the verse and the good songs evoked in the chorus. The harmony of the verse is more than (in Midkiff’s generous term) “unstable”; it is terrible and, I believe, deliberately so. So too is the rhythm of the verse with its erratic alternation of half, quarter, and eighth notes. Surely, Kern is depicting inept music. The deliberateness of Kern’s

The verse of “Land Where the Good Songs Go”

intention is clinched for me by the jarring C-flat to which Wodehouse inappropriately sets the word “afternoon.” This sour note I am sure comes as a shock to the listener. It did even to my amateur ear. (In the second verse Wodehouse comes closer to Kern’s intention by writing “newer tune” at that point.) I think it is a good bet that the musical genius who could so breathtakingly bend his tune at the words “that in this whole wide world you’ve chosen me” in “They’ll Never Believe Me” knew what he was doing in creating this contrast between verse and refrain.

Wodehouse apparently didn’t get it. He writes lines throughout of a tender, nostalgic tone; yet the miraculous thing is that the song succeeds brilliantly anyway largely because of Wodehouse’s insightful building into his lyric

subtle, almost subliminal, hints of good old familiar things. There are echoes of the folksong “Green Grow the Rushes O” and the familiar saw, “April showers bring May flowers,” and there are time-honored rhymes from English pastoral poetry like “flow/blow” and “flowers/showers.” Wodehouse complements Kern’s limpid melody which sounds so simple and inevitable with mostly monosyllabic words rounded off by soft, feminine rhymes that are likewise limpid, simple, and inevitable.

Knowing the dramatic situation in which the song is sung enhances its effect. A couple is strolling home from the movies—a force that already in 1917 threatened the stage. They pass a cobwebbed stage door of an abandoned theatre. The door-keeper is softly singing “After the Ball,” a sensational hit of Victorian days which Kern later interpolated into *Show Boat*. The couple stops to listen. “Land Where the Good Songs Go” is sung to introduce a medley in which the stars of a bygone era step forward one by one and perform their old hits, the good songs.

Now Kern and Wodehouse’s beautiful song is being called back from that land in a welcome and much-deserved revival.

I have limited myself in this essay to Wodehouse’s unflagging wide-awakeness as a lyricist. I have not attempted to show how they are a performer’s delight, conversational, yet singable. How they display a surety of touch that could only come from a man who is unself-

consciously at home with himself and with the common life and language of real people. How they are generous and unsentimental without going to the opposite extreme of cynicism. How they are wholesome without insincerity and banality. How they set the standard for future lyricists in the possibilities for comic rhyme: multiple-word rhymes where one of the elements is a half a hyphenated word, “ragging” rhymes where running the syntax across two musical phrases allows for rhyme on colorless conjunctions and pronouns, surprising juxtapositions (Mahatma Ghandi/Napoleon brandy).

But the common denominator of all of these particulars is that canny intelligence of which I have written. And that to me is the genius of P. G. Wodehouse.

I’ve reproduced the verse of “Land Where the Good Songs Go” for anyone who may wish to try it out on the piano. I hear Kern’s verse as modern, impressionistic, certainly not simple or in the popular style of 1917, but deliberately unsettling, contrasting in an artistic and beautiful way with the serenity of the chorus of the song. It doesn’t seem like a depiction of inept composition to me.

So I don’t agree that Wodehouse missed the intent of the music here; he did a great job of following Kern’s tricky shifting pace and color. I concur with David’s comments on Wodehouse’s lyrics in every other respect. —Neil Midkiff

A New Wodehouse Lyric?

BY NORMAN MURPHY

LOOKING through a book by Leslie Baily, I came across what I think is a “new” song by P. G. Wodehouse. From 1933 to 1953, Baily ran a successful BBC radio show called “Scrapbook,” on which he interviewed people on their memories of thirty, forty, or fifty years before. I remember these shows as a boy, and even then I realized I was listening to living history.

Seymour Hicks, who died in 1949, had been the Noel Coward of his days—writing, acting and managing plays for thirty years. He was the man who gave Wodehouse an early start in *The Beauty of Bath* back in 1906. In that show Wodehouse had lyrics for two successful songs with music by the young and equally new Jerome Kern. The songs were “Mr Chamberlain” and “The Frolic of a Breeze.”

In his interview with Baily, however, Hicks remembered another song by Kern and Wodehouse, with lyrics as follows:

What is the thing that helps to keep the population small?
 What is it makes us run like hares and jump a six-foot wall?
 What is it makes the skunk turn pale and feel that life is flat?
 And murmur sadly, “What’s the use, I can’t compete with THAT?”
 It is the motor-car, it is the motor-car,
 If you exceed the legal speed you have to pay,
 You get on very well, till it blows you up to —(BANG)
 When you motor down to Brighton for the day.

This song is not in McIlvaine nor in any other of my reference books. Is there a Jerome Kern expert out there somewhere who can find the tune for us? I hope I can say you read it here first!

The Best Friend of Mystery

BY ROSE DESHAW

This article was originally published in *The Mystery Review*, Vol. II, No. 2, Winter 2003, and is reprinted here by permission of the publisher. Richard Nielsen spotted this article and sent it along to *Plum Lines*. It considers Plum from an unusual angle, as a mystery writer. Rose and I have exchanged emails recently, and I've discovered that she and her husband run a bookshop in Kingston, Ontario, just a whoop and a holler from Toronto. Rose has joined TWS and hopes to attend the convention. —OM

“THE greatest disciple of Arthur Conan Doyle,” according to that esteemed Sherlockian, Owen Dudley Edwards, “was P. G. Wodehouse.” His Bertie Wooster character and Bertie’s manservant, Reginald Jeeves, are a perfect Watson and Sherlock offshoot.

Sherlockian brilliance is apparent in the Wodehouse short stories such as “Jeeves Takes Charge,” where the brainy servant shimmers into the room to extract his master from the clutches of a fiancée intent on forcing him to read Nietzsche. “You would not enjoy Nietzsche, sir. He is fundamentally unsound.”

With a nod to Sherlock, Jeeves is frequently involved in such mystery staples as prisons (“The Rummy Affair of Old Biffy”) or dealing with the local constabulary, fully as much as Nero Wolfe dealt with Inspector Cramer, or in solving countless country house burglaries and thefts, not to mention detecting a whiff of crime among fellow servants with their handy proximity to the silver. A case can be made for Wodehouse as one of the primary sources of modern mystery.

His name pops up regularly in the conversation and credits of mystery buffs including frequent mention throughout the two-volume *Literature of Crime, Detection and Espionage*, which is fast becoming a classic. In a recent interview, mystery writer Pete Hartman mentions Wodehouse as one of his earliest influences, as does thriller writer Alan Beechey.

But though crime in one form or another runs rampant through the 96 books to Wodehouse’s credit, he has never been considered a mystery writer himself.

There are two reasons. Mystery nearly always equals murder and Pelham Grenville Wodehouse was not one for killing off a character. Not when he could embarrass them to death. Someone said death is only mentioned about eight times in the entire canon. One of these was: “It was a confusion of ideas between him and one of the lions he was hunting in Kenya that had caused A. B. Spottsworth to make the obituary column. He thought the lion was dead and the lion thought it wasn’t.” (*Ring for Jeeves*)

The other reason, of course, is that he is funny and remains outstandingly hilarious after all these years. Humorous mysteries have never been popular with the critics when awards are being handed out. (“Ice formed on the butler’s upper slopes.” *Pigs Have Wings*)

Wodehouse created private detectives on a regular basis, though he never held them in high esteem. (“A chap who’s supposed to stop chaps pinching things from chaps, having a chap come along and pinch something from him.” *The Code of the Woosters*) Another hapless Wodehouse sleuth was once described as being “unable to detect a bass drum in a telephone booth.”

Even murder struck Wodehouse as amusing. Perhaps my very favourite Wodehouse story, one for which I have searched diligently but been unable to find, concerns an axe murderer who has come to a small rural train station. The lone attendant manages to lock killer and axe in a broom closet before departing to seek help. Meanwhile, the usual dim but obliging young man happens along and courteously releases the felon from the closet. A chase ensues. Wodehouse managed to convince me, with this story, that axe murder, while it has its grisly aspects, contains a core of humour.

I was thinking about this story last winter when a short, stocky, backwoods-looking man passed the window of my bookshop with an axe over his shoulder, for several days in a row. He rather stood out among the commuters in their suits with their briefcases and purses, but no one ever seemed to stop and ask him why he was heading downtown with his axe. About lunchtime he’d return and I’d eyeball the axe, looking for signs of mayhem that might have gone on in the meantime. I became so curious towards the end of the week that I thought about asking him myself. But it was a big axe and he didn’t seem the chatty sort so, what with one thing and another, I put it off till he had completed whatever he had set out to do. After all, I reasoned, an axe seems one of the fairer sorts of murder weapons. It’s hardly concealed and you should be able to outrun someone lugging it around. However, like a good mystery buff, I read the papers carefully just in case something horrid had been going on downtown.

Wodehouse liked to satirize the golden age of the mystery. In one short story, a character takes a detective story along to read while staying at the home of his fiancée and her mother. His book goes missing just as the identity of the “faceless fiend” is about to be revealed.

Creeping about the dark, creaky, old house in search of his book, he discovers the literary mother with a copy and a lively discussion of mystery results. “There are two



Who owns this copy of Strychnine in the Soup?
Illustration by Roy F. Spreter for The American Magazine,
December 1931

Faceless Fiends,” the mother declares. This is what Roger Ebert would call a “guilty pleasure.”

Another mystery connection occurred recently. Samuel H. Iams Jr., who died this year, wrote eight very successful detective novels with his series character, Rockie Rockwell, under the pseudonym Jack Iams. Then he abruptly left the genre, though he wrote five more books on other topics. Inexplicably, he’d had enough of mysteries, he once said. A colleague of his, Peter Schwed, who happened to be Wodehouse’s editor and publisher, wrote about Iams in his alumni newsletter. “I never read any of Wodehouse’s Psmith books, without comparing him to Jack Iams—and laughing my head off.”

Which meant that Iams was also quite like Wodehouse himself. Psmith—the “P” is silent—was Wodehouse’s favourite character and also his most autobiographical, the two men both starting their careers as bank clerks. It is Psmith who runs the ad: “Some One To Assassinate Your Aunt? Psmith will do it. Crime not objected to....” Lighthearted, non-lethal crime of course, all resolved by the discovery that Psmith belongs to the right club (Senior Conservative).

“Why then, dash it,” said his lordship, “Baxter would have it that you had stolen my sister’s necklace. But if you’re a member of the Senior Conservative, you can’t be a criminal. Baxter’s an ass.”

Were Pelham Grenville writing in these days of CEO felonies and white-collar greed, he would sing the same gentle, sarcastic song. And he would, as always, be the best friend of mystery.

I haven’t been able to find the axe-murderer story she describes, unless she is recalling the outline of “The Truth about George,” the first Mr. Mulliner story, with minor variations of detail.

The *Literature of Crime, Detection and Espionage* books are in the Scribner Writers Series, Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1998; Robin W. Winks, Editor-in-Chief; Maureen Corrigan, Associate Editor. Rose tells us that Winks is at Yale and Corrigan at Georgetown.

Those readers who are intrigued by the connections between Sherlock Holmes and the Wodehouse stories will no doubt be interested in becoming members of The Clients of Adrian Mulliner, a special-purpose chapter of TWS based not on location but on this common interest. See the Chapters Corner listing on page 26 for contact details.

Thanks to Len Lawson for the illustrations here and on pages 14–17.

—GW

Richard Nielsen draws our attention to the recent appearance of a Donald E. Westlake mystery/spy novel titled *Money for Nothing*. We must be pleased to learn that the author “keeps the proceedings lighter than air.” Nor must we cavil if the title is not original. The number of English words, and of their combinations, is limited. Plum described a similar situation in the preface to his 1929 *Summer Lightning*:

A word about the title. It is related of Thackeray that, hitting upon *Vanity Fair* after retiring to rest one night, he leaped out of bed and ran seven times round the room, shouting at the top of his voice. Oddly enough, I behaved in exactly the same way when I thought of *Summer Lightning*. I recognized it immediately as the ideal title for a novel. My exuberance has been a little diminished since by the discovery that I am not the only one who thinks highly of it. Already I have been informed that two novels with the same name have been published in England, and my agent in America cables to say that three have recently been placed on the market in the United States. As my story has appeared in serial form under its present label, it is too late to alter it now. I can only express the modest hope that this story will be considered worthy of inclusion in the list of the Hundred Best Books Called *Summer Lightning*.

—OM

Letter from England

BY ELIN WOODGER MURPHY

ONE of the joys of living in England is that spring sprouts sooner here than it does back on Long Island. I am now living in a nation of gardeners, so even in London one can wander around and enjoy beautiful (and beautifully tended) gardens, hanging baskets of colorful flowers, and a sensational greenness that makes one feel jolly good about life and all that. Add blue skies to the mix—there has been a peculiar lack of rain in these parts—and the effect is such that I identify fully with Bertie Wooster, feeling the urge to grab my whangee, put on my yellowest shoes, and go into the Park to do pastoral dances. Bertie, of course, puts it best: “I don’t know if you know that sort of feeling you get on these days round about the end of April and the beginning of May, when the sky’s a light blue, with cotton-wool clouds, and there’s a bit of a breeze blowing from the west? Kind of uplifted feeling. Romantic, if you know what I mean.” Do I ever!

Spring is also the time when the Wodehouse Walks start again. These are thrice-yearly events in which Wodehouse fans are taken around the Mayfair district, Piccadilly, Pall Mall, and Trafalgar Square to goggle at many of the places our favorite writer either lived in or used in his books—sometimes both. Quite a bit of London history is also thrown in for good measure. These 2 1/2-hour walks are, of course, sponsored by the P G Wodehouse Society (UK), and I will leave it to you to guess the identity of the tour leader (who often does many more walks besides the regularly scheduled ones, being both soft-hearted and soft-headed).

On April 12, around ten people showed up for the first walk of 2003, and this particular group got a special treat when their Fearless Leader spotted Robert Bruce heading into a shop. Robert, a freelance writer and all-around good egg, is a frequent supplier of ripe material for *Wooster Sauce* and the UK Society’s website. (I’ve stolen some of his stuff for *Plum Lines* but still need to wangle him into a full-blown article.) He must have been a bit perplexed at first to be surrounded by gawking tourists as Fearless Leader sang his praises. However, he later professed himself to be quite chuffed by the experience, noting, “For the first time, after all the years I’ve lived in London, my ambition has been

realised. I have become a tourist attraction.”

Meanwhile, the mentions of Wodehouse in the media continue apace. Lately there has been quite a lot on the radio. Alistair Cooke—my hero and a renowned Wodehouse fan—slipped a lovely reference into his “Letter from America” broadcast of April 27. While awaiting word on negotiations to avoid a service workers strike in New York, he said, “I went to bed in a gloom, only slightly relieved by reading again about the threat to the reputation of old gents of Kent and Sussex and other counties of Galahad Threepwood’s decision to write his memoirs of his early wild days on the town.” And this a few paragraphs later: “Still the honourable Galahad, that dapper rogue who always seemed out of place away from a race track or a hotel bar, he saw me off to sleep.”

What was particularly delightful about this was that Mr. Cooke did not mention either the author or the book—he assumed his listeners would know who and what he was talking about. And it is certainly true that in England most would.

In my last column I mentioned how my mate was infesting the media, and he continues to do so. On April 24 he was part of a half-hour program on BBC4 entitled “Plum’s Notebooks.” Sir Edward Cazalet and Wodehouse biographer Robert McCrum were also interviewed concerning insights into Wodehouse’s thoughts and work based on his personal notebooks from the early part of the 20th century. All in all, it was an enlightening program. (Sidenote to my British

chums: Yes, I know I should be writing that as programme.)

And on May 5, BBC4’s *Today* program had an interview with “the indefatigable Tony Ring” (a very apt description!) concerning his publication of *A Prince for Hire*. Tony spoke of how he discovered part of this story while examining the collection of a friend in California—that could only have been Len Lawson—and how he tracked the remaining parts over the next two years (a big nod to eBay here), resulting in the publication of a previously unpublished Wodehouse book. (Ordering details can be found on page 11 of the last *Plum Lines* [Spring 2003] and will also be available at the Toronto convention.) The interviewer concluded by suggesting there couldn’t possibly be anything more by Wodehouse to be found, and Tony replied with the equivalent of “One never knows, do one?” Knowing the indefatigable Tony, there probably are more Wodehousian surprises just around the corner!



Who Wants to Marry an English Lord?

BY STU SHIFFMAN

"Courtship is often...a series of deceptions." — *The Complete Etiquette for Gentlemen* (circa 1878)

THE new aristocracy of burgeoning wealth in the United States of the post-Civil War era had much to offer the often-impoorished nobles of the British Isles and the continent. Even the less well endowed but well-endowed daughters could find husbands from among the highest rungs of the aristocracy and gentry. In this period of 1865–1914, some 454 American heiresses married European nobles, 100 of them with British titles. Six of the 100 who made their love connection in Britain married Dukes, in most cases arranged by their matrimonial stage-mothers. They included Consuelo Yznaga (who wed the 8th Duke of Manchester), Lily Hammersley (the 8th Duke of Marlborough), Consuela Vanderbilt (the 9th Duke of Marlborough), Helena Zimmerman (the 9th Duke of Manchester), and May Goelet (the 8th Duke of Roxburghe). It became so common that the practice left its fossils in the culture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. A large amount of buxom American cash was more important in deciding a match than what the Spanish call *limpieza de sangre*, purity of blood or descent.

This practice shows its signs in the popular culture of the period. Look at Edith Wharton's well-known novel, *The Buccaneers* (1938), with its wealthy Americans in search of noble marriages, or the many references in the works of P. G. Wodehouse. You see it in his novels such as *Big Money* (1931) in which the impoverished Earl of Hoddesdon is perennially putting the bite on all and sundry for fivers, and his son Godfrey, Lord Biskerton (the Biscuit) becomes engaged to an American millionaire's daughter. As the Biscuit explains to his old friend Berry Conway, "The fact of the matter is, laddie, there's nothing in being an Earl nowadays. It's a mug's game. If ever they try to make you one, punch them in the eye and run. And being an Earl's son and heir is one degree worse."

Conway is, naturally, aghast to discover that his friend who seems to be living the high life is as broke as is he.

"But I've always thought of you as rolling in money, Biscuit. You've got that enormous place in Sussex—?"

"That's just what is wrong with it. Too enormous. Eats up all the family revenues, old boy. Oh, I see how you came to be misled. The error is a common one. You see a photograph in *Country Life* of an Earl standing in a negligent attitude outside the north-east piazza of his seat in Loamshire, and you say to yourself, 'Lucky devil! I'll make that bird's acquaintance and touch him.' Little

knowing that even as the camera snapped the poor old deadbeat was wondering where on Earth the money was coming from to give the piazza the lick of paint that it so badly needed...."

A situation like this demanded an infusion of large bags of cash as well as some diverse DNA to lend a bit of hybrid vigor to the family.

Many another of Wodehouse's aristocrats manage to get by economically by renting the ancestral seat to wealthy expatriates and, with some luck, marrying their daughters. This is the case with Bertie Wooster's friend and fellow member of the Drones Club, the Right Honorable Lord Chuffnell, the 5th Baron (aka Chuffy). In *Thank You, Jeeves* (1934), Chuffy is rusticating at his somewhat dilapidated seat, Chuffnell Hall, Chuffnell Regis, in Somerset, in the unfortunate company of his step-mother, the Dowager Baroness, and her son Seabury. Millionaire J. Washburn Stoker has two daughters, Pauline and Emerald, the former of which is the only documented female to be found in Bertie Wooster's bed in Bertie's own mauve pyjamas. Despite this possibly scandalous occurrence, all works out for the best through the assistance of Jeeves as Pop Stoker takes Chuffnell Hall and Pauline marries Chuffy. It is Emerald Stoker who eventually rescues Gussie Fink-Nottle from the horrible fate of marriage to Madeline Bassett in *Stiff Upper Lip, Jeeves*.

Uncle Fred of *Uncle Fred in the Springtime* and other stories, Lord Ickenham (Frederick Altamont Cornwallis Twistleton, the Right Honorable Fifth Earl of Ickenham), is the happy partner of his own American bride, Aunt Jane. We never are quite sure what dowry Jane may have brought to the nuptials, but this was definitely, by all evidence, a love match.

Even Freddie Threepwood, younger son of Lord Emsworth, is happily married to the heiress of Donaldson's Dog Food and now lives on Long Island.

We see the practice clearly delineated much earlier in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's tale "The Adventure of the Noble Bachelor" in which Hatty Doran is offered up to Lord Robert St. Simon. The groom's family is ancient:

[Holmes] picked a red-covered volume from a line of books of reference beside the mantelpiece. "Here he is," said he, sitting down and flattening it out upon his knee. "Lord Robert Walsingham de Vere St. Simon, second son of the Duke of Balmoral. Hum! Arms: Azure, three caltrops in chief over a fess sable. Born in 1846. He's forty-one years of age, which is mature for marriage.

Was Under-Secretary for the Colonies in a late Administration. The Duke, his father, was at one time Secretary for Foreign Affairs. They inherit Plantagenet blood by direct descent, and Tudor on the distaff side."

Undoubtedly, they were mentioned in dispatches at Agincourt and Crecy.

That old Aloysius Doran originally dug his fortune out of the Californian soil is less important than his possession of it. He is described as being "the richest man on the Pacific slope." Doran had had nothing as little as two years before and then "he struck gold, invested it, and came up by leaps and bounds."

"Here is the first notice which I can find," [said Watson.] It is in the personal column of the *Morning Post*, and dates, as you see, some weeks back: 'A marriage has been arranged,' it says, 'and will, if rumour is correct, very shortly take place, between Lord Robert St. Simon, second son of the Duke of Balmoral, and Miss Hatty Doran, the only daughter of Aloysius Doran, Esq., of San Francisco, Cal., U. S. A.' That is all."

"Terse and to the point," remarked Holmes, stretching his long, thin legs towards the fire.

"There was a paragraph amplifying this in one of the society papers of the same week. Ah, here it is: 'There will soon be a call for protection in the marriage market, for the present free-trade principle appears to tell heavily against our home product. One by one the management of the noble houses of Great Britain is passing into the hands of our fair cousins from across the Atlantic. An important addition has been made during the last week to the list of the prizes which have been borne away by these charming invaders. Lord St. Simon, who has shown himself for over twenty years proof against the little god's arrows, has now definitely announced his approaching marriage with Miss Hatty Doran, the fascinating daughter of a California millionaire. Miss Doran, whose graceful figure and striking face attracted much attention at the Westbury House festivities, is an only child, and it is currently reported that her dowry will run to considerably over the six figures, with expectancies for the future. As it is an open secret that the Duke of Balmoral has been compelled to sell his pictures within the last few years, and as Lord St. Simon has no property of his own save the small estate of Birchmoor, it is obvious that the Californian heiress is not the only gainer by an alliance which will enable her to make the easy and common transition from a Republican lady to a British peeress.'"

This was the situation when the two worlds collided. The trade for both sides was quite clearly delineated. The young women and their families wanted titles to validate their rise above often plebeian origins, and the penniless



"The Noble Bachelor" as depicted by Sidney Paget in *The Strand Magazine*, April 1892

noble houses wanted their money. Some historians have estimated that some \$220 million crossed the stormy Atlantic in the dowries of these "dollar princesses." During this period, a quarterly tip-sheet periodical named *Titled Americans* could be purchased for a dollar, and included a listing of the extant available, titled noblemen in Europe. Perhaps there should have been such a sheet listing the unmarried heiresses too.

Die Dollarprinzessin (*The Dollar Princess*) was an operetta in three acts by A. M. Willner and Fritz Grünbaum, with music by Leo Fall, which was originally produced in Vienna in 1907. It was adapted for London and New York with book and lyrics in English by George Grossmith, and additional numbers contributed by Jerome Kern. The show opened at the Knickerbocker Theatre on Broadway on September 6, 1909 and played for 288 performances. It does sound like a Wodehousian plot in its Anglo-American form: An American millionaire's daughter employs a male secretary who may be something more. There is a presumably amusing romantic mix-up involving New York tycoons with aristocrats (genuine and otherwise) from the Old World. The sets include a stately ballroom on Long Island and the terraces of a winter sports hotel in Vermont.

The trans-Atlantic horse-trading practice was happily lampooned in the comic papers of the day on both sides of the Atlantic, in such periodicals as *Punch* and *Puck* or *Life* in the United States. Charles Dana Gibson, renowned penman of the past and creator of the quintessential Anglo-Saxon American "Gibson Girl" and "Gibson Man" (the

Olympian ideal to be aspired to by all young men and women), was among the many cartoonists who touched on the phenomenon in their work. In such collections as his *London as Seen by Charles Dana Gibson* (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1897), he illuminates the scenes of the American beauties being presented at Court and in London's society. His *Sketches and Cartoons* (R.H. Russell, 1898) includes "A Special Exhibit," in which a stately long-necked beauty is being regarded by two older gentlemen in elegant tailcoats:

"Are you exhibiting at the Horse Show this year?"

"Yes, I am sending my daughter."

"The Latest Nobleman" shows a bevy of Gibsonian beauties surrounding a rather effete-looking European aristocrat: "Girls, girls, don't press his Grace! He can only take one of you, and with him it is purely a matter of business." Gibson's *The Education of Mr. Pipp* (R.H. Russell, 1899) includes a number of penniless, and unscrupulous, titled scoundrels who latch on to Mrs. Pipp in attempts to gain access to her daughters. One of Mr. Pipp's daughters does eventually marry the son of Viola, Lady Fitzmaurice of Carony Castle, Herts. He, at least, seems to be a fine young chap.

Reality seems to have been at least as absurd as any cartoon. It was on April 18, 1893, that a vast social extravaganza was scheduled at Grace Church in Manhattan. The Bradley Martins, American tax exiles living in Scotland, had returned to America to marry off their 16-year-old daughter, Cornelia, to William George Robert Craven, 4th Earl of Craven. The event was a riot of ostentation, publicity, and, at the end, vandalism by hordes of the informed but uninvited. The wedding occurred a few weeks before the stock crash that launched the country's second-worst depression.

Bradley Martin, a lawyer, and his wife Cornelia Sherman Martin, had inherited almost six million dollars from Mrs. Martin's father, and were original members of the "Four Hundred," a term coined for New York City's high society. During the 1880s, they spent a great deal of time and money making a home for themselves in New York City at 22 West 20th Street. Their house was decorated richly in the manner of the American Gilded Age, with furniture and decorations from the period of Louis XIII, and humongous canvases by the Academy artists then considered the finest or, at least, the most expensive and fashionable. To people like the Martins, a room that looked back to a magnificent moment in history gave them an air of being American royalty. Cornelia and her husband attracted some scorn from their contemporaries when, following a trip to London in 1892, they hyphenated his first and last names to give the impression that they were English aristocrats. They were intensely shallow people who regarded decoration and social occasions as their

artistic canvas, and their later society ball of 1897, after a five-year absence from New York, inspired the invention of the term "conspicuous consumption." Mrs. Bradley Martin threw the ball as a hare-brained attempt to brighten the dark atmosphere of the depression and trickle down the economic benefits to the servants, seamstresses, and all the other little people. Diamonds and rubies of ancient lineage were an especially great lure to Mrs. Bradley Martin. The Bradley Martins loved the limelight and the attention from the twelve hundred elite guests who attended (three thousand had been invited) and the thousands of sensation-seekers from among the *hoi polloi* drawn to the event.

The groom, the Earl of Craven and Viscount of Uffington, was apparently quite a character. Lord Craven was widely rumored to be impoverished and was a rather rough country type and Nimrod much given to outdoor sporting pursuits. He was heavily tattooed. *Manners for Men* (1897) by Mrs. Humphrey says that the "usual dress of a bridegroom consists of a very dark blue frock-coat, light trousers, light or white scarf-tie, patent boots, and a new hat." Craven appeared at Grace Church wearing his riding boots and with his trousers rolled up above his boots. This doesn't look like a love match.

Unlike the wedding ceremony between Hatty Doran and Lord Robert St. Simon in "The Adventure of the Noble Bachelor," there was no missing secret husband like Francis Hay Moulton to give Lord Craven's bride a loophole of escape. Unlike the works of P. G. Wodehouse, real life doesn't always end with lovers united and happiness ensured. The Earl of Craven, alas, fell off his yacht in 1921 and drowned at age 53. His death was said to be an example of a Baskerville-like curse on the Craven title whereby all who inherit the title die young. Cornelia was left a widow and took up residence for the next forty years at Hamstead Lodge on their Berkshire estate. I don't know if she really missed him.

Brandon, Ruth, *The Dollar Princesses: The American Invasion of the European Aristocracy 1870-1914* (Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1980)

Dicks, Terrance, *The Players* (BBC, 1999)

Dunlop, M. H., *Gilded City: Scandal and Sensation in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (William Morrow, 2000)

Fowler, Marian, *In a Gilded Cage* (St. Martin's Press, November 1994)

Gibson, Charles Dana, *The Gibson Girl and Her America: The Best Drawings of Charles Dana Gibson* (Dover, 1969)

Hawthorne, Rosemary, *Do's & Don'ts: An Anthology of Forgotten Manners* (Pavilion, 1997)

MacColl Jarrett, Gail & Wallace, Carol McD., *To Marry an English Lord or How Anglomania Really Got Started* (Workman Publishing Company, October 1989)

The Studio System and the Mulliners of Hollywood

BY BRIAN TAVES

DURING his 1930–31 year at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer as a screenwriter, P. G. Wodehouse had felt obligated not to write a satire of the studio. However, as he wrote Denis Mackail on May 10, 1931, “Now that the pay envelope has ceased, maybe I shall be able to write some stuff knocking them good.” Shortly after leaving Hollywood, Wodehouse found himself committed to write a number of stories for *The American Magazine*, stories about American characters set in the United States. The solution was simple. From December, 1932, through March, 1933, Wodehouse’s sharpest satire on Hollywood appeared, with the sequence of stories “Monkey Business,” “The Nodder,” “The Juice of an Orange,” and “The Rise of Minna Nordstrom,” printed simultaneously in England in *The Strand Magazine* and completed there in June with “The Castaways.” All were eventually collected as “the Mulliners of Hollywood” in the 1935 short story volume *Blandings Castle*. He capped the series with one more short story, “George and Alfred,” published in 1967, which paled alongside its predecessors and reflected the era as the moguls are in Europe producing super-spectacles.

In these short stories, Wodehouse created a carefully-drawn, parallel Hollywood universe, based on what he had seen, requiring minimal exaggeration to achieve his comedic effect. Wodehouse methodically outlines various Hollywood positions and types which have an obvious basis on the reality of the studio system. In “Monkey Business,” Wodehouse describes the studio lot “where the outdoor sets are kept permanently erected, so that a director with—let us suppose—a London street scene to shoot is able instantly to lay his hands on a back-alley in Algiers, a medieval castle, or a Parisian boulevard—none of which is any good to him but which make him feel that the studio is trying to be helpful.”

In “The Rise of Minna Nordstrom,” Wodehouse provides his own version of Marcus Loew’s 1924 merger of Metro Pictures Corporation, the Goldwyn Pictures Corporation, and Louis B. Mayer Pictures into Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, under the ownership of Loew’s, Inc., with Louis B. Mayer as vice president and general manager. In the Wodehouse version, Jacob Z. Schnellenhamer, like Mayer, rules a company including the name of a producer, Sam Goldwyn, who has long since left the fold. Schnellenhamer’s Perfecto-Zizzbaum Corporation is the result of a merger between his own company, the Colossal-Exquisite, with Isadore Fishbein’s Perfecto-Fishbein and Ben Zizzbaum’s Zizzbaum-Celluloid.

Schnellenhamer, the leading mogul of the “Mulliners of Hollywood” series, is modeled on the executive

Wodehouse had seen up close at M-G-M, Louis B. Mayer. Schnellenhamer is portrayed, like Mayer, as the most powerful magnate in Hollywood. In “The Rise of Minna Nordstrom,” it is revealed that he contents himself with remembering “that that morning he had put through a deal which would enable him to trim the stuffing out of two hundred and seventy-three exhibitors,” but “Like all motion-picture magnates, he had about forty-seven guilty secrets, many of them recorded on paper.”

As with his prototype, Schnellenhamer is unintellectual, tyrannical, paternalistic, a man who rewards obedience and sees the company as one big family. In “The Juice of an Orange,” Wilmot Mulliner tells Schnellenhamer, “‘Don’t dream of cutting your salary....You’re worth every cent of it. Besides, reflect. If you reduce your salary, it will cause alarm. People will go about saying that things must be in a bad way. It is your duty to the community to be a man and bite the bullet, and, no matter how much it may irk you, to stick to your eight hundred thousand dollars a year like glue.’” (And as it turns out, Schnellenhamer was only thinking of cutting Wilmot’s salary, not his own.)

In “The Nodder,” Schnellenhamer is described physically and mentally. “Even at the best of times, the President of the Perfecto-Zizzbaum, considered as an object for the eye, was not everybody’s money.” He is a man of negligible intellectual attainment, “modestly proud of knowing words of two syllables.”

Wodehouse provides two memorable parodies of the Hollywood story conference. In “The Juice of an Orange,” a scenario calls for a husband, seeing his wife kissing another man and not realizing it is her brother, to leave for Africa to hunt big game. As he is about to be devoured by a lion, one executive proposes he have a vision of a cabaret sequence, while Schnellenhamer decides that what is needed is the arrival of the United States Marines.

In “The Nodder,” with eleven writers in the room, along with yes-men and secretaries, Schnellenhamer continues the scripting of the picture, leaving off at the last scene. Here, “Cabot Delancy, a scion of an old Boston family, has gone to try to reach the North Pole in a submarine, and he’s on an iceberg, and the scenes of his youth are passing before his eyes.” One of the writers suggests that one of the scenes passing before his eyes is that of a polo-game. “‘No good,’ said Mr. Schnellenhamer. ‘Who cares anything about polo? When you’re working on a picture you’ve got to bear in mind the small-town population of the Middle West. Aren’t I right?’” And all agree. Minutes later, after the other authors have offered their suggestions, Schnellenhamer has the solution. “‘He sits on this iceberg

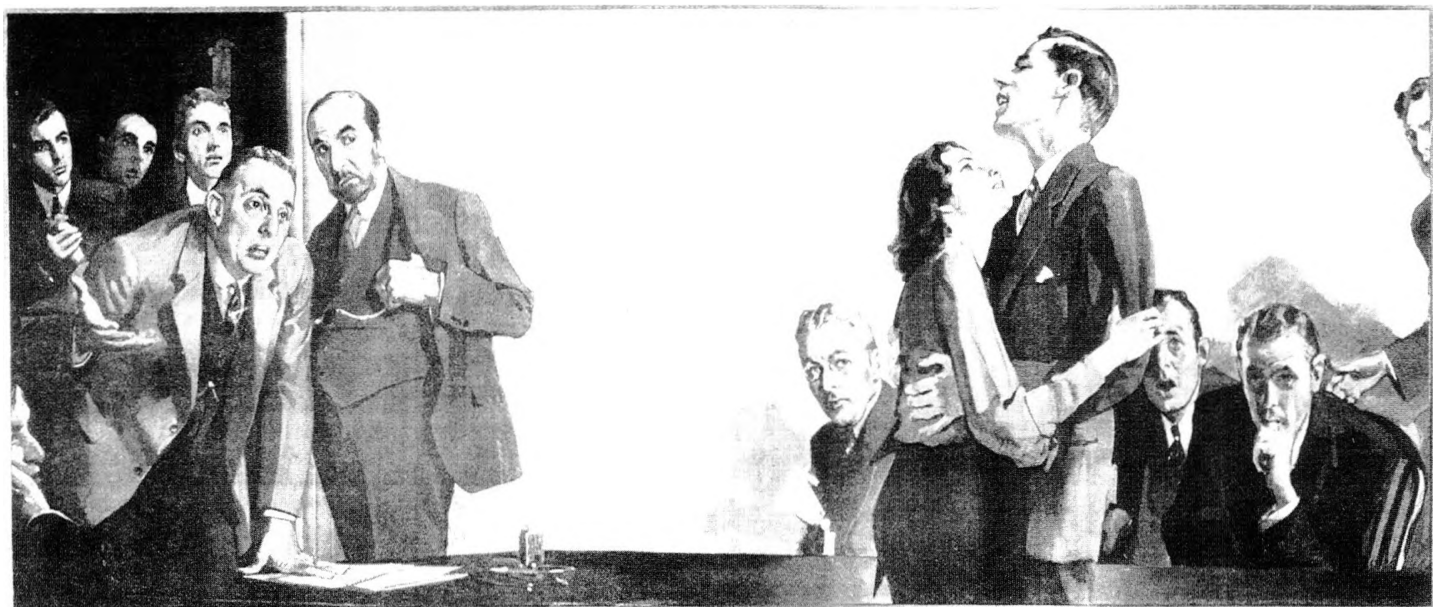


Illustration by Roy F. Spreter for "Love Birds" ("The Nodder") in *The American Magazine*, January 1933

and he seems to see himself—he's always been an athlete, you understand—he seems to see himself scoring the winning goal in one of these polo-games. Everybody's interested in polo nowadays. Aren't I right?" And all agree. A second vision for Delancy has "to be something that'll pull in the women." Schnellenhamer has his next brainstorm. "This fellow's with this girl in this old-world garden where everything's burgeoning...and when I say burgeoning I mean burgeoning. That burgeoning's got to be done right, or somebody'll get fired...and they're locked in a close embrace. Hold as long as the Philadelphia censors'll let you, and then comes your nice comedy touch. Just as these two young folks are kissing each other without a thought of anything else in the world, suddenly a cuckoo close by goes "Cuckoo! Cuckoo!" Meaning how goofy they are. That's good for a laugh, isn't it?"

In "The Castaways," Wodehouse compares writing dialogue for the talkies to being castaways on a desert island, explaining that few who write film dialogue are actually authors, and they are gathered in a manner reminiscent of the old press gangs. "The executives of the studios just haul in anyone they meet and make them sign contracts. Most of the mysterious disappearances you read about are due to this cause. Only the other day they found a plumber who had been missing for years. All the time he had been writing dialogue for the Mishkin Brothers. Once having reached Los Angeles, no one is safe." Bulstrode Mulliner, trying to pick up his hat accidentally taken from a train by Schnellenhamer, is signed as a writer.

Room 40 is assigned to Bulstrode, where he is one among a mere ten other writers working separately on the script of *Scented Sinners*. This is a "powerful drama of life as it is lived by the jazz-crazed, gin-crazed Younger

Generation whose hollow laughter is but the mask for an aching heart," said Mr. Schnellenhamer. 'It ran for a week in New York and lost a hundred thousand dollars, so we bought it. It has the mucus of a good story. See what you can do with it.' However, writers have already been laboring over *Scented Sinners* for years. "That grey-bearded gentleman over there, who is sticking straws in his hair...comes in occasionally to complain that there are spiders crawling up his wall. He has been doing treatments of *Scented Sinners* since he was a young man." When all the writers laboring on it are summoned, they are a motley collection, shuffling listlessly. "There were young writers, old writers, middle-aged writers; writers with matted beards at which they plucked nervously, writers with horn-rimmed spectacles who muttered to themselves, writers with eyes that stared blankly or blinked in the unaccustomed light. On all of them *Scented Sinners* had set its unmistakable seal." Scenarists discover they are chained to the lot by their contract, unable to quit, as Schnellenhamer explains.

"Here are the contracts, duly signed by you, in which you engage to remain in the employment of the Perfecto-Zizzbaum Corporation until the completion of the picture entitled *Scented Sinners*. Did you take a look at Para. 6, where it gives the penalties for breach of same? No, don't read them...You wouldn't sleep nights. But you can take it from me they're some penalties. We've had this thing before of writers wanting to run out on us, so we took steps to protect ourselves...."

"And anyway," he said, speaking now in almost a fatherly manner, "you wouldn't want to quit till the picture was finished....It wouldn't be right. It wouldn't

be fair. It wouldn't be cooperation. You know what *Scented Sinners* means to this organization. It's the biggest proposition we have. Our whole programme is built around it. We are relying on it to be our big smash. It cost us a barrel of money to buy *Scented Sinners*, and naturally we aim to get it back."

He rose from his chair and tears came into his eyes. It was as if he had been some emotional American football coach addressing a faint-hearted team.

"Stick to it!" he urged. "Stick to it, folks! You can do it if you like. Get back in there and fight. Think of the boys in the Front Office rooting for you, depending on you. You wouldn't let them down? No, no, not you. You wouldn't let me down? Of course you wouldn't. Get back in the game, then, and win—win—win...for dear old Perfecto-Zizzbaum and me."

Wodehouse remembered his long months of labor on the unused scripts of two plays, *Rosalie* and *Candlelight*, in authoring "The Castaways," especially the fact that *Candlelight* was ultimately filmed at another studio. Only when Schnellenhamer's aide, Isadore Levitsky, reminds the chief that the Medulla-Oblongata-Glutz had outbid them for *Scented Sinners*, and they don't own the property at all, are the writers freed from their contracts.

In "The Nodder," Wodehouse elucidates the corporate structure from top to bottom.

It is not easy to explain to the lay mind the extremely intricate ramifications of the personnel of a Hollywood motion-picture organisation. Putting it as briefly as possible, a Nodder is something like a Yes-Man, only lower in the social scale. A Yes-Man's duty is to attend conferences and say "Yes." A Nodder's, as the name implies, is to nod. The chief executive throws out some statement of opinion, and looks about him expectantly. This is the cue for the senior Yes-Man to say yes. He is followed, in order of precedence, by the second Yes-Man—or Vice-Yesser, as he is sometimes called—and the junior Yes-Man. Only when all the Yes-Men have yessed, do the Nodders begin to function. They nod.

In "Monkey Business," Montrose Mulliner is an assistant director at the Perfecto-Zizzbaum:

It is one of the drawbacks to being an assistant director that virtually everything that happens to him is of a nature to create an inferiority complex—or, if one already exists, to deepen it. He is habitually addressed as "Hey, you" and alluded to in the third person as "that fathead." If anything goes wrong on the set, he gets the blame and is ticked off not only by the producer but also by the director and all the principals involved. Finally, he has to be obsequious to so many people that it is little wonder that he comes in time to resemble one of the

more shrinking and respectful breeds of rabbit. Five years of assistant-directing had so sapped Montrose's morale that nowadays he frequently found himself starting up and apologizing in his sleep.

George Pybus, of the Press department, suggests to Montrose that he and his fiancée, Rosalie Beamish, be married in the gorilla's cage as a publicity stunt. As Wodehouse advises, "The brains of members of the Press departments of motion-picture studios resemble soup at a cheap restaurant. It is wiser not to stir them." When Montrose refuses, causing Rosalie to accuse him of cowardice, and the gorilla's agent complains that all the publicity goes to the human stars, the publicist has an idea. One afternoon the gorilla is let out of its cage to menace hundreds, although no one of consequence need worry. "The stars have all been notified and are off the lot. So are the directors. Also the executives, all except Mr. Schnellenhamer, who is cleaning up some work in his office. He will be quite safe there, of course. Nobody ever got into Mr. Schnellenhamer's office without waiting four hours in the ante-room." Montrose impresses Rosalie and wins a promotion when he discovers the studio's secret—the gorilla is actually a man in a suit. As the Balliol-educated actor tells him, "The initial expenditure comes high, of course...you don't get a skin like this for nothing...but there's virtually



Arriving at the cage, they found Captain Fosdyke there, prodding at the gorilla with a natty cane

Illustration by Roy F. Spreter for
"A Cagey Gorilla" ("Monkey Business")
in *The American Magazine*, December 1932

no overhead.” And, of course, a gorilla star is as much in need of a good agent as a human-faced performer.

Wodehouse makes use of a typical stock figure in “The Juice of an Orange.”

One of the things which have caused the making of motion pictures to be listed among the Dangerous Trades is the fact that it has been found impossible to dispense with the temperamental female star. There is a public demand for her, and the Public’s word is law. The consequence is that in every studio you will find at least one gifted artiste, the mere mention of whose name causes the strongest to tremble like aspens. At the Perfecto-Zizzbaum this position was held by Hortensia Burwash, the Empress of Molten Passion....

A procedure, accordingly, had been adopted not unlike that in use during the raids in the War. At the first sign that the strain had become too much for Miss Burwash, a syren sounded, warning all workers on the lot to take cover. Later, a bugler, blowing the “All Clear,” would inform those in the danger zone that the star had now kissed the director and resumed work on the set.

“The Nodder” deals with child stars, and whether they are actually played by midgets—a question “that has occupied the minds of thinking men ever since these little excrescences first became popular on the screen. Some argue that mere children could scarcely be so loathsome. Others maintain that a right-minded midget would hardly stoop to some of the things these child stars do.” Yet the star of *Baby Boy*, Little Johnny Bingley, *The Idol Of American Motherhood* and *The Child With The Tear Behind The Smile*, is actually a hard-boiled midget in his early forties.

“The Rise of Minna Nordstrom” begins in the milieu of Hollywood, where every maid, butler, waitress, barber, secretary, watchman, and bootlegger hopes to be a star, and even a local policemen has “specially taken sex-appeal in the College of Eastern Iowa course of Motion Picture acting.” Schnellenhamer’s wife is a former silent star who had been known “as the Queen of Stormy Emotion, and she occasionally saw to it that her husband was reminded of this.” But with his bootlegger playing an archbishop on the Outstanding Screen-Favorites lot, Schnellenhamer, Fishbein, and Zizzbaum finally decide to break into the liquor cellar of their rival, Sigismund Glutz of the Medulla-Oblongata-Glutz (abbreviated M-O-G, another play on M-G-M, and with the first two words taken from the part of the brain that tapers into the spinal cord). At Glutz’s home is Vera Prebble, the former maid for Schnellenhamer, Fishbein, and Zizzbaum who had been fired by each when she tried to audition for them at home. Prebble has taken her revenge by reporting the liquor supply in the homes of Schnellenhamer, Fishbein, and Zizzbaum to the police.



Illustration by Roy F. Spreter for
“A Star is Born” (“The Rise of Minna Nordstrom”)
in *The American Magazine*, March 1933

Alone with the three moguls in the only remaining home with liquor in Hollywood, Prebble demands and wins herself a starring contract (under the name of “Minna Nordstrom”), compelling the merger of the three companies.

Studio life, the contract system, corporate management and mergers, the story conference, multiple writers composing scripts of a single property, the position of assistant directors, publicists, and stars, and the greed and stupidity of movie moguls, all the prominent features of Wodehouse’s Hollywood, were memorably covered in the Mulliner series. In all it was his most pointed satire, and none of his subsequent novels with a filmmaking background or characters were so biting in their tone.

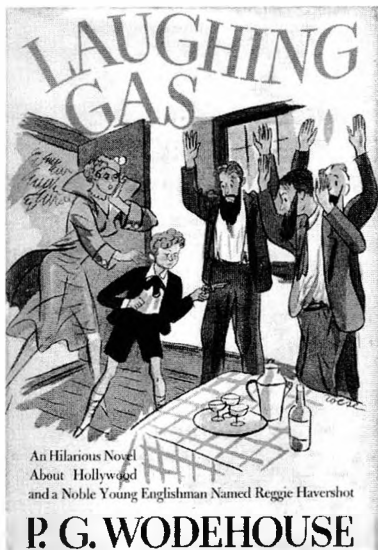
My First Time

CONDUCTED BY DAN COHEN

In the last issue of *Plum Lines* I appealed to readers to search their memories and send me an account of the first time they read Wodehouse. Here are some of the results:

From **Thomas H. Rogers** of State College, PA:

WHEN did I first read Wodehouse? I can't be sure. From at least 1936 onwards I was reading *The Saturday Evening Post* during my endless waits every Thursday afternoon in the waiting room of Dr. Sceerey, a fussbudget dentist who seemed to have a neurotic relationship with Miss Curlen, his unattractive dental assistant, whom he nagged all the time and frequently reduced to tears. Sceerey spent almost ten years straightening my teeth....Did I discover Wodehouse in *The Saturday Evening Post* in Dr. Sceerey's office? I remember reading Corey Ford and other *Post* humorists but not Wodehouse, and since I've never thought of Wodehouse as a magazine writer, though of course he was, I surmise that I began to read him in book form. I know that from early days I had something called *The Weekend Wodehouse*, which has somehow disappeared, and Ogden Nash's *Nothing But Wodehouse*, which is almost falling apart, but were they the first Wodehouse books I read, and if so when did I start reading them? Hard to say. I have a copy of *Laughing Gas* given me in 1939 as a birthday present. I turned twelve in 1939 and my guess is that the cousin who gave me *Laughing Gas* knew I liked Wodehouse, whom I was probably reading already in those two Wodehouse anthologies (which may have been family books that I appropriated as my own). So evidently I was reading Wodehouse from about the age of 11 or 12. I don't think I was sophisticated enough to have enjoyed him much before that age.



It's surprisingly hard— isn't it?—to pinpoint one's first experience of a writer like Wodehouse. I remember in considerable detail my first experiences with Fielding and Tolstoy and Dostoevsky and Waugh and Lewis Carroll, the latter of whom I discovered years before I started reading Wodehouse. So why didn't my first reading of Wodehouse register the way my first reading of those other authors registered? The obvious answer is that Wodehouse is not as fantastic as Lewis Carroll or as realistic as Tolstoy or as deep as Dostoevsky or as tough as Waugh or as bawdy as Fielding. There's nothing in Wodehouse capable of producing the kind of huge emotional and mental effects that great writers or enormously original writers can have when you first read them. Wodehouse is simply fun to read, and fun seems to be a less memorable, less challenging kind of experience than what Tolstoy, for instance, gives one. I was sixteen when I first read *War and Peace* and was amazed and at times heartbroken that Nikolay Rostov, who was my age at the start of the novel, wasn't turning out to be the hero I had expected him to become. It was my first experience of the sad fact that attractive boys don't all grow up to be great men. You never learn anything that simple and true from Wodehouse. In fact you never learn anything from Wodehouse, and I think that's why it must be rare for enthusiasts to remember their first experience of Wodehouse.

Wodehouse grows on one, he becomes a lifelong companion, but he's incapable of making the kind of memorable first impact that sticks with one through life. I can still see my mother's expression when she found me lying on the couch in our living room roaring with laughter as I read a green bound copy of *Tom Jones*. "What is that you're reading?" she asked. I told her, and a funny look came over her face. She stared at me in amazement. "Why, I thought that was the dullest novel I ever read!" I stared back pityingly. It was probably the first time I ever pitied my mother. You're not likely to get that kind of experience while first looking into *Leave It to Psmith*, though on the other hand I re-read *Psmith* this year whereas it must be twenty years or more since I've re-read *Tom Jones*.

Murray Wilson, who grew up in England, does remember his first encounter with Wodehouse:

IHAVE long held that the accident or choice of the first story is of possible influence on the rest of the reader's life. In my own case it was *The Luck of the Bodkins*. Not one of the truly great stories, but certainly more than enough of a good one to interest a 13-year-old into reading more of the same. That would have been in 1945 and I well remember my elder sister asking me what I was doing reading a book by a traitor, she being 14 at the time. That I did not find at all off-putting; the story had made too much of an impression and had me looking for more by Wodehouse.

At that time our local library was understandably (the war being in its closing phase) stocked with many old books and so I could just as easily have chanced on one of the early potboiling pieces of romantic fluff and been turned off for life. Mercifully I didn't and wasn't.

If one was to lay bait for a prospective reader then there is no doubt that "Uncle Fred Flits By" would be the ideal morsel. If that was refused there'd be no point in persevering.

Walt Stevenson also first found Wodehouse at the library during the war years, but in America:

THE explosions of Pearl Harbor were still echoing. To an impressionable 13-year-old boy, with emotions already rattled by the whirlwind of teen-age hormones, the air seemed full of anxiety and uncertainty. The newspapers, magazines, and even the Pathé newsreel at the movies were full of war news—all bad.

One day, up a dark aisle of my local library, I discovered a book whose intriguing cover was a cartoon of a lovely girl, a fancy-dressed butler, and a fat pig. Taking it home I was soon captivated by the British flavor of the language and the absurdities of the plot and the characters. I strolled through the peaceful grounds of Blandings Castle with Lord Emsworth and laughed out loud at the hare-brained adventures of people called Bertie, Bingo, and Oofy. And as I did, the sun, in true Wodehousian fashion, rose hot and fresh, beamed down my street, turned the corner, and lit up my little third-floor bedroom. The books of P. G. Wodehouse became an island of peace and sanity, and I read all I could find. My sense of humor and vocabulary were greatly influenced as a result. At a time of life when young boys' language is punctuated with newly-learned four-letter words, "What ho," "Dash it all," and such established me as a creature of the Far Side to my buddies, but "By Jove!" proved an attraction to that newly discovered species—girls.



Decoration by Kerr for the title page of the British edition of Week-End Wodehouse

As my life moved along through another war, business, marriage, and fatherhood, my acquaintance with P. G. dimmed and was eventually forgotten. But about two years ago, walking down another aisle in another library, I came upon *The Weekend Wodehouse*, opened it up to those familiar pages and had a joyful reunion with my old friends of the Anglers' Rest, the Drones Club, etc. Searching the Internet for kindred souls, I found and joined the Wodehouse Society. It is great fun, and I find it therapeutic to come to regular meetings, stand up and confess my addiction, and be understood by very nice people who are equally obsessed.

Roz Kushner, an American, apparently first encountered Wodehouse in England:

I HAVE tried to recall the very first time I picked up a Wodehouse book and became addicted. I eagerly searched my defective memory for the event or place but...I had a brainstorm. Why not look at every copy of my Wodehouse novels and see if I could find a price tag that might reflect a sum of money way out of line with present-day costs, or better yet, an English price tag.

I had visited the UK in 1985 and seemed to recall visiting book stores, which was always my habit. But my search was not conclusive. Some of my paperbacks didn't even have their price tags on them. But then I had another brainstorm....Look at the covers to see if they were the old or newer Penguin models.

So I have narrowed my choices to these two beauties: *Right Ho, Jeeves*, that wonderful tale with Fink-Nottle in red tights, or *The Mating Season*, with all of those aunts. Both of my copies of these novels were so tattered, and had such old price tags on them, that I am sure the choice was between those two.

Can you imagine having those two novels to look forward to reading for the first time? It's no wonder that I became an ardent fan of the Master. My sentiments totally reflect one book critic, whose name and exact words escape me (again my Teflon memory comes into play), that heaven is finding a Wodehouse novel that you have never read before. Unfortunately, I've read mostly all of them. Fortunately, I have mostly all of them to read...again...and again.

This is to be a regular *Plum Lines* feature so keep those cards and letters (and e-mails) coming, folks. Were any of you first drawn to Wodehouse by a film (doubtful), but how about television? Was your first Wodehouse experience *Wodehouse Playhouse* or *Jeeves and Wooster*? Share this with the Wodehouse world.

P. G. Wodehouse: The Long Exile

BY JAN KAUFMAN

EARLY last year, I felt like one of the those dazed Wodehouse characters who has just been accosted by a hitherto silent bush, when my answering machine said the BBC in London wanted me to call them back collect. This was my first intimation that the BBC were making an hour-long video on PGW for Christmas viewing in the UK. Either Norman or Elin Murphy had suggested that I might be able to help with information on his Hollywood years. A cheerful young woman eventually called again who indicated that a London crew would spend several days in Southern California shooting part of this documentary biography.

So it was with great interest that I finally got to see the video called *P. G. Wodehouse: The Long Exile*. We watched it at a Blandings Castle meeting, and the video passed the ultimate test of being interesting, as everyone stayed awake and no one talked. The program was a nice mixture of contemporary still photos, films of different live interviews with Plum, shots of a Monarch typewriter tapping away, actors playing him at all ages, excerpts from movies mostly showing Ian Carmichael as Bertie, and a large cast of speakers, plus a couple of unnamed people reading aloud from his books. Evidently there were a number of other interviews that weren't used. Tony Ring, editor of *Wooster Sauce*, the UK Wodehouse Society's elegant newsletter, gave the program a nine out of ten, saying despite some omissions and lapses from good taste, that "overall it was an extremely good representation to the public of the life of the last century's greatest humorous writer."

The story followed his life, beginning with lantern slides of Hong Kong and then his birthplace of Guildford in Surrey. The main narrator was the actress Miranda Richardson, who wasn't shown, and the material was based on the upcoming authorized biography by Robert McCrum, who spoke frequently. One of the possibly contentious things Mr. McCrum said is that the reason Wodehouse didn't get to go to Oxford was that his older brother Armine felt rivalry towards him and didn't want him there. When I asked for his evidence for this statement, Mr. McCrum replied, "The short answer is that there is some subtle evidence in the early work (you'll have to wait for my book for all the details) and there's also evidence that, although PGW was fond of his brother, there was also—right up to Armine's death in 1936—quite a bit of fraternal tension between them. The Oxford business certainly remains a mystery, however, and you can't point to a single document which fully explains it, and certainly not *Over Seventy*!"

Plum's prominence as a musical comedy lyricist was featured with admiring comments by Broadway historian Lee Davis, author of *Bolton and Wodehouse and Kern*, who said they invented American musical comedy. David Jasen, the first Wodehouse biographer, mentioned that Plum's wonderful ear for words gave him the rare ability to write lyrics after the music was written. The lyricist Tim Rice claimed that Plum's musical achievements were as amazing "As if Shakespeare had first rowed the Atlantic single-handedly, and then wrote *King Lear*."

Plum's very talented great grandson, Hal Cazalet, played and sang some of his songs which he's been doing since childhood, including "You're the Top," adapted by Plum for the London production at Cole Porter's request, which has some of the most ingenious lyrics ever:

You're the top—you're the Coliseum,
You're the top—you're the Louvre Museum.
You're a melody from a symphony by Strauss.
You're an Ascot bonnet,
A Shakespeare sonnet,
You're Mickey Mouse.

Or the words to Ivor Novello's music *If I Ever Lost You*:

Think how sad an egg would feel
If ham should disappear
Think how a sausage's hopes would be dash'd
If one day it awoke and miss'd its mash'd.
And what grief a steak would feel if it found
That there wasn't an onion around.

The section on the Hollywood years included views of an actor swimming in the pool and writing in the lush garden of their rented Beverly Hills house at 1005 Benedict Canyon Road. They also staged a re-enactment of the famous *Los Angeles Times* interview by Alma Whitaker where Plum made national headlines by frankly telling how little of his script work was used and how much he was paid (\$2,000 per week, when that was worth twelve times today's money.)

About a fourth of the program covered his war years and the much-debated radio broadcasts to America. Unfamiliar movie footage of Plum and Ethel at Degenerhausen, the German estate where they spent a couple of summers, was included. Barry Pitt and Bob Whitby, who were also interned by the Germans, spoke about their experiences. Plum's grandson, Sir Edward

Cazalet, mentioned the great injustice of the fact that relevant Government documents declaring Plum innocent of all traitorous charges were not released until 1991, long after his death. The program stressed Plum's sadness and sense of exile, and his discomfort at the prospect of returning to England after the war. The program did not mention the terrible blow to both Plum and Ethel when they heard of their daughter Leonora's death.

The author and playwright John Mortimer claimed that Wodehouse knew all of Shakespeare by heart and beautifully read some familiar quotes about the Empress of Blandings in *Full Moon*. He spoke of how well Wodehouse would use some great wonderful phrase and then bring it down to some ridiculously trivial matter. At age nine, Mortimer said he wanted a monocle and cane so he could be a Drone.

Among the commentators were the actress Olivia Williams, who said "I have the sense that men have all the fun in Wodehouse, and I may be a traitor to my sex, but I can't resist the fact that he makes me laugh"; his nephew Patrick Wodehouse, who spoke of the kind servants he remembered from his childhood visits to Plum in London; Jacqueline Powell, who served as Ethel's secretary when they lived at Le Touquet, and who told how the late Queen Mother offered to go all the way to Remsenburg, Long Island, to honor Plum, but was dissuaded by the Government; his American editor at Simon & Schuster, Peter Schwed, who talked about Plum's modesty and how Schwed gave him a mock knighthood when he couldn't travel to England to receive the real one. Lee Davis mentions how his father forbade Plum to go to England for his knighthood saying it would be a one-way trip, which is confusing without the explanation that his father was Plum's doctor. Robert McCrum ends by saying that the final and unbeatable tribute for an author is that he stays in print.

Elin Murphy generously got *PGW: The Long Exile* video to America, translated into a form we can use here, and I got my copy from Jan Hunt, who is very kindly distributing it in American VHS videotape form. As Jan announced in the Spring issue:

My son Jason will be making the copies. We're asking for \$3.50 to cover the tape, packaging, and media postage within the U.S. An additional donation for Jason's time and effort would be appreciated. For priority mail or for addresses outside the U.S. please write first to make arrangements.

Treasurer's Report, 2002

BY GARY HALL, (TEMPORARY) TREASURER

Balance as of December 31, 2001:	\$8,500.85
Income: Dues and fees:	\$12,707.54
Expenses:	
Plum Lines production & mailing:	\$10,920.38
Correspondence, supplies, other:	\$384.10
Advanced funds for 2003 Convention:	\$500.00
Total Expenses:	\$11,804.48
Balance as of December 31, 2002:	\$9,403.91

NOTE: Due to the timing of the Autumn/Winter 2002 *Plum Lines*, the normal flow of dues was somewhat delayed. Hence, we have had a great tide of dues arrive in just late February and early March of 2003. Our balance (as of March 9, 2003) has swollen like the Mississippi in Spring, and has reached a potent \$12,612.14.

Lives of the Mind

Ann Nicholson found a brief review of a book with the intriguing title *Lives of the Mind: The Use and Abuse of Intelligence from Hegel to Wodehouse*. The author is Roger Kimball, the publisher Ivan R. Dee, and the price \$28.95. The review appeared in the December 22, 2002, issue of *The New York Times Book Review*. The reviewer, John Motyka, writes that the author's theme is "the interplay of character and thought, the interaction of personal qualities and intellectual activities in a wide range of thinkers and writers." Wodehouse is not mentioned in the review, and I agree with Ann, who says she "has no idea how Wodehouse fits into the book."

Thomas "Plug" Smith and Dave Lull point us to a review by Norman Malcolm in *The Telegraph* (12 January 2003) which solves the mystery. Its concluding paragraph:

Lest this seem too forbiddingly serious a task, there is also a leavening of humour here, both in Kimball's own writing and in his subject-matter. It is nice to read, alongside explorations of Schopenhauer and Kierkegaard, an essay on the "genius" of P. G. Wodehouse. And when we read his conclusion, that "In many ways, Wodehouse accomplished what Flaubert aspired to do: to write a novel about nothing," it is pleasing to think that the closest Kimball has ever come to sounding like a post-modern literary theorist is in that appreciation of the world of Lord Emsworth and Gussie Fink-Nottle.

Collecting Wodehouse: America, I Like You

BY JOHN GRAHAM

SO, YOU'VE decided to take the plunge and collect Wodehouse first editions. Well done. But which first editions are we talking about—English only, American only, or both? A popular alternative is to collect first appearances worldwide, a strategy which would yield a library with somewhat more UK than US volumes. One other possibility is to concentrate on the output from one side of the Atlantic, but to collect the equivalent book from the other side as well when there are significant textual differences. (For example, you may not need to own both *Right Ho, Jeeves* and *Brinkley Manor*—different titles, same story—but you will need both US and UK editions of *The Luck of the Bodkins*—same title, different stories.)

If you have enough time and money, I would certainly advise collecting both American and English first editions. Apart from being able to compare the texts, it can simply be great fun seeing cross-country variations in the dust jackets. (Only rarely did the same artist draw both jackets—Frank Ford in the 1950s and Osbert Lancaster in the 1970s are rare exceptions who did.) But, since not all of us have the bank account of a Hollywood Ivor Llewellyn, it may be worthwhile to consider the case for specialization. So, in this column I propose to look at the pros and cons of collecting only American firsts, and in my next column I'll survey the English-only strategy. By the way, I have found that most serious American collectors tend to go in for both US and UK firsts while most British collectors specialize in UK firsts.

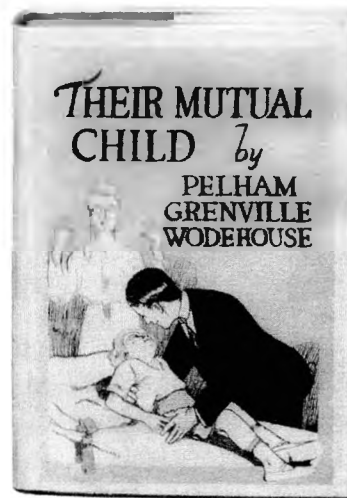
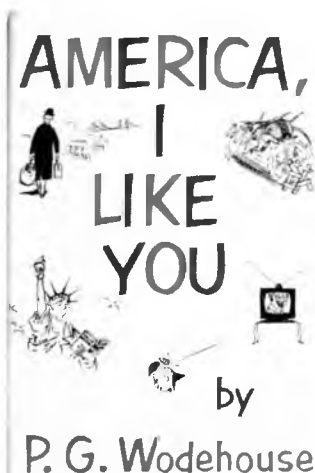
Let's begin by noting the main disadvantage of specialization: following an American-only strategy, you will never have a complete set of Wodehouse titles. Plum's official debut in the US was the 1909 Circle publication of *Love Among the Chickens*, so if you start here, you'll miss the early school stories. Although McIlvaine notes that Macmillan's publishing records claim most of these books were imported into the US, don't count on finding copies of many (or any) of them today. Even if you are willing to skip the school stories (some of us love them; some don't), there are still several other important titles you'll miss, most notably *My Man Jeeves*, *The Man Upstairs* and *Louder and Funnier*. Barry Phelps provides a complete list of the 15 English titles never published in America (see page 321 of his biography *P. G. Wodehouse: Man and Myth*.)

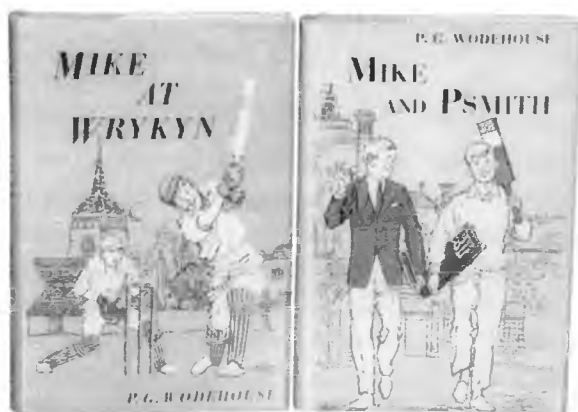
So, assuming you are willing to forego completeness or plan to fill in the gaps with English editions, let's move on to consider the advantages of American firsts. To my mind (the mind of an economist that is), the biggest plus is price: compared with English firsts, American firsts are much less expensive. It isn't entirely clear why this should be the case, but it simply is. (I suppose it has something to do with supply and demand.) Putting aside dust jackets for the moment, you should not expect to pay more than \$500–\$750 for any American first, and all but half a dozen titles sell for much less than this. By comparison, I would guess that 25 percent of English firsts routinely sell for at least \$500 (again, ignoring dust jackets).

Besides lower prices, American editions offer another advantage: They tend to be better made books than their English counterparts (particularly those issued by Herbert Jenkins) and therefore tend to survive to this day in better condition. (There are exceptions of course: just try to find a copy of *Stiff Upper Lip, Jeeves* whose pages have not turned brown.) Wisely or not, Wodehouse tended to be loyal to his publishers. In America most of his books were produced by either Doran (which became Doubleday Doran then simply Doubleday) or Simon & Schuster. As a result, it can be great fun accumulating a continuous run of titles from a single publisher, noting what

changes and what remains the same from one book to the next. Sometimes even obvious mistakes persisted: for example, Charles Gould has observed that for many years Simon & Schuster listed *The White Hope* (rather than *Their Mutual Child*) among previous Wodehouse titles, and I would add they also pluralized Jimmy's singular "Intrusion" (perhaps to match Archie's "Indiscretions").

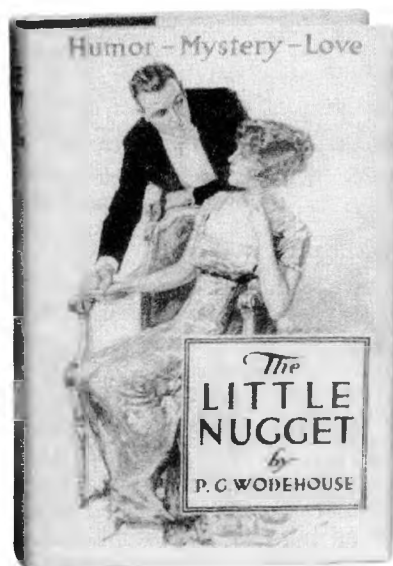
Let's address the issue of scarcity. Which American book can claim to be the rarest? Without a doubt, it would be the 1919 *Their Mutual Child*, the only Wodehouse title published by Boni &



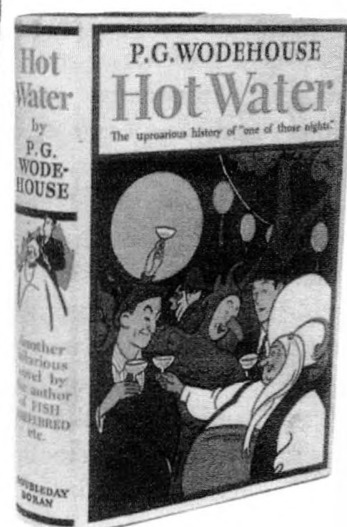


Liveright. It has light blue boards and white lettering on the spine and front cover that invariably flakes off over time. One day in April, I found 4 copies offered for sale on abebooks.com, ranging in price from \$600 to \$1500. No copy was described as better than “very good” (which, as Joseph Connolly has noted, is book dealer jargon for “not very good”). The rarest post-war title may come as a surprise to many. I think it is likely to be *Mike and Psmith*, published by Meredith Press in 1969. Wodehouse’s one-time literary agent Scott Meredith had published *Mike at Wrykyn* the previous year, and it must not have sold very well; as a result, the print run for *Mike and Psmith* was cut and seems to have been exhausted almost entirely by sales to libraries. This means that when a used copy does appear on the market today, it is likely to be described as “ex. lib.,” considered a fatal flaw by many collectors.

Happily, some of Wodehouse’s earliest output in America are not particularly rare or pricey. These include *Love Among the Chickens* and the three titles published by W. J. Watt—*The Intrusion of Jimmy*, *The Prince and Betty* and *The Little Nugget*. Their survival may be due to the fact that all four books come with richly illustrated covers. You might not be able to judge a book by its cover, but nice



covers do help save books from the dustbin! As I write this column, there are 8 “Chickens” for sale on abebooks, ranging in price from \$450-\$750. There are also 13 “Intrusions,” 10 “Bettys” and 19 “Nuggets.” A word of advice: don’t pay too much for the Watt publications. All three of them show up regularly on ebay, and often can be had for less than \$100 a piece.



For me, one final pleasure of collecting American firsts is owning some of the very best Wodehouse dust jackets around. Two of my favorites are James Montgomery Flagg’s depiction of Jeeves on *Brinkley Manor* and Rea Irwin’s colorful cover for *Hot Water*. A dust jacket definitely adds to the price of a book, but also to its value. Fortunately, no post-war book in dust jacket (save *Mike and Psmith*) should set you back more than \$100–\$200. Pre-war jackets are another story, and will be the topic of a future column. Meanwhile, if you have any suggestions, comments or questions about collecting Wodehouse, please don’t hesitate to email me (jwgraham@andromeda.rutgers.edu).

John’s column this month is describing collecting at the high end, treating books and dust jackets as rare artworks. New Wodehouse readers and fans on a limited budget need not be daunted by these prices; good reading copies, even of most of the rarer items, are available at a small fraction of the cost of top-quality first editions. Future articles will give strategies for bargain-hunting.

—GW

Character Sketches: Uncle Fred

BY TONY RING

This is the third in an occasional series of pen-portraits based on articles from *The Millennium Wodehouse Concordance*, by Tony Ring and the late Geoffrey Jaggard.

UNCLE Fred (Frederick Altamont Cornwallis Twistleton, 5th Earl of Ickenham) was a younger son who enjoyed a varied and adventurous career, principally in the western United States, while awaiting the call to the peerage. Nowhere are we clearly told whether he inherited the title from his deceased elder brother (in which case the brother would be the fourth Earl, his father the third, and his grandfather the second) or from his father (who would then have been the fourth, with his grandfather the third).

He was shipped overseas at an early age, working in turn as cow-puncher on ranches in Wyoming and Arizona, soda-jerker, journalist (at which time he met George Painter) and prospector in the Mojave Desert. The life induced a liberal expansion in both his humanism and his innately philosophical outlook, and enabled him to acquire the skills which entitled him to wear the names "England's Annie Oakley," "Old Sureshot" and "Chilled Steel." It probably intensified the resolve never to be bored, and sharpened to a fine point his talent for starting things, or stirring them up, in order to spread his own version of sweetness and light on all sides. Even at the time of our last meeting, when he had reached his late fifties, that resolve remained undiminished.

It is valid to ask whether his occasions for enterprise were much curtailed by his marriage to his much cherished Jane, although it might be thought that, if he conducted his whole mature life at the pace of the parts reported to us, a search for a sixth Earl would not have been long delayed. It is easy to contrast his approach to gaining his light-spreading ends (effrontery, provocation, "buzzing" talk, bogus impersonation, charm and the ability to respond instantly to crises as they occur) to those of Galahad Threepwood, to whom time and experience have imparted methods more approximating those of the chessboard.

The Ickenham line of earls was a revived one. Several members of the original line distinguished themselves (or otherwise) in the Crusades or the French wars. Lord Ickenham's country seat was Ickenham Hall, Bishop's Ickenham, Hants, a manor originally granted to the Bishops of Winchester. If you were still able to go by rail, you would leave the main line at Wockley Junction and take the branch line via Eggmarsh St John and Ashenden Oakshott to Bishop's Ickenham.

He was the uncle of Pongo and Valerie Twistleton-Twistleton, though each regularly went about half-dressed

(or is it half-undressed?) without their hyphens. He passed at least part of the Second World War in the Home Guard and remained tall, slim, distinguished-looking, and with a jaunty moustache, an enterprising eye and iron-grey hair throughout the period of his life during which we knew him. Although his personal opinion was that, to catch him at his best, you had to catch him in London, this is not borne out by his appearance on three occasions in country houses, where the havoc he successfully wrought stood comparison to any of his reported London adventures.

As hinted at above, the influence of his American spouse Jane, née Bastable and half-sister of that ornament of the law, Sir Raymond Bastable, QC, was considerable. Though remaining offstage, Jane's character was positive enough for us to endorse the spirit of Lord Ickenham's opinion that she is probably "the sweetest thing who ever murmured 'Yes' to a clergyman's 'Wilt thou, Jane...?'" as well as being one of the most sorely tried. Her own doubts about her ability to control hot springs, avalanches and earthquakes were evidenced by her Lord's admission that she broke off their engagement no fewer than six times before the congregation was eventually allowed to bend a reverent gaze upon the soles of their wedding shoes. The marriage's lasting success was a tribute to her acumen in assuming control of the family budget, her ceaseless vigilance, the restriction of his visits to the Metrop and the possession of a good stock of blunt knives for skinning errands, though she was not above taking the risk of an occasional trip to Trinidad.

The Earl's other justifiable source of pride was *The Ickenham System* which, coupled with his advice to all young men to marry a girl whom they could tickle, was claimed by its sponsor to be 100% successful—in certain cases. The Editors disclaim all responsibility for torts and malfeasances or actions for civil damages, *lis pendens* and even *pendente lite* as may ensue upon the adoption of the System, confining themselves to the terms of the claim of its originator:

"What you must do is stride up to the girl and grab her by the wrist. Ignoring her struggles, clasp her to your bosom and shower kisses on her upturned face. You needn't say much. Just 'My mate!' or something of that sort. I can assure you that this system will bring home the bacon. Oh, by the way, in grabbing the subject by the wrist, don't behave as though you were handling a delicate piece of china. Grip firmly and waggle her about a bit. The preliminary waggle is of the essence."

The system was recommended for use by the Earl on many occasions, including one when the delicate piece of china was to be the ice-cold Lady Constance Keeble.

Uncle Fred appeared in four novels and held centre stage in "Uncle Fred Flits By," the short story selected by the world's Wodehouse Societies as their overall favourite.

Chapters Corner

CONDUCTED BY NEIL MIDKIFF

We're delighted to announce the formation of a new chapter, the Size 14 Hat Club in Halifax, Nova Scotia (our first Canadian chapter). Contact information is in the list below. And we're thoroughly cheered by this long-awaited announcement:

New York City Chapter Forming!

The bustling metrop., so long lacking an official TWS chapter, is about to have this sad state of affairs rectified. The greater New York area is simply bursting with Wodehousians, and soon they will have the ability to get together and inflict themselves upon the public in large doses. We hope to have our first meeting soon—possibly before the Toronto convention, possibly after—so keep your ear to the pavement. If you're interesting in helping launch this worthy effort, contact Amy Plofker via email (AmyPlf@aol.com) or US mail (109 Kaye Vue Drive, Apt 2G, Hamden, CT 06514-6300). Also drop Amy a line if you just want to make sure your name gets on the invitation list for meetings.

Anglers' Rest

(Seattle and vicinity)

Contact: Susan Collicott

Blandings Castle Chapter

(greater San Francisco Bay Area)

Newsletter: *The Argus Intelligencer and Wheat Growers Gazette*

Contact: Jan Kaufman, president

You can bring your bathing suits (well, Tuppy Glossop isn't invited after what he did to Bertie) but for everyone else our summer meeting will be at Chris Dueker's house, where there's a swimming pool. We'll meet on Sunday, July 13, at 1 pm at 37 Ringwood Drive, Atherton.

At our spring meeting at Doug and Margaret Stow's on April 27, in Half Moon Bay, Raja Srinivasan was just back

from his native India, where in his home town of Madras, he found out on the Internet about a Blandings Castle meeting there of local Wodehouse enthusiasts, so he had dinner and coffee with them. They sound just like our group as their main activities at meetings are eating and laughing. They've made screen savers which show the Blandings books, which is something we haven't done yet.

Doug Stow, who has been hand-printing books, broadsides and Convention keepsakes for many years, brought out his treasure of an uncashed 1984 check from the late author and long-time TWS member Isaac Asimov, who wrote even more books than Wodehouse. Asimov sent Doug \$11.50 for his elegant book of alphabetical poems called *Plum Pudding*, and asked him to send it with celerity. Doug wrote back and told him that he wasn't going to cash his check and Asimov replied "would that my landlord would do the same." Some examples from *Plum Pudding*:

P is for Psmith

...the p's silent, you know...

Though Psmithian lips

Are seldom found so.

—Carl Wells

F is for Freddie,

Lord Emsworth's youngest son,

Whose annoying behavior

makes him wish he had none.

—Doug Stow

Capital! Capital!

(Washington, D.C. and vicinity)

Contact: Erik R. Quick, president

No news is not good news, I fear. Can any of our Capital! Capital! members report to us on their activities?

Chapter One

(greater Philadelphia area)

Contact: Susan and Daniel Cohen

At our May 18 meeting we plan to have a group read-aloud of the school story "The Tabby Terror," organized by Roz Kushner. That will be the main event of the day. Reading Wodehouse aloud is always fun. Our next meeting will be in the fall.

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

May Queen, our recording secretary, reports that for our winter adventure, The Chicago Accident Syndicate took a dinner trip to City Lit theater's production of *Uncle Fred in the Springtime*, adapted by Page Hearn, veteran of several roles as Jeeves in earlier City Lit Wodehouse productions. Daniel Glazer reviewed *Uncle Fred* in a recent issue of *Plum Lines*. In February, members of the Syndicate not in stir without the option met at Tommy Nevin's pub in Evanston (our registered headquarters) for refreshment and readings of Wodehouse on Romance. Our May 17th meeting will be at Ukridge Castle for our annual croquet match in the yew alley. Visitors representing sister societies are welcome, subject to the understanding that Chicago croquet is not for the faint of heart.

The Clients of Adrian Mulliner
(for enthusiasts of both PGW and Sherlock Holmes)
Contact: Marilyn MacGregor

The Drone Rangers
(Houston and vicinity)
Newsletter: *DroneStar*, edited by Toni & Bill Rudersdorf
Contact: Toni Rudersdorf

and enjoyed a paper over our "book of the month," *Mike and Psmith*. Then one of our members read from Chapter 2 of *Broadway Babies Say Goodnight* by Mark Steyn. This chapter is about P.G.W. and his friends (Guy Bolton, the Gershwins and Jerome Kern) who wrote and produced musical comedies in the '20s, '30s and '40s for theaters on Broadway and in London. Mark Steyn is a master in his own right (or possibly write), and several members went straight to Amazon to find copies of this excellent book on theater for themselves. Toni later got permission from Mark to publish all or most of this chapter in *DroneStar* (the Drone Rangers newsletter).

We met at a new restaurant in Houston, the Raven Grill, the evening of April 26th for our bi-monthly browsing and sluicing. The Raven Grill specializes in unusual

vegetarian dishes and also produces some fine pasta. These evenings are remarkable for the beauty of the Drone in all his or her splendor. Admiring glances were cast at Susan Garrett in her red strapless gown and at Carey Tynan in her chic Dior simple black evening frock. We all had a delicious time and are ready to do it again June 28th.

The next book evening will be May 30th and we are all looking forward to sharing our views on *Joy in the Morning*. It is always a pleasure to be at the Barnes & Noble because our hostess, manager Rebecca Joiner, provides us with a pleasant and comfortable meeting place, Starbucks coffee and sometimes wine to go with the yummys our fellow Drones bring to share. If you are in Houston at the end of May or June, please join us at B&N, Town & Country Village or call to learn which restaurant we will be infesting.

The New England Wodehouse Thingummy Society
(NEWTS)

(Boston and elsewhere in New England)
Contact: Anne Cotton, president

The NEWTS had a splendid gathering on March 30 at the Princeton, Mass., home of Bill and Jo Claghorn; along with our usual conversation and consumption of everything in sight, we were treated to a showing of the videotape of the recent BBC documentary, *The Long Exile*.

On May 10 we met at John and Lisa Fahey's. We will join a celebration of midsummer on June 21 chez Rosemary Roman and David Nolan. At one or the other of these events, we will read "Aunt Agatha Takes the Count" (guess who will try to grab the small but delicious role of Aunt Agatha).

The Northwodes
(St. Paul, Minneapolis, and vicinity)
Contact: Kristine Fowler

The Perfecto-Zizzbaum Motion Picture Corporation
(Los Angeles, California, and vicinity)
Contact: Melissa D. Aaron

The Perfecto-Zizzbaum Motion Picture Corporation will be celebrating its third anniversary in June! If you are in Pasadena (or environs) on the second Sunday in June,

please join us after the meeting at the Chado Tearoom on 99 N. Raymond for a spot of browsing and sluicing.

PZMPCo meets the second Sunday of every month at Vroman's Bookstore (695 E. Colorado Blvd., Pasadena) at 12:30. We have selected our readings for the rest of 2003, as follows:

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

July: "The Clicking of Cuthbert" and "The Coming of Gowf" from the *Golf Omnibus*

August: *Laughing Gas* — *n.b.*, this meeting conflicts with the convention, so some of us will be in Toronto

September: *Galahad at Blandings (The Brinkmanship of Galahad Threepwood)*

October: *Much Obligated, Jeeves (Jeeves and the Tie that Binds)*

November: *Pearls, Girls, and Monty Bodkin (The Plot that Thickened)*

December: Two Mulliner stories, the sequels to the ever-popular "Buck-U-Uppo": "The Bishop's Move" and "Gala Night."

In December, Vroman's generally slings us out to shift for ourselves to make room for holiday shoppers, and that is when we generally have our annual Holiday Tea at the house of a PZMPCo member. Banjoleles optional.

We sometimes gather for special related events, especially 20s-themed events. These have become both numerous and good here in LA owing to the popularity of the recent film *Chicago*. If you want to be kept informed, check our web page at <http://www.lahacal.org>, under P. G. Wodehouse Society, and subscribe to our emailing list.

The Mottled Oyster Club

(San Antonio and South Texas)

Contact: James P. Robinson III

P.O. Box 6501

San Antonio, TX 78209-6501

(210) 824-1565

(210) 826-7621 (facsimile)

E-mail: jprobins@ix.netcom.com

The Pelikan Club

(Kansas City and vicinity)

Contact: Sallie Hobbs

The Pickering Motor Company

(Detroit and vicinity)

Contact: Elliott Milstein

See the first page of this issue for a report from the Pickering Motor Company on the upcoming Convention!

The Size 14 Hat Club

(Halifax, Nova Scotia)

Contact: Jill Robinson

A half-dozen souls devoted to Plum have committed to certain meetings per annum during which moments we will engage in light-hearted banter about Spinoza and sup on smelts. The name of course derives from Bertie's conviction that Jeeves brain was prodigiously large due to a diet high in fish...and after all, nowhere could be fishier than here! Since I myself have just discovered TWS (membership time? five minutes) and we come to this assembly from varying backgrounds of familiarity with Wodehouse I anxiously await the DVDs of *Wodehouse Playhouse* and the documentary *The Long Exile* for such will serve to bring the less obsessed up to par with the greatly obsessed. We are delighted to have found one another and the rest of you too and are proud to be the first Canadian Chapter of The Wodehouse Society. Tally ho and hard for'ard!

—Jill Robinson

The Soup & Fish Club

(northern Virginia area)

Contact: Deborah Dillard

The Wuckoos of the Palace

(greater Portland, Oregon area)

Former president: Dennis McDougall

I'm sad to report that the Wuckoos of the Palace are pretty much defunct. At our last meeting, only Ish and I showed up. Ish tried to put something together, and could not generate any interest. So unless some other Plummie wants to pick up the ball, the Wuckoos will be no more.

Portland vicinity residents who would like to turn this situation around should communicate with Dennis.

Membership Survey

I want to thank all of you who took the time and trouble to reply to our TWS Membership Survey included with the Spring issue of *Plum Lines*. I only wish I could thank each of you personally, but the responses are coming in at such a fast and furious rate I wouldn't have time to read Wodehouse if I did. And what interesting replies they are, full of helpful ideas and suggestions. So please keep those Membership Survey responses coming, Plummies! Send them to me at the address in the next column.

—Susan Cohen

Belgian “Gentlemen”

The Drones Club Belgium seeks input from the Wodehouse societies worldwide discussing:

1. What is a good definition of true gentlemanship?
2. Which three Wodehouse characters would you select as true gentlemen upon your definition?
3. Was P. G. Wodehouse a true gentleman?

They seek answers from each Society by August 1; since TWS is geographically widespread and won't meet until August 8–10 for the Convention, perhaps the various chapters could contribute ideas. The Drones plan a website and several events around the results, as part of their fifteenth anniversary in 2003–04. I wish I could reproduce here their spiffy electronic prospectus of the project.

Kris Smets, Chairman of the Drones, can be reached at drones.club@pandora.be.

—GW

Contents

- 1 Right Ho, Toronto!!
- 3 Attention Poets: Convention Contest!
- 4 Wideawake Wodehouse—and the occasional nod
- 7 A New Wodehouse Lyric?
- 8 The Best Friend of Mystery
- 10 Letter from England
- 11 Who Wants to Marry an English Lord?
- 14 The Studio System and the Mulliners of Hollywood
- 18 My First Time
- 20 *P. G. Wodehouse: The Long Exile*
- 21 Treasurer's Report, 2002
- 21 Lives of the Mind
- 22 Collecting Wodehouse: America, I Like You
- 24 Character Sketches: Uncle Fred
- 25 Chapters Corner
- 28 Membership Survey
- 28 Belgian “Gentlemen”

New York City chapter

Wodehouse Society members in the greater New York City region should turn to page 25 immediately for news about organizing the long-awaited local chapter of TWS. We have several dozen members there, so we hope that they'll soon be enjoying local meetings and events!

Volunteer Officers

President of The Wodehouse Society:
Susan Cohen

Information and new-member inquiries:
Amy Plofker

Dues payments and changes in contact information:
Gary Hall and Linda Adam-Hall

<http://www.wodehouse.org/membership/>

Original contributions to *Plum Lines*:
David Landman, SS

Other contributions to *Plum Lines*:
Ed Ratcliffe, OM

Photos, illustrations, chapter news for *Plum Lines*:
Neil Midkiff, GW

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

All quotations from P. G. Wodehouse are reprinted by permission of the Copyright Owner, the Trustees of the Wodehouse Estate.