

The quarterly journal of The Wodehouse Society

Volume 25 Number 4 Winter 2004

Jan Wilson Kaufman 1935–2004

With deep sorrow we announce the sad news that TWS president Jan Kaufman, Wodehousian extraordinaire, died on December 5, 2004, after a prolonged battle with cancer. A year already marked by much loss has been made more painful for those who knew, loved, and admired Jan.

There was much to admire. Jan, a professional photographer and longtime member of TWS, was also president of the Blandings Castle chapter (San Francisco) and publisher of their newsletter, *The Argus Intelligencer and Wheat Growers Gazette*. Elected president of TWS at the Toronto convention last year, she immediately began planning the 2005 convention in Los Angeles. Enthusiastic and energetic, she set about it almost single-handedly until illness forced her last month to turn the task over to TWS vice president, and now acting president, Jean Tillson.

It is difficult to think of a convention without Jan. In addition to being the Society's official photographer—her pictures filled *Plum Lines* pages for years—she was also a speaker at no less than five of our official gatherings (San Francisco 1987, Kalamazoo 1989, New York 1991, Boston 1995, and Toronto 2003), which must be a record. For Los Angeles she was planning to speak on "Hollywood in the Thirties"—and knowing Jan, it would have been a fascinating and highly entertaining talk.

A Californian all her life, Jan grew up on a large family chicken ranch in Palmdale, north of Los Angeles. Even then she had a wide variety of interests, including an extensive knowledge of cars. Somewhere along the way she discovered Wodehouse, and when she joined The Wodehouse Society the lives of many other Plummies became richer for knowing her. In October she traveled to England for the U.K. Society's Dinner and enjoyed herself thoroughly.



Jan Wilson Kaufman in London, 2004

Donations in Jan's memory can be made to the American Cancer Society; or to Berkeley City Library, 2090 Kittredge Street, Berkeley, CA 94704. Tributes will be published in the next issue of *Plum Lines*. If you have a special memory of Jan that you would like to share, please send it to Gary Hall (address on the back page).

Convention Time!

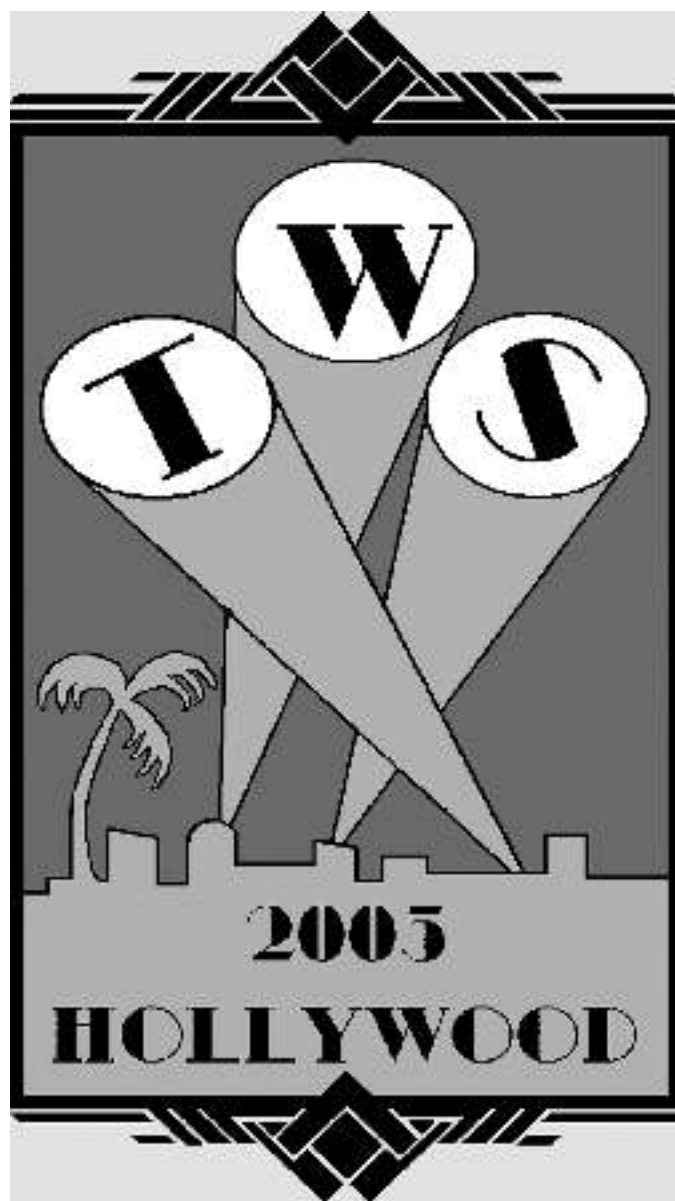
Start saving your doubloons in the old oaken chest for The Wodehouse Society's 13th International Convention, Hooray for Hollywood, to be held in Los Angeles on the sunny UCLA campus, August 11–14, 2005. Plan to come to this best of all worlds to frolic with kindred souls in the ambiance of star-studded Southern California. True to TWS traditions, there will be a variety of speakers, skits and readings by several chapters, raffle prizes, and a bloodthirsty competition for all members.

A possible studio visit, for the full Tinseltown experience, may be included on our tour of Hollywood, where Wodehouse once lived and worked. UCLA campus attractions include the Fowler Art Museum, the Murphy Sculpture Garden, the Mathais Botanical Garden, and the Armand Hammer Museum of Modern Art. *The New York Times* recently called the Hammer Museum one of the city's hottest cultural attractions, with a keen eye for emerging artistic talent. Information will also be provided on how to get to the nearby free Getty Art Museum and gardens, and in a future issue we'll tell you about Hearst Castle, where Plum, Ethel, and Leonora once stayed.

Our accommodations will be in Sunset Village on the UCLA campus (see separate article). Two meals a day are included in the room price, making this a very economical vacation! (But please note: rooms *must* be reserved by July 22—we are unable to accommodate registrants after that date.) Meals are served in all-you-care-to-eat buffet style in the nearby dining commons, with a large variety of entrees, extensive salads and fresh fruit, freshly made pizza, charbroiled chicken and burgers, and many dessert choices. Tennis, racquet ball, outdoor swimming, and fully equipped fitness centers are available.

We feel it is only fair to point out that Los Angeles is not a walking city. Therefore we recommend very strongly that you either bring or rent a car to the convention, cadge a seat in someone else's coupe, or take advantage of Perfecto-Zizzbaum's special transportation-matching service, which will be advertised in the next issue of *Plum Lines*. *Important:* If you do bring a car, parking permits will be needed, so please fill in the appropriate section on the registration form.

Convention fees include registration, the Saturday night banquet, and a special barbecue on Friday, which will be followed by a Clean and Bright Entertainment. Altogether it's only \$220 for early registration (by July 1), \$255 for sluggards. Just fill out and send in the enclosed registration form—and we'll see you in L.A.!



Additional important information about the convention may be found on other pages in this issue:

The Pursuit of Happiness: A terrific history of past conventions, courtesy of Elin Woodger (page 3)

Accommodations and Roommate Matching: Information about the UCLA accommodations and instructions for finding a roommate, should you need one (page 5)

Strutting our Stuff: Important information for vendors and booksellers (page 10)

The Great Wodehouse Movie Pitch Challenge: A bit of competitive Hollywood-themed fun (page 16)

The Pursuit of Happiness: A Not-Very-Brief History of The Wodehouse Society and Its Conventions

BY ELIN WOODGER

This history was originally written for the program of the 2003 convention in Toronto and has been updated in anticipation of the 2005 convention in Los Angeles. —Ed.

One score and four years ago, our Founding Fathers [Captain William Blood and Franklin Axe] brought forth upon this continent a new society, conceived in a moment of absolute brilliance, and dedicated to the proposition that P. G. Wodehouse is without equal.

As a result of this momentous decision in our history, The Wodehouse Society (TWS) was formed in 1980—appropriately enough, in Pennsylvania—with the Oldest Member (Bill Blood) at the helm and a newsletter then called *Comments in Passing*. Like many literary societies, TWS grew slowly, but Captain Blood soon succeeded in attracting members from across the country and across the seas.

It wasn't long before various Bright Ideas evolved regarding the Society's organization, its constitution—and, especially, its conventions. Shortly after the newsletter was rechristened *Plum Lines*, the following report appeared in Volume III, Number 4: "THE FIRST Annual Gathering of The Wodehouse Society was convened on 16 July, 1982 . . . While only eight members attended the session at Delaware Valley College, the dinner at Missy's Inn was celebrated by a multitude of 13 members and three guests. . . ." Talks were informal, readings included a letter from Lady Wodehouse, there was plenty of browsing and sluicing—and a tradition was born.

The following year *Plum Lines* (Vol. 4, No. 6) boasted a grand announcement: "THE SECOND INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION OF THE WODEHOUSE SOCIETY was held in Doylestown, Pennsylvania on October 15th, 1983, to celebrate the 102d anniversary of Plum's birth." Attendance had slipped a bit—only nine members came—but this meeting was a forerunner of things to come. Again there were informal talks, readings, and a letter from Lady Wodehouse. In addition, business discussions were held, a constitution was agreed upon, and

Professor Robert Hall was elected to succeed Bill Blood as TWS president. It was also decided that conventions should be biennial rather than annual. Photographs and names of attendees were noted in the Tome, a large book charting TWS's growth and activities, which has since been passed from president to president at every convention.

The Third International Convention of The Wodehouse Society gathered on October 19, 1985, at Cornell University, Ithaca, New York. A pattern was now developing, with morning and afternoon sessions as well as an evening banquet, and the international title was justified when Father James Carruth of Zimbabwe presented two papers. Walter S. White of Chevy Chase presented another, Florence Cunningham was elected president, and attendance rose to a whopping 24.

In 1987 the Society took Horace Greeley's advice and went West when the Blandings Castle chapter invited one and all to San Francisco. Our fourth convention at the Canterbury Hotel was significant for the number of precedents it set: a Society chapter acting as convention host (although Blandings was then the only organized chapter), events spread out over an entire weekend (August 14–16), an opening reception on Friday evening, and a closing brunch Sunday morning. Doug and Margaret Stow provided a beautiful hand-printed program, the first of many they would make for TWS conventions. The number of talks increased; speakers included Jan Kaufman, Len Lawson, Phil Ayres, and Dan Garrison—all TWS stalwarts; and Bill Blood was elected president.

But Captain Blood had a problem: There was no chapter available to host the fifth convention in 1989. The story goes that he scoured the membership list, saw a reasonable number of members in Kalamazoo, Michigan, and persuaded them to organize the next shindig. The festivities at Kalamazoo College over the weekend of October 6–8 were splendid, with speakers including Jan Kaufman and Elliott Milstein. This gathering holds the dubious honor of instituting bread-roll tossing at the Saturday night banquet. Booksellers set up shop, and Wodehousians have bought and sold books at conventions ever since. Kalamazoo also saw the start of another TWS tradition: the convention lapel pin. (Veterans of multiple conventions can be seen sporting all their pins with pride.)

Bill Blood's death on October 7, 1991, cast a shadow over the Sixth International Convention, organized by TWS president Phil Ayres and held in New York on October 11–13. Nevertheless, the Big Apple convention, which inaugurated a move from college campuses to swanky hotels, was a great success.

Jimmy Heineman, publisher of all things Wodehouse, and his fellow Drones Club members were the hosts. Events included a Friday pilgrimage to Remsenburg; a number of talks described by many as the funniest ever presented at any convention (Charles Gould, Lee Davis, Elliott Milstein, and Jan Kaufman were among the speakers); and the first Wodehouse Society convention skits, both written by Norman Murphy. There had been no brunch in Kalamazoo, but on Sunday in New York a group who couldn't bear to part met at a midtown eatery before reluctantly leaving for the airport. Thereafter the final brunch became a regular part of TWS conventions.

Len Lawson took over as president and brought the seventh convention back to San Francisco on July 30–August 1, 1993. By now attendance was topping 100, thanks to a blossoming membership and the realization that a year without a TWS convention was like a year without sunshine. Conventioneers began arriving on Thursday to meet old friends and get an early jump on the weekend's activities. As in New York, any spare moments were occupied by extracurricular activities, and competitions such as egg-and-spoon races were added to the agenda. Blandings Castle members regaled conventioneers with a filmed skit based on the Story of the Prawns. Speakers included three illustrious Wodehousians from England—Tony Ring, Helen Murphy, and Barry Phelps—and Toni Rudersdorf was elected president.

After the New York convention, chapters had begun springing up across the country. One of these was the New England Wodehouse Thingummy Society (NEWTS), founded in 1992 and hosts of the eighth convention in Boston on October 20–22, 1995. Old England joined New England as speakers included Tony Ring, Norman Murphy, and Hal Cazalet (Plum's great-grandson) from one side of the Atlantic; and Charles Gould, David Landman, Dan Garrison, and Anne Cotton from the other side. Hal's singing was the highlight, bringing the house down with his magnificent rendition of "Sonny Boy." Norman presented the Society with a silver Wembley Exhibition tea bell, which is now passed on, along with the Tome, from the outgoing to the incoming president—in the latter case, now Elliott Milstein.

For our ninth convention we moved to America's heartland, with the Chicago Accident Syndicate hosting "What Ho, Chicago!"—the first convention to be named and the largest ever—on October 3–5, 1997. Some 200 TWSers enjoyed a performance given by the City Lit Theatre; talks presented by Mike Dirda, Helen Murphy, Marilyn MacGregor, Peter Schwed,

and others; songs dazzlingly provided by Hal and Lara Cazalet; readings of winning entries in the Great Poetry Handicap; the International Team's triumph in Tony Ring's Scripture Knowledge Competition; Dan Garrison's election as president; and the formation of The Wodehouse Society Cricket Club. Although TWSCC's first outing was not very impressive, another tradition had begun, and we have tried to play cricket at each convention since.

The South Rose Again on the weekend of October 22–24, 1999, when Houston's Drone Rangers hosted our 10th convention, titled "Gone to Texas." TWSCC played an honest-to-goodness game, with players sporting badges designed by Jean Tillson. In a weekend replete with games, talks (speakers included Dan Cohen, Mike Skupin, Tony Ring, and Norman Murphy), fireworks, and Elin Woodger's election as president, two features of the Boston convention were again presented in Houston: an original skit from the NEWTS ("Jeeves and the Bum Steer") and a reading of a Wodehouse story ("The Story of William") enacted by Blandings Castle members. Bread throwing at the Saturday banquet reached an all-time high—or low, depending on whom you talk to. Later debate resulted in a decision to ban bread tossing at future conventions.

It was perhaps appropriate that we returned to our roots for "A Wodehouse Odyssey," TWS's 11th convention, hosted by Chapter One and held in Philadelphia on October 12–14, 2001. When TWSCC (America's newest cricket club) played at the Merion Cricket Club (America's oldest), we could only imagine how proud Bill Blood would have been to see how far his Society had come. Among the speakers who regaled us were Gary Hall and Linda Adam-Hall, Elliott Milstein, John Fletcher, and Brian Taves. The NEWTS performed "Mirth of a Nation," a Wodehousian version of the Revolutionary War, and Blandings Castle read the sublime story "Lord Emsworth and the Girl Friend." Norman Murphy expanded the official regalia by presenting a Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother medallion on a ribbon, to be the president's badge of office. Elin Woodger duly passed this, the Wembley tea bell, and the Tome over to new president Susan Cohen.

On August 8–10, 2003, the delightful task of hosting TWS's 12th convention, "Right Ho, Toronto!," fell to the Pickering Motor Company of Greater Detroit, Michigan. The Pickerings, led by Elliott and Elyse Milstein, chose the beautiful metropolis of Toronto, Ontario, Canada, for its convention, held largely on the campus of St. Michael's College, Elliott's alma mater. TWSCC's now-traditional game was a huge

success, attracting a record number of participants, and the talks on Saturday were pure joy. Many agreed that the slate of speakers—including, for the first time, Dennis Chitty, Curtis Armstrong, Richard Scrimger, and Major Thomas L. Smith, in addition to some familiar faces—was among the best presented at any convention. The Pickering Players performed a hilarious reading of “Ukridge’s Accident Syndicate,” and at the dinner that night Richard read the hilarious winning poem in the Great Poetry Competition to everybody’s huge enjoyment.

In Toronto the presidential torch was passed to Jan Kaufman,* who chose Los Angeles as the site of TWS’s 13th International Convention, “Hooray for Hollywood,” to be held August 11–14, 2005—get out your pen and mark it on your calendar *now!* (Plenty of juicy details on “Hooray for Hollywood” can be found in this issue of *Plum Lines*.) We are all looking forward to Los Angeles 2005, where we will continue The Wodehouse Society tradition of enjoying a weekend filled with friendships made and remade, browsing, sluicing, fun, games, and surprises—thus following our Manifest Destiny to ensure that the stories, characters, and songs of P. G. Wodehouse shall not perish from the earth.

* - Sadly, Jan will not be with us; see page 1.



Accommodations and Roommate Matching

As noted in the main article about the Hooray for Hollywood convention, our accommodations will be on the UCLA campus—but don’t be fooled into thinking we’d be staying in just *any* old dorm rooms! In fact we will be on a special part of the campus called Sunset Village, where all the rooms have private baths, air conditioning, maid service, television, and high-speed Internet hook-ups. That’s a great deal for the price (\$119 single, \$144 double, with no hotel tax).

While convention attendees are free to book hotel rooms off-campus, we highly recommend signing up for an on-campus room, which can be paid for along with your convention registration. It should be noted, however, that *we must receive all room bookings by July 22*; after that, you are on your own!

Many Plummies will want to take advantage of the double-room rate, which comes to only \$72 a night if split with a someone else. If you have a roommate lined up, please provide his or her name on the registration form and indicate whether one of you is paying for the room in full or you are splitting the cost. If you don’t have a roomie yet and want to get one, we do have a roommate-matching system:

1. *The preferred way:* Subscribe to our special mailing list. Once you are subscribed, you can write to others who are looking for roommates. We recommend that your message be brief: Just indicate that you need a roommate and what your specifics are (e.g., male or female, smoking or nonsmoking, apt to be out late on the tiles, or one of these “early to bed, early to rise” johnnies, etc.). Once roommates have “found” each other and agreed on how to pay for their rooms, they can unsubscribe from the list and proceed with their registration.

2. *The alternate way:* For those who don’t have e-mail but still need a roommate, please write to Anne Cotton, who will be subscribed to the mailing list and will be happy to find roomies for any and all who are not computer-accessible. Along with your name and address, your letter should provide your phone number and best time to call, which Anne will pass along to any potential roomies.

Questions? Get in touch with Anne.



Against handholding as a means of stimulating the creative faculties of the brain there is, of course, nothing to be said. All collaborators do it. The trouble is that it is too often but the first step to other things.

“The Castaways,” 1933

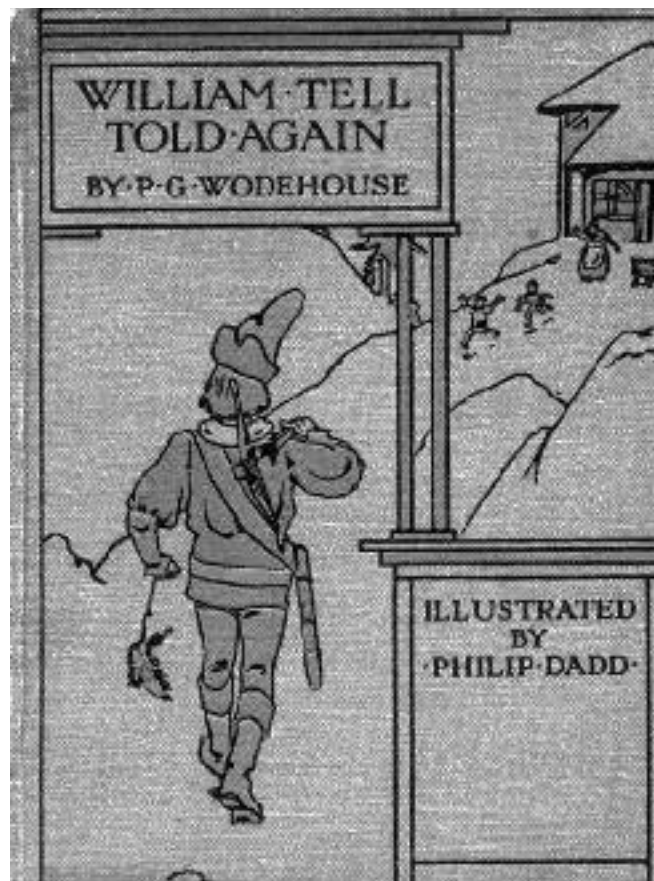
Collecting *William Tell Told Again*

BY JOHN GRAHAM

In his July 15, 1961, BBC broadcast, "An Act of Homage and Reparation to P. G. Wodehouse," Evelyn Waugh observed: "Collectors prize as bibliographical rarities such early works as *William Tell Told Again* and [*The*] *Swoop*, but it is impossible to discern in them any promise of what was to come." Much as I admire this powerful essay (with its justly famous passage about "Wodehouse's idyllic world" enshrined on the back of countless Penguin paperbacks), I cannot agree with Waugh's assessment either about the relative rarity or lack of promise of *William Tell*. I would not place it among the dozen or so rarest Wodehouse titles (although *The Swoop* certainly belongs there), and a careful reading of the story reveals plenty of Wodehouse's signature touches. As November 2004 marked the centenary of the first publication of *William Tell*, this is a good time to look back at Plum's most unusual publication.

William Tell Told Again is the only book Wodehouse wrote that might truly be labeled a "children's book." While many of his early works were written for and about public school boys, these stories were as likely to be read by adults as by children. Not so with *William Tell*. From the start, its publisher A&C Black clearly had young readers in mind: The print was large with generous space between the lines and there were 16 full-page color illustrations to accompany the short text. According to Eileen McIlvaine, in 1900 A&C Black commissioned artist Phillip Dadd to submit a series of drawings to illustrate an old German legend, "King Hildebrand's Ring," but for some reason they were never used. So in 1904 Black paid Wodehouse 15 guineas for writing 15,000 words about the Swiss legend of William Tell and published Plum's story along with Dadd's illustrations and 15 short verses by lyricist John W. Houghton. I find McIlvaine's account rather hard to believe: Either apples and flag poles must also have loomed large in the legend of King Hildebrand, or else some last-minute artistic changes must surely have been made to the illustrations. By the way, Dadd's original drawings still exist: Once owned by James Heineman, they were sold at auction by Sotheby's in 1998 and are now safely in the hands of another well-known Wodehouse enthusiast.

The first edition of *William Tell Told Again* was published on November 11, 1904, and sold for 6s. McIlvaine describes the book's cover this way: "Off-white (i.e., stone-colored) pictorial cloth; gold lettering on spine and front cover; green, black, brown drawing



The new version of William Tell Told Again

same as frontispiece; top edge gilt." It was printed by Billing and Sons, Ltd. in Guildford, the town in Surrey where Plum was born. The book was wrapped in a white dust jacket with blue lettering. The front of the jacket reproduces one of the illustrations in full color (plate X) and the spine part of another (plate IV). The front inside flap has a one-paragraph summary; the back inside flap is blank; and the back cover lists a selection of 25 "Black's Beautiful Books for Boys and Girls," beginning with *Aesop's Fables* and ending with *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. McIlvaine also notes that the first American edition was issued by Macmillan, New York, in December 1904 from imported sheets and sold for \$2. Today, copies of the English first in very good condition without dust jacket sell for between \$750 and \$1,500. Copies of the American first editions never appear on the market and may not even exist.

McIlvaine records four later printings of the book in England, although dates of issue are unknown. Her list includes one edition I have never come across in my 17 years of book collecting, but omits one fairly

common edition I've seen many times. The one I have never seen she labels A5a2 and describes as being identical to the first except for the addition of a 12-page advertising insert at the back that mentions *The White Feather* (published in 1907). Her next issue, A5a3, is easily and often mistaken for the true first edition: It is identical to the first in all respects except that the cover is darker (a light brown) and the lettering on the front cover (but not the spine) is dark brown rather than gold. This edition sells for \$400–\$700 without a dust jacket. My guess is that A5a3 may have appeared before A5a2 since it carries no later ads. The final two editions that McIlvaine describes are definitely much later printings, probably from the 1920s. A5a4 has a russet-red pictorial cover and A5a5 a green one, but they are otherwise identical twins and closely resemble the earlier printings, except for a few obvious differences: They are printed on thicker and cheaper paper (which tends to brown with age), and their title pages are undated. Also, plate numbers are omitted from atop the 8-line verses that accompany the illustrations. The edition that McIlvaine fails to record (which we might call A5a6) is in the same format as these last two printings, except the color of the cover is beige or light gray. It is impossible to establish the exact order of appearance of these 3 editions. Today, jacketless copies of these editions sell in the \$200–\$400 price range.

Now I'm going to let you in on a little secret that might earn you a bit of easy money someday (no, not the one about being able to see the law courts clock tower from outside Romano's restaurant in the Strand, nor even the one about how a quart whisky bottle can be made to hold more than a quart). My secret is this: All six English editions of *William Tell Told Again* used exactly the same dust jacket! Copies of the first edition in dust jacket seldom appear on the market, but when they do, dealers have priced them at up to \$5,000. It is not uncommon to find dust-jacketed copies of the later reprints (A5a4-6), and their prices are always much more reasonable, perhaps around \$750. So what this means is that once you subtract the cost of the book, you can either pay \$4,000 or \$400 for exactly the same dust jacket. It's your choice.

William Tell falls into that small category of Wodehouse books that have never been published in paperback. The first American appearance of the story (apart from the apocryphal 1904 Macmillan edition) was not until 1980, when David Jasen included it as the final selection in *The Eighteen-Carat Kid and Other Stories*, published by Continuum. Fine copies of this book in its mustard-and-red dust jacket are increasingly rare but still sell for under \$100. The book

omits Dadd's illustrations and Houghton's verses as well as Plum's dedication ("To Biddy O'Sullivan for a Christmas Present"). Barry Phelps (in his Wodehouse biography) notes that 43 people have been dedicatees of Wodehouse books, and among them only Biddy O'Sullivan remains untraced to this day.

Wodehouse's humorous retelling of the early 14th-century Swiss tale of William Tell is a much anglicized version of the story, as the opening paragraph makes clear:

Once upon a time, more years ago than anybody can remember, before the first hotel had been built or the first Englishman had taken a photograph of Mont Blanc, and brought it home to be pasted in an album and shown after tea to his envious friends, Switzerland belonged to the Emperor of Austria, to do what he liked with.

(Never mind that Mont Blanc is in France, you get the idea.)

What the Emperor did was to appoint as governor his friend Hermann Gessler, who soon imposed taxes on just about everything. The unhappy citizens, meeting in the town's inn, the Glass and Glacier, select a delegation of three, including Walter Fürst ("who had red hair and looked fierce") and Werner Stauffacher ("who had gray hair and was always wondering how he ought to pronounce his name"), to convince William Tell (prize-winning marksman and self-described "pot-hunter") to go stand up to the tyrant Gessler. Of course everyone knows what follows: Tell quickly offends Gessler and, as punishment, is ordered to shoot his arrow through an apple placed on his own son's head. But not before Walter Fürst pleads: "Your Highness . . . none deny your power. Let it be mingled with mercy. It is excellent, as an English poet will say in a few hundred years, to have a giant's strength, but it is tyrannous to use it like a giant." Even in Switzerland in 1307, Wodehouse's characters know their Shakespeare (*Measure for Measure*, act 2, scene 2)! Of course, everything ends happily and Plum closes with a short verse of his own:

Some say the tale related here
Is amplified and twisted;
Some say it isn't very clear
That William Tell existed;
Some say he freed his country so,
The Governor demolished.
Perhaps he did. I only know
That taxes aren't abolished.

Rivals of P. G. Wodehouse: Robert Benchley

BY DAVID McDONOUGH

The peculiar thing about a newt's courtship is its restraint. It is carried on, at all times, with a minimum distance of fifty paces (newt measure) between the male and the female. Some of the bolder males may now and then attempt to overstep the bounds of good sportsmanship and crowd in to forty-five paces, but such tactics are frowned upon by the Rules Committee. To the eye of the uninitiated observer, the pair might be dancing a few of the more open figures of the minuet.

Gussie Fink-Nottle holding forth? Not at all. That's from a piece entitled "The Social Life of the Newt," and it was written by Robert Benchley, America's greatest master of the humorous essay. In his day Benchley was a humorist on a par with James Thurber and Plum himself. That he is not as well remembered as they are can be put down to two factors: Unlike Thurber, he never ventured into fiction, and he was the very antithesis of Plum in his work ethic. Benchley had a relatively short period as a writer; almost all his work was done between 1919 and 1936. From then until his death in 1945, he became best known as a busy character actor in Hollywood films, and he wrote very little. He was a lovable and slightly tragic figure.

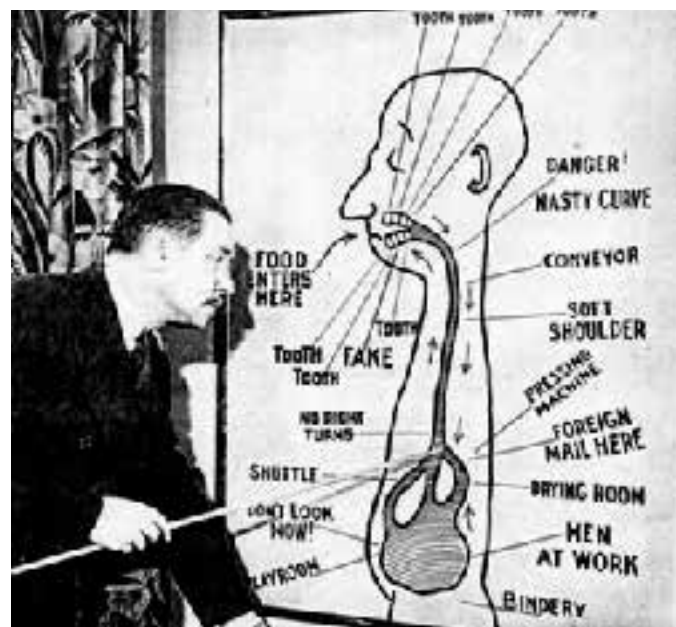
Robert Charles Benchley was born in 1889 to a middle-class family in Worcester, Massachusetts. He was one of two children; his brother Edmund, 13 years his senior and the apple of his family's eye, was killed in the Spanish-American War in 1898. Robert's mother, guilt-ridden over having favored the older son, could not do enough for her surviving child, and Edmund's fiancée also took a strong interest in Robert. She extended financial aid to Benchley, enabling him to attend Phillips Exeter Academy and then Harvard.

At Harvard, Benchley joined the *Lampoon* as an illustrator and writer, and eventually he was elected to the Board of Directors. He finished up school in 1913 and held a series of secretarial type jobs for which he was ill-suited. He also began to gain a reputation as an after-dinner speaker ("Through the Alimentary Canal with Gun and Camera" was a typical title). He married Gertrude Darling, his childhood sweetheart, in 1914.

After a few more false starts, Benchley ended up working for the *New York Tribune Sunday Magazine*, where he first made the acquaintance of such lifelong friends and fellow humorists as George S. Kaufman and

Franklin P. Adams. In *Laughter's Gentle Soul: The Life of Robert Benchley* (1997), biographer Billy Altman writes, "[H]e, Adams and [*Tribune* magazine editor Arthur] Folwell could spend hours sharing their admiration of writers like George Ade, Stephen Leacock and P. G. Wodehouse."

After the magazine folded, Benchley got a job with *Vanity Fair* in 1917, substituting for that publication's regular drama critic—P. G. Wodehouse, who had gone off for his first fling at screenwriting. Benchley also became a freelancer, primarily for *Collier's*, and started writing the type of humorous essays for which he became famous. His persona was that of the well-meaning, inept, middle-class man, and he refined it to



Robert "Sweet Old Bob" Benchley making a point

a rare skill. In "Coffee, Megg, and Ilk," for example, he describes his utter panic at trying to order his lunch in a crowded cafeteria. He is intimidated by a steamer trunk in another piece. In "Ladies Wild" he writes of his inability to play poker when there are women present. And who can resist throwaway opening lines like, "While going through my desk recently, I came across some old snow."

In 1919 Benchley joined *Vanity Fair* full-time as a managing editor. It was there he became friendly with two kindred spirits, playwright Robert Sherwood and author Dorothy Parker, who, many people believed, nursed a hopeless crush on Benchley. Benchley made

friends easily; he liked people, and the feeling was mutual. He was also admired widely for his work. Humorist Frank Sullivan wrote, "Everyone wanted to be his close friend, and to be with him all the time, and he, kindly and gregarious man, would have liked to oblige. But there was simply not enough Benchley to go around." Corey Ford, in his reminiscences of New York in the Twenties, "The Time of Laughter," said, "No other humorist, with the exception of Sullivan himself, has ever been so idolized as a craftsman, so universally loved by everyone who knew him."

In the August 1919 issue of *Vanity Fair*, Benchley lightheartedly profiled some of the magazine's contributors:

P. G. Wodehouse ("Prohibition and the Drama") only a few months ago reflected—in the buoyancy of his demeanor—the light, whimsical and somewhat fantastic quality discernible in all of his published writings. Then golf, the Grim Reaper, came upon him in the night and withered his bonhomie, blanched his spirit, blasted his soul. From a literary point of view, the interesting thing now to be said about Mr. Wodehouse is that he uses the overlocking grip, the thumb of the right hand slightly down the shaft, the feet well apart, the belt straining, the hand ready to be tossed in the air—like a Nubian lion—at the first impact with the ball.

Benchley lasted about a year and a half with *Vanity Fair*. In January 1920 Dorothy Parker, acting as the magazine's drama critic, lambasted a performance by Billie Burke, best known today as Glinda in the film *The Wizard of Oz* but then a top Broadway actress. Burke was also the wife of impresario Flo Ziegfeld, who complained to *Vanity Fair* publisher Conde Nast. Parker was fired, and Benchley (and Sherwood) quit the next day. (Incidentally, Parker was told that she was being let go because the magazine's regular drama critic—Hello, Plum!—was returning to work.)

Benchley was not out of work long; he began a column for the *New York World* and then became a columnist for *Life* (the humor magazine, not the later pictorial). By 1925 he was contributing regularly to a new magazine, the *New Yorker*. It was about that time that Benchley and his crowd—Parker, Sherwood, Adams, Kaufman, Alexander Woolcott, Edna Ferber, and others—became famous as the Algonquin Round Table. This was an informal group that met for lunch at the Algonquin Hotel, but it quickly became known as a legendary gathering of witty, sophisticated people who

moved and shaped the world of the arts. Harpo Marx, a longtime member of the gang, wrote, "The Algonquin was a refuge for the brightest authors, editors, critics, columnists, artists, financiers, composers, directors, producers and actors of the times. . . . But until I came along, there wasn't a full-time listener in the crowd . . ."

Some accused them of unduly fostering each other's careers, and some thought they spent too much time being smug and witty and sophisticated and not enough time working. "All those three hour lunches . . . when did those slackers ever get any work done?" inquired P. G. Wodehouse. But no one ever accused Benchley of being anything except witty and genial.

The year 1921 held some significant firsts for Benchley. His first book, *Of All Things*, was published, and like all his later books, it was a collection of short pieces. In total, 12 of these collections would be published in his lifetime, and seven would appear posthumously—the last, *Benchley at the Theater*, as recently as 1985. Also in 1921, Benchley would take his first drink. It was not his last; he quickly became an alcoholic—a lovable, pleasant, functioning alcoholic, it is true. But it was a lifelong love affair, and it contributed to his early death.

In 1922 the Algonquin crowd, as a lark, put together a one-night revue on Broadway, "No, Sirree." The undisputed hit of the evening was Benchley's contribution, "The Treasurer's Report." It was a monologue involving an assistant treasurer who has been drafted to give an accounting of the year's proceedings. It was such a success that Benchley was hired the next year to perform it nightly in the *Music Box Revue*. In 1928 he turned the monologue into a movie short subject. All told, he would write and appear in 48 movie shorts between 1928 and 1945, one of which, "How To Sleep," won the Academy Award for Best Short Subject of 1935. By this time he had drifted out to California to make good money as a recognizable character actor. He worked in 38 feature films, including Plum's *Piccadilly Jim*, on which he also worked as screenwriter. Other notable films included *Foreign Correspondent* for Alfred Hitchcock, *The Major and the Minor*, *I Married a Witch*, and *The Road to Utopia*. Despite the fact that many of his old friends had also sold out for Hollywood gold, including Parker, playwright Marc Connelly, and humorist Donald Ogden Stewart, and despite the pleasure of having meals with Wodehouse ("He says that he writes stuff which is never heard from again, so he doesn't see why they pay him. But he'll soon get over worrying about that," Benchley wrote to a friend), Benchley seems to have felt that he too was a sellout. He experienced depression in his later years and didn't

write much. He died in 1945 at the age of 56.

Benchley did leave a legacy of sorts: His son Nathaniel attained a minor reputation as a humorous novelist whose book *The Off-Islanders* was turned into the popular 1966 film *The Russians Are Coming, The Russians Are Coming*. Nathaniel's son Peter is known for his best-selling adventure novel *Jaws*. Fortunately, almost all of Benchley's published works survive in reprints and in used bookstores, and there are three biographies: *Robert Benchley* (1955), by his son Nathaniel; *Robert Benchley: His Life and Good Times*, by Babette Rosmond (1970); and Billy Altman's *Laughter's Gentle Soul*. There is also a critical study in the Twayne series by Norris W. Yates.

As great a humorist as Benchley was, interest in him today is largely focused on his inclusion in the Algonquin Round Table. In Alan Rudolph's 1994 film *Mrs. Parker and the Vicious Circle*, Campbell Scott plays Benchley to Jennifer Jason Leigh's Dorothy Parker. *Talk of the Town*, a musical based on the 10-year friendship among Parker, Benchley, Kaufman, and Woolcott, was presented from November 4 to December 5, 2004, by the Peccadillo Theatre Company at the Bank Street Theater in New York City. The show was written by Ginny Redington and Tom Dawes; Chris Weikel played Benchley. The show garnered mixed reviews.

As for Benchley and Wodehouse, they were friends and mutual admirers. Wodehouse never edited an anthology of humor without including a Benchley piece. Lamenting the dearth of modern humorists (in 1952) he writes, in the *Weekend Book of Humor*, "... I want to see a Benchley on every street corner . . ." Wodehouse and Guy Bolton also attributed several apocryphal anecdotes to Benchley in their highly embellished autobiography *Bring On The Girls*; in fact, Plum goes so far as to give one of his own nifty Hollywood takes to Benchley: "He [Benchley] said I mustn't believe the stories I had heard about ill-treatment of inmates at the studios, for there was very little actual brutality. Most of the big executives, he said, were kindly men, and he had often seen Louis B. Mayer stop outside some nodder's hutch and push a piece of lettuce through the bars." Wodehouse quotes Benchley approvingly in *America, I Like You*: "'What we need in this country,' said Robert Benchley in one of his thoughtful essays, 'is fewer bridges and more fun.'" And in a letter quoted in *Yours, Plum*, Wodehouse writes to his daughter, "I am in a bit of a quandary. (See Benchley's *My Ten Years in a Quandary*.)"

When Barry Phelps, in his 1992 biography, lists Wodehouse's large number of friends, Benchley is prominent. But perhaps the greatest tribute Plum

paid to Benchley is the simplest. In *The World of P. G. Wodehouse*, Herbert Warren Wind wrote of Plum, "On shelves on the wall facing his desk he has assembled a copy of each of the ninety-odd books he has written, and the books of his favorite authors line the adjacent walls—among them . . . seven by Robert Benchley."

. . . 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, nobody is safe.

"The Castaways," 1933

Strutting Our Stuff

Attention, all booksellers, chapters, and members! Here's an opportunity to strut your stuff at the Hooray for Hollywood convention!

Booksellers: If you would like a table at the convention, you will be welcome with open arms—as long as you pay a \$25 fee. The deadline for submission of applications for booksellers' tables is July 1, 2005.

Chapters: As has been a convention tradition since 1995, tables will be made available for chapters that want to put on a display about their activities, projects, etc. Please write to Missy Ratcliffe (address in next paragraph) if you will need a table for your display. *Important:* If you plan to sell anything at your table, you MUST let us know by July 1 at the latest!* Details about what you will be selling should be provided.

Members: We invite anybody who would like to put on a special display—about Wodehouse, Hollywood, or anything connected to Wodehouse or Hollywood—to do so. Let us know by July 1 if you have a special idea and would like a table to show it off.

* - *Please note:* UCLA requires us to let them know of any merchandise to be sold during the convention. That is why we must have all notification of intent to sell in to us by July 1 at the latest.

We hope to see lots of tables!

A Few Quick Ones

Rockwell and Wodehouse

In October Rosie and I visited the Norman Rockwell Museum in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, and I was struck by the similarities between the careers of Rockwell and P. G. Wodehouse. Both men created wonderful imaginary worlds. For Plum it was an imaginary England, for Rockwell it was an imaginary New England. Both men were compulsively hard workers and meticulous craftsmen. In fact, it is hard to appreciate Rockwell's craftsmanship until you see some of his original paintings on display at Stockbridge. Rockwell and Wodehouse were dismissed as "lightweights" by the establishment—but their popularity has long outlasted their critics.

And then there is the *Saturday Evening Post*. *The Post* was Plum's primary market in America for 30 years. Rockwell's association with *The Post* is, of course, legendary. The Rockwell museum has on display copies of all of the covers he did for the magazine, an amazing 322 of them. A large number of these covers have a line announcing that there is a new P. G. Wodehouse story or serial inside.

Ade on Age

The Purdue University Library sent a letter informing us that the last issue of *Plum Lines*, which contained an article on George Ade, was being placed in the Ade collection at Purdue. They also sent along a copy of an article on Ade in a 1940 edition of the *Purdue Alumnus*. It was the Hoosier humorist's 74th birthday, and he was none too thrilled about it. He told a reporter for the Associated Press that he wasn't going to "run up any flags or shoot any guns" on the occasion: "If I knew any way to suppress my age, I'd do it. . . . This birthday isn't very welcome but I guess it can't be avoided."

Threatened Berkshires

John Baesch has sent us an alarming article from *The Weekly Telegraph*. It says that the Berkshire, Britain's oldest pig breed, which trace its lineage back to the late 1700s, is in trouble: "Numbers are declining fast, says the Rare Breeds Survival Trust, with just 359 breeding females and 89 boars."

There is a picture of a beautiful black Berkshire named Milly. Milly's owner says, "They are simply wonderful and cannot be allowed to disappear."

—Ed.

A Definitive Biography

BY JAN WILSON KAUFMAN



Robert McCrum

Wodehouse: A Life

by Robert McCrum

W. W. Norton, \$27.95, 384 pages

16 pages of illustrations

Biography is, or should be, a completion of life, finding in the routine and triviality of daily experience, the universal patterns that give them harmony and meaning," said Virginia Woolf, who added that the most crucial task of all was listening to the subject without interruption. Then a biographer might see "As suddenly as, at the turn of a passage, one comes upon one's image in a mirror, a living face . . . in that fleeting moment, he may perhaps reach a faint apprehension—as near to the truth as we are ever likely to get—of what another man was like."

That critical quest for what P. G. Wodehouse was really like has been the goal of Robert McCrum, who spent four years on this heavily researched biography. McCrum, whose father was a former headmaster at Eton, is the literary editor of the *Observer* and the author of eight previous books. Writing about Wodehouse, who has been the subject of six earlier biographies, McCrum rises to the challenge of dealing with the long life of a reserved man whose main conversational topics were writing, dogs, and Dulwich College sports.

McCrums acknowledges his indebtedness to earlier Wodehouse biographers: Richard Osborne, who

first examined the literary antecedents which inspired him; David Jasen, who wrote the pioneering biography, with all facts carefully supplied by Wodehouse; Lee Davis, who gave the best summation of his life in show business; Barry Phelps, whose biography showed how Wodehouse orchestrated his own myth and emphasized the financial aspects of his career; and Lady Frances Donaldson, who had access to the Cazalet family letters and archives. The family was eager to clear up public misunderstandings about the war years, and more than half of Donaldson's book concerns the German broadcasts and their circumstances. Norman Murphy's extensive and imaginative researches revealed much about Wodehouse's family and youth.

So what does McCrum bring to his book that was not covered by several other perceptive authors? He has synthesized all the material covered by the others, and has done a lot of his own legwork as well. He has tried to find the psychological truth for a fuller, more comprehensive view of his elusive subject, and he has worked to discover the gap between Wodehouse's outer and secret self. Wodehouse's detachment is one of the central themes of this biography.

McCrums prologue considers the Wodehouses' life in Le Touquet and Plum's internment by the German army, and then presents his subsequent broadcasts to America as the terrible defining point of the rest of his life. McCrum believes Wodehouse's last 30 years in America—living in exile—were his personal tragedy. I think as Americans we don't really understand the furor caused by his broadcasts, because the Second World War never affected us as it universally did the English, and of course, we don't consider living here as exile.

Regarding Plum's childhood, McCrum says, "In total, Wodehouse saw his parents for barely six months between the ages of three and fifteen, which is by any standards a shattering emotional deprivation. . . . The psychological impact of this separation on the future writer lies at the heart of his mature personality." McCrum shows why Wodehouse's six years at Dulwich College were heaven: Dulwich was his home, where he was popular, successful, and one of the most important boys in the school. The biographer is very good at tying together all the details that make the school setting familiar.

In the BBC documentary film *Wodehouse: The Long Exile*, which was based on his research, McCrum said that the real reason Wodehouse did not go to Oxford was not so much a lack of parental funds as the jealousy of his older brother Armine, who didn't want him to go. I questioned McCrum about this statement, and he told me to wait for the book to see his evidence,

but neither claim nor evidence appears in the book.

McCrums writes perceptively about the London years of the young freelance writer: "Wodehouse's light verse, as much of his youthful prose, shows a writer reveling in the allusive music of English, learning to make the words dance on the page while presenting a succession of clear, completely intelligible images organized into a compelling narrative."

And more: "The decision to visit America was the making of Wodehouse . . . he became as much at home in New York as in London, forging a transatlantic literary career long before jet-travel made such a proposition commonplace. On a strict calculation of the time Wodehouse eventually spent in the United States, and the lyrics, books, stories, plays and films he wrote there, to say nothing of his massive dollar income, he should be understood as an American *and* a British writer."

McCrums is very good at putting Wodehouse and his work in the context of the times, marshaling a massive quantity of details. He writes well about how Wodehouse developed his most successful characters: Ukridge, Psmith, Bertie and Jeeves, Lord Emsworth, Mr. Mulliner, and Uncle Fred. For example: "During the inter-war decades, in which his work achieved an enviable marriage of literary accomplishment and wide popular acclaim . . . Jeeves finally became fixed in the mind of the reading public as one of English literature's immortals . . ." He also says: ". . . Wodehouse's style, subtly maturing throughout the 1920s under the influence of the stage, the speakeasy, and the popular song, became a kind of comic ragtime, so light and innocent that the underpinning plots, miracles of ingenuity, seem spun from nothing."

All of Wodehouse's biographers step a little gingerly when it comes to his marriage to Ethel, but McCrum probably gives the best appraisal of her. He is brave enough to examine their sexual relationship more closely, and tactful about her possible liaisons with other men: ". . . opposite in so many obvious ways, he was quiet and elusive, she was relatively uneducated and sociable; he was repressed, she was highly sexed; and where he was fanatically prudent, she was extravagant with money." Both had been emotionally abandoned in childhood: "She needed him for the benign security he offered. He needed her to organize his life and to give him peace and quiet in which to write." Ethel also brought to the marriage her daughter Leonora, whom Wodehouse adopted and loved as his own daughter. Despite their always-separate bedrooms, there is no doubt that their marriage lasted for 60 years and that they loved each other.

McCrums' chapter "Disgrace" discusses the

year of Wodehouse's wartime internment, his ill-judged broadcasts to America, and how their English repercussions continued to haunt him. Plum spent his last 30 years in America and eventually adapted to postwar changes. His final move, to Remsenburg, was a happy one: He was near Guy Bolton, in the country, and near the seashore. As McCrum writes, "Today, the wartime scandal, seen in a longer perspective, no longer clouds the reader's approach to his work; it can be seen as a disastrous blunder that reflects on the author but not on his books. Almost unique among his twentieth-century contemporaries, many of whom predeceased him, his work is in print in various editions." And more: "... Wodehouse is more popular today than on the day he died, and references to his characters appear somewhere in the English speaking world almost every day."

McCrum's book has received a lot of favorable publicity in England, where it is already in a second printing, and it has inspired the reprinting of Joseph Connolly's biography and the reissuing of Frances Donaldson's in paperback. His acknowledgments, full of familiar titles and authors, fill three pages, as does his bibliography, which mentions both *Plum Lines* and *Wooster Sauce* as "indispensable to the Wodehouse student." The 41 photos include some unfamiliar ones, such as the 1901 Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank football team; the elusive Bill Townend; and Wodehouse friends Dennis Mackail, Maureen O'Sullivan, Baroness Anga von Bodenhhausen, and Malcolm Muggeridge. There are 71 pages of notes. McCrum has created a balanced, thoughtful, and well-written book, the definitive biography of Wodehouse for our times.

More on McCrum . . .

Following are excerpts from other reviews of Robert McCrum's *Wodehouse: A Life*

Nothing will ever dim the brilliance of Wodehouse's world or flatten his ever-sprightly and always entertaining prose. Today literary pundits tell you that nothing matters except the text and that a writer's personal life is irrelevant. But those who delight in Wodehouse will also delight in McCrum's biography. Wodehouse is a pleasure to follow from his schooldays to his sudden death in the act of filling his pipe and reading yet another manuscript in his hospital bedroom.

—John Mortimer, *The Sunday Times* (U.K.)

So Mr. McCrum, the literary editor of *The Observer*, faces formidable obstacles here—not the least of them the existence of numerous other Wodehouse biographies, including a couple of recent ones. But he surmounts them all with an invaluable portrait, thanks to a broad, incisive and complex understanding of Wodehouse's psyche. He also adroitly balances analysis of life and literature, mingling them aptly when necessary. "Jeevian in his professional life," Mr. McCrum writes, "it was his fate to be Woosterish in Berlin."

. . . Though Wodehouse was viciously excoriated at the time of the broadcasts, this book takes the revisionist view (shared by George Orwell, Evelyn Waugh and John Le Carre among others) that stupidity, however colossal, is not evil. And that Wodehouse, who was officially forgiven with a knighthood shortly before his death in 1975 at age 93, left a body of work that can speak lovingly for itself.

—Janet Maslin, *The New York Times*

Among the great works of art written in the prison camps of the second world war are Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time*, Viktor Ulman's *The Emperor of Atlantis*, Ezra Pound's *The Pisan Cantos* and P. G. Wodehouse's *Joy in the Morning*. Spot the odd one out. Robert McCrum, with some ingenuity, has managed to isolate some lines in *Joy in the Morning*, which may be infected by Wodehouse's difficult war. The Gestapo translates into a little sourness about village policemen, and that's about it.

McCrum yields to temptation, and describes Wodehouse's war history as the defining episode of his career, but that is not right. Rather, the story of how the sunny and naive comic novelist was sucked into Nazi war machinery looks like a monstrous juxtaposition of things which were never meant to meet.

—Philip Hensher, *The Spectator* (U.K.)

This revealing biography of British novelist Wodehouse hinges on his wartime internment in Germany and its aftermath. In Wodehouse's disastrous 1941 decision to record a series of readings for Berlin Radio, McCrum discerns the political blindness of a gifted author whose work in farce and comedy had left him initiated into life's sterner realities. That initiation—belated and painful—came for Wodehouse when his Berlin broadcasts ignited a firestorm of denunciation. . . . In time, cultural heavyweights—including Wittgenstein, Welty, and Updike—were too busy praising Wodehouse's deft artistry to mention his wartime blunder. Curiously, though, by making Wodehouse's biggest mistake the very center of his biography, McCrum makes it easier

for his many readers to forgive him as they renew their appreciation for the gifted creator not only of Bertie and Jeeves but also Psmith, Mulliner and so many other delightful characters.

—Bryce Christensen, *Booklist*

While not claiming to be a literary biography, McCrum's book allows [the] connections between early life and final artistic flowering to be perfectly made. The rest is supremely well told and, considering its lack of eventfulness . . . surprisingly riveting. . . . No lover of Wodehouse will want to be without this masterly appraisal of the good life of a good man, who happened to be a very, very great writer.

—Stephen Fry, *The Observer* (U.K.)

. . . McCrum . . . doesn't gloss over the appalling lack of political sense that embroiled Wodehouse in this public relations disaster, concluding that "the moral test with which Wodehouse was confronted in June 1941 was one that was beyond him"—obsessed as always with the need to work and the desire to please his audience. But he judges his subject gently, backed up by no less an authority than George Orwell, as a duffer rather than a traitor who paid the price in declining sales and dismissal as the bard of a vanished age after the war. His biographer captures the warmth and charm of a man who wanted only to amuse, who loved his party-girl wife and his Pekinese dogs and his daily exercise. A bit long, but a fitting tribute to one of the great purveyors of light—though not insubstantial—entertainment.

—Michael Sissons, *Kirkus Reviews*

[McCrum] succinctly covers all the major topics—Wodehouse's creation of the immortal Jeeves and Wooster; his triumphs as a lyricist for the musical theater; his frustrating stints as a scriptwriter in Hollywood; his tax troubles; his love of animals; his post-WWII U.S. exile; his long and successful, if apparently sexless marriage. McCrum is franker on this latter subject than previous biographers. . . . Earlier studies have tended to be partisan or personal and stronger on some aspects of Wodehouse's varied life than others. For balance and readability, this popular biography, like Jeeves, stands alone.

—*Publisher's Weekly*

But such moments of sloppiness are untypical of what on balance is an intelligent and lyrical biography, worthy of its subject. Wodehouse's friend Anga von Bodenhausen once said of him that "one feels his genial personality like the ticking of a clock in a room" and

that is true of this book. So much so that you feel a twinge of sadness parting company with Wodehouse's presence at the end of it. I found myself remedying the situation by plucking a Blandings novel off my bookshelf.

—Nigel Farndale, *The Evening Standard* (U.K.)

Mr McCrum has managed to avoid the trap other biographers fall into, the temptation to quote Wodehouse's "funniest bits." His task was to write an account of Wodehouse's life, not of his literary achievements, and he has done so with a remarkable wealth of precise detail; it could easily become tedious but does not do so. My speciality has been to find the originals of Wodehouse's characters and locations. Mr McCrum mentions the fact/fiction connections when it is appropriate, but sticks firmly to his task of recounting what Wodehouse did in his long life, who he did it with—and why he did it. Whether he is correct in all his surmises is clearly impossible to judge. All I would say is that, with some very minor reservations, I think McCrum has got nearer than anyone else in describing how Wodehouse ticked.

—Norman Murphy, P G Wodehouse Society (UK)
website, <http://www.eclipse.co.uk/wodehouse>

In an epilogue, McCrum says that Wodehouse's great theme was a longing for "something approximate to love." Yet love, in the sexual or romantic sense, is completely absent from the Wodehouse world. His idle young men frequently imagine themselves to be besotted by this or that young miss, but the condition is seldom serious or permanent. What many of them eventually long for is to get out of their ill-considered engagements and away from the clutches of domineering aunts and mothers—to flee like a bird, as Bertie puts it. The plots of the books invariably turn on extrication from some jam or predicament.

The really great Wodehouse theme, in fact, is escape, and that's what the act of writing itself seems to have been for him—an escape, among other things, from adult emotions and adult responsibility. His was essentially an arrested, preadolescent sensibility, which is what makes his work so pleasing, so much fun to read, and so welcome an escape for us too.

—Charles McGrath, *New York Times Book Review*

What do you think?

The Robert McCrum biography is the biggest event in Wodehouse scholarship in many years. In general the book has received highly favorable reviews both in the United States and United Kingdom—but objections

and criticisms have also been heard. By now many of you have doubtless read the book or will be doing so shortly. As Wodehouse fans—or perhaps what McCrum has called a Wodehouse cult—you probably have opinions one way or the other (or possibly both ways). *Plum Lines* invites you to share your thoughts with other TWS members. We have only one request: Try to keep it short. Limit yourself to one double-spaced typewritten page, which would be approximately 250–300 words on Plum’s old Monarch. Exceed that limit, and your editor would be forced to cut ruthlessly or simply not run the piece—and you wouldn’t like that!

–Ed.

Browsing and Sluicing with the Lexicographer

BY DAVID LANDMAN

I write for *Plum Lines*, and lots of folks tell me that I sure know a lot of words so I wasn’t like WOW when the guy that makes up the books where they put all the words there are in asked me to come to him to eat tomorrow. I heard he use to make fun of me, but I guess he wanted to make up. The invite was printed on one of those cards, you know, where the letters stick up and said, “The Lexicographer cordially and fraternally requests the gratification of your companionship at a prandial collection of sweetmeats.” And at the bottom he wrote in pen, “browsing and sluicing at 8 P.M.” I got that part anyways because I know what browsing and sluicing means because I belong to the NEWTS. Pasta salad. Chocolate chips. Booze. So I went.

I got there before the time that he said I was to get there, and as soon as he sees me, “Ah,” he goes in his fun way of talking, “lid you.”* So I took off my hat and I go “Yo” right back like Rocky. I gave him a copy of my new writing in which I had put down my name, you know, like they do, and he took it and pointed to a seat.

Well we sat there a long time jawing about that and the other, and all the time I was thinking maybe they’d pass around one of those dishes with some of those little sandwiches, the kind with no tops where the stuff just sits there on the bottom slice. But no such luck. And no booze. I thought may be he didn’t want to spoil my wanting for food before the browsing and sluicing kicked off.

Then a bell rung and we went to the room where they keep the eating table and sat down. There were dishes with a shiny ring on the outsides and glasses,

not the kind that go all the way to the bottom, but the kind where the glass stops about four inches off the table and then a glass stick goes down, you know what I’m saying, to a round sort of thing at the bottom. But they had no drink in them and nothing came. Well, the first dish comes and on it was two of those little black things with all the bumps that you pick off bushes in the woods, a little cracker, and a little piece of some stuff that looked like lettuce but wasn’t. I thought this was the little stuff they put out before the big stuff comes, but no, he gets up from the table and goes, “My dear fellow, our browsing and sluicing is (pardon the pun) consummated. Thank you for coming.” Well I got real sore so I go, “Hey! You call that browsing and sluicing? That ain’t no browsing and sluicing!”

I must have scared him because he made his lips all funny and started talking crazy. “Oaken chair Mona me,”** he says, and then he must have got a handle on himself but not all the way because the next thing that comes out is, “The Barmecide feast which you have just dispatched is, if you will please to consult my most recent lexicon, accordant with the veritable semantic content of browsing and sluicing.”

“Huh?” I snapped back, and I meant it to feel like there were pins and needles sticking him.

“You have *browsed*,” he goes, “and you *have* sluiced. Browsing consists in the cropping of *scanty* vegetation, and though I may have stretched the term by providing you with two drupaceous blackberries and a Triscuit, the foliol of radicchio, I venture to say, imports that I have conformed to the semeiotic parameters of the vocable. Mayhap you have confounded the term with ‘grazing’ which means pasturing where one may partake of herbaceous vegetation to repletion. As for sluicing, that is one of those Janus words that bear contradictory significance: a word like ‘cleave,’ for example, which denotes in one sense to cling and in another to divide. A sluice, thus, in addition to its meaning as a channel, trough, flume, launder, spillway, chute or conduit for fluidic matter, also denotes a valve or gate by which the aqueous effluence is started, regulated, or *stopped*. In this case the latter. Moritz will show you to the door. And, by the way, thank you for your autographed opuscle. I shall waste no time reading it.”

At least that was something.

* *Ah, l’idiot.*

** *Au contraire, mon ami.*



The Great Wodehouse Movie Pitch Challenge

BY MAX POKRIVCHAK

As we know, Plum was misunderstood and underutilized by Hollywood. The Great Wodehouse Movie Pitch Challenge lets you experience firsthand those same feelings of neglect and ennui, only without Plum's exorbitant accompanying salary. Here's how it works:

1. Entrants must submit a one- to three-page movie "treatment" (a brief synopsis, including any relevant details—cast, location, key dialog—that will help sell the proposed movie). The treatment may be based on a work by Plum, be your own creation in the style of Plum, or be an adaptation of another work to Plum's style or characters (e.g., Bertie Wooster as James Bond). Remember, this is Hollywood, so originality does not count.
2. Judges will choose three finalists, whose treatments will be "pitched" at the upcoming Hollywood convention. Said pitch will consist of a five-minute presentation by the author of his or her treatment to a panel consisting of a studio head, a yes man, and a nodder. As in a Supreme Court hearing, the presenter may be interrupted at any time with questions, comments, or observations about the weather.
3. Judges will pick a grand prize winner from among the three finalists, whose treatment will be subsequently bought and sold by various studios but never actually made into a picture.
4. Anyone unable to attend the convention (or unwilling to risk public humiliation by pitching their own treatment) may still enter a treatment, and if it is selected, a Hollywood agent will be appointed to pitch the story for you. The agent will then receive half your prize and 50 percent of all future prizes.

Send your entries to Max Pokrivchak. The three finalists will be chosen and notified prior to the convention, when they will need to decide if they will pitch their own treatment or have an agent do it for them. The grand prize winner will be decided based on audience response. Good luck!

Roll Tossers, Take Heart



David Ruef, having thrown his rolls, chooses to share

For those who miss the roll throwing now banned at convention banquets, David Ruef has found the place for you. It's called Lambert's Cafe, and roll throwing is not merely allowed, it is encouraged and widely advertised. Lambert's is located in Sikeston, Missouri; there are two branches in nearby communities, but the one in Sikeston is the original and the biggest. Granted it is a lot more mid-America than Mayfair, and we doubt if Anatole ever prepared fried okra, black-eyed peas, or sorghum and honey to go along with his meals, but the rolls really do fly. The difference is that the diners do not throw the rolls at one another, the waiters throw the rolls at them!

The practice started in 1976. Cafe owner Norman Lambert would walk around and hand out the rolls. One day, when it was really busy, he couldn't get through the crowd. A customer yelled, "Throw the d*** thing." He did, and a tradition was born. Today a customer at any of the three Lambert's can expect to be pelted by a roll "thrown" by one of the servers. They are known far and wide as "Home of Thrown Rolls," and their website is www.throwedrolls.com. The souvenir shop sells soft-rubber roll replicas, which are excellent for throwing—as David demonstrated by flinging one across the room and into my plate. David says that the rubber rolls cost \$2.99 each and can be obtained by mail from Sarah Winfield at Lambert's Cafe II. Her e-mail address is SBWinfield@aol.com.

And if that isn't enough for the Wodehouse fan, the Travel Channel chose Lambert's as the best place in Missouri to "Pig Out."

—Ed.

Letter from England

BY ELIN WOODGER

I must admit that I was strongly tempted to begin by saying that things over here chug along as usual. Just the normal routine, you understand: a black-tie dinner at an historic site hundreds of years old with Stephen Fry, Robert McCrum, Royalty, and Wodehouse's grandson and great-grandchildren all doing their thing. And a couple of weeks later, Robert McCrum squeezes his way into a crowded Savage Club to tell us all about . . .

But rather than let my three years over here lead me into the infuriating British habit of understatement, I'll come clean and say it was quite a month! And the bonus for me is that we had TWS president Jan Kaufman (who was visiting London with her sister Nancy), Ed and Missy Ratcliffe, Dan and Tina Garrison, and the Drone Rangers' Carey Tynan and Amanda Pocock over to enjoy it with us—not to mention California's Bill Franklin, who again managed to arrange his business appointments around the U.K. Society's festivities.

The biennial dinner was held on October 21 in Inner Temple Hall, and once again the Society's committee did us proud. Tim Andrew managed to organize matters superbly in between official journeys around the world, and Chairman Hilary Bruce coped brilliantly with guests arriving from a dozen countries. The food was superb, the setting was splendid. After toasts by Hilary Bruce and Edward Cazalet, Robert McCrum proposed the toast to Wodehouse and the Society, to which our president, Richard Briers, responded. (Think about it: Wodehouse's grandson, his biographer, and the best Gally Threepwood of all doing their stuff in front us.) And then came the Wodehouse "This Is Your Life."

Tony Ring, who wrote the skit, had surpassed himself this time. Stephen Fry acted as narrator, summarizing Plum's life, and Anton Rodgers played Wodehouse himself. You all know who Stephen Fry is, of course—'nuff said. As for Anton Rodgers, for those who don't know him, he is one of those actors whom you listen to and watch and realize what good acting really is. Many here remember him as a brilliant Ukridge on television long ago, and he had recently played Wodehouse superbly in a stage tour of *Beyond a Joke*. Norman said: "I got quite a shock. It was like listening to a recording of Wodehouse—the voice was right, the intonation was perfect, it was uncanny. And then I turned to look at him, and even the expression on his face was right."

During "This Is Your Life" we had contributions

from Tony Ring; the Duke of Kent, who read us Wodehouse's views on the idiocy of murderers in fiction; Philip Dunne, chairman of Ottakar's (the bookstore serving as this year's sponsor), getting laughs when he read Wodehouse's description of Bertie trying to buy a copy of Spinoza's *Annotated Works*; Hal and Lara Cazalet, playing a variety of parts and singing songs; and Eliza Lumley, who showed us what a trained singer can do—make well-known songs sound so brand new that you listened to every word she sang. All that should have finished the evening, but the audience was not going to go home until Lara sang "Bill." It was the only way to end, singing the touching song her great-grandfather had written 80 years before to an audience that included three generations of the family (Patrick Wodehouse and his son Nigel were also with us).

A whale of a night!

Because many people had come so far, Norman conducted a Wodehouse Walk the next day (his 88th, he claims), and to stop stragglers getting lost, he followed his practice of appointing whippers-in. Nobody will be surprised to learn that these were none other than those two stalwart Wodehousians, Sven Sahlen from Sweden and Bill Franklin, who did their job superbly, eventually whipping everybody into the Victorian grandeur of the National Liberal Club, with whom Norman's Savage Club shares premises.

There were then two weeks of comparative quiet during which Ed and Missy Ratcliffe (who were ostensibly staying with us) took off around England in a rented car, with Ed reenacting the part of Burt Reynolds in *The Cannonball Run*. They returned safely, however, and on November 9 they joined Jan Kaufman and her sister and about 60 members to squeeze into the Savage Club for one of the U.K. Society's regular meetings. Hilary Bruce opened the proceedings by welcoming Oommen and Judy Thomas from Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, who also "just happened to be" in London, and she wondered aloud who had come the greatest distance, the Thomases or the Ratcliffes and Jan. Hilary then conducted the Society's Annual General Meeting, which went as well as usual, with the audience responding to reports of our two cricket defeats (boos), our healthy financial situation (cheers), other matters arising (no comment), and advice to get another drink at the bar before the evening's speaker, Robert McCrum, began (more cheers).

Robert must have felt like Daniel amongst the lions. We were probably the most knowledgeable audience he will ever have, but he handled it superbly. We listened enthralled as he told how he could have written twice as much, how he wished he could have covered more on

the London of Wodehouse's early days, on how lucky he had been in meeting people all over the place who had known Wodehouse. He told us the regrets he had over his coverage of certain factors but said how proud he was of managing to find a photograph of Wodehouse's oldest friend, Bill Townend. He concluded, brave man that he was, by inviting questions, and (as was only to be expected from that audience) he got them. A splendid talk, a splendid evening—and Ed Ratcliffe, who joined a dinner for Robert afterward, was lucky to catch the last train home.

As I said—quite a month!



New Address for Dues!

Note that our Membership Manager's address has changed! All snail-mail dues payments, address changes, and membership inquiries should be sent to Amy Plofker. Amy's e-mail address remains the same.



Note: New Address for Plum Lines Material Submissions!

All potential *Plum Lines* material should now be e-mailed as Microsoft Word attachments. If you cannot e-mail Word documents, please e-mail in an alternative attachment, or submit the article in the body of the e-mail. If you do not do e-mail, please mail to Gary Hall. Dan Cohen is still our editor in chief, but this will allow easier handling of submitted material. Thanks!

That Other Dulwich Boy

BY DAN COHEN

While contemplating the anticipated delights of the upcoming Hollywood convention, my thoughts have turned inevitably to that other Dulwich boy who became the master of L.A. *noir*, Raymond Chandler.

Chandler's journey from the playing fields of Dulwich to the mean streets of Los Angeles was a circuitous one. He was born in Chicago in 1888. When his parents divorced seven years later his mother took him back to England, where her family lived. They were by no means wealthy but had enough money and status to enroll young Raymond as a "day boy" at Dulwich. He became a naturalized British citizen and was able to get a secure, if boring, job at the Admiralty. He hoped that he would have enough spare time to pursue a writing career. It didn't work; he was so depressed that he couldn't write a thing, and to the horror of his family he quit and got a job as a reporter.

That didn't work either, and he was fired. Chandler was able to sell poetry and criticism to some small literary publications, but to supplement his meager writing income he also served as a part-time teacher at Dulwich. After five years the 23-year-old Chandler felt he was going nowhere and decided to return to an America he barely remembered.

He arrived in L.A. "with a beautiful wardrobe, a public school accent, no practical gifts for earning a living, and a contempt for the natives which, I am sorry to say, has in some measure persisted to this day." He knocked around at a variety of odd jobs, and when the U.S. entered World War I, Chandler joined the



Raymond Chandler looking rather Dulwichian

Canadian army as a British national. In France he was the sole survivor of an attack that wiped out his entire unit. Before he got out of the hospital the war was over, and he went back to California.

Eventually some friends got him a job at an oil company, and Chandler turned out to be a very efficient manager. He rose quickly and made a lot of money. Then came the Depression as well as a habit of getting very drunk and disappearing for days, Chandler found himself in Los Angeles out of a job again and broke. Now the 40-year-old Chandler took up writing in earnest. No journalism, no literary magazines—he went straight for the pulps. Unlike most pulp magazine writers, Chandler was a slow worker, but he gradually built a reputation in the hard-boiled detective genre. His breakthrough came in 1939 with the publication of the first Philip Marlowe novel, *The Big Sleep*.

Hollywood also took notice of Chandler. Several of his books were adapted for the movies, and one based on *The Big Sleep*, starring Humphrey Bogart as Marlowe, is a genuine *noir* classic, though the script, taken from an already complex novel, was rewritten so many times I defy anyone to figure out exactly what happened and why.

Like Plum, Chandler also served time as a screenwriter—a job he never liked, grumbling that “the motion picture is a great industry, as well as a defeated art.” But at one point his services were so much in demand that Paramount offered him a dream contract. He didn’t have to show up at the studio, he could stay home, stay drunk, and dictate his script to a crew of stenographers.

He was undoubtedly the hottest American writer of detective fiction, but in England he found that “I am not regarded as a mystery writer but as an American novelist of some importance.” Always touchy about his status, that meant a lot to Raymond Chandler.

Chandler had entered Dulwich a few years after Plum left, and their paths never crossed in Hollywood either, but they do have one definite connection: Plum’s lifelong friend Bill Townend. According to Norman Murphy, Chandler spotted Townend in L.A. because he was wearing an Old Alleynian (Dulwich College) tie. Townend kept up a correspondence with Chandler and may have sponged off him a bit—that was his way. Robert McCrum notes that in his correspondence Townend sometimes quoted “the two famous Alleynian writers to each other.”

It’s probably a good thing that the “the two famous Alleynian writers” never met. Chandler was a depressed and bitter man as well as a serious and sometimes dangerous drunk, not an ideal luncheon

companion for the relentlessly sunny and disciplined Wodehouse. But they did have something in common, something inspired or sharpened by their Dulwich experience: They knew how to write.

Here are some of my favorite Chandlerisms:

I got up on my feet and went over to the bowl in the corner and threw cold water on my face. After a little while I felt better, but very little. I needed a drink, I needed a lot of life insurance, I needed a vacation, I needed a home in the country. What I had was a coat, a hat and a gun. I put them on and went out of the room.

There was a sad fellow over on a bar stool talking to the bartender, who was polishing a glass and listening with that plastic smile people wear when they are trying not to scream.

Even on Central Avenue, not the quietest dressed street in the world, he looked about as inconspicuous as a tarantula on a slice of angel food . . .

I belonged in Idle Valley like a pearl onion on a banana split.

When I pack my things for the Los Angeles convention I am going to toss a copy of a book called *Raymond Chandler’s Los Angeles* into the suitcase. I intend to see if I can find any traces of “that other Dulwich boy.”

The Oldest Dulwich Boy

The part of Tamburlaine was created by an astonishingly gifted young actor in the Lord Admiral’s Men, Edward Alleyn, at the time only twenty-one years old. At the sight of the performance, Shakespeare, two years his senior, may have grasped, if he had not already begun to do so, that he was not likely to become one of the leading actors on the London stage. Alleyn was the real thing: a majestic physical presence, with, a “well tuned” clear voice capable of seizing and holding the attention of the enormous audiences. Achieving instant and enduring fame for his “stalking and roaring” in the part, Alleyn went on to play Faustus, Barabas and many other great roles; to marry Henslowe’s step-daughter; to become immensely rich from the business side of entertainment; and to found a distinguished educational institution, Dulwich College.

—From *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare*, by Stephen Greenblatt



Chapters Corner

CONDUCTED BY SUSAN COHEN



It's fun being with other fans, and it's fun reading about what other fans are doing. So please use this column to tell the world—the Wodehouse world, that is—about your chapter's activities, zany and otherwise. Representatives of chapters, please send all info to me, Rosie M. Banks, otherwise known as Susan Cohen. Anyone reading this who is not a member of a local chapter but would like to attend a meeting or become a member can get in touch with the contact person listed.

Great news! Two new chapters have been formed! See Buck-U-Uppo Bottling Company and Rocky Mountain Plums.

Anglers' Rest
(Seattle and vicinity)
Contact: Susan Collicott
Phone:
E-mail:

Blandings Castle Chapter
(Greater San Francisco Bay area)
Contact: Ed Ratcliffe
E-mail:

Hollywood Comes to Blandings" is the working title of our skit, which is a work in progress for the August 2005 convention, under the direction of Dave Smelzer. Most of the casting is still to be done, but there is no question about who will play two key parts, with Ed Ratcliffe as the definitive Lord Emsworth and Tom Wainwright as the mellifluous butler Beach, a dynamic duo familiar to everyone who has been fortunate to go to other TWS conventions.

The Broadway Special
(New York City and vicinity)
Contact: Philip Shreffler
E-mail:

Members of The Broadway Special met on August 28 at the Wheeltapper Pub in midtown Manhattan's Fitzpatrick Grand Central Hotel for a "Summer Moonshine" gathering that featured informal browsing, sluicing, Plummish conversation, welcoming new members into the chapter, and generally spreading sweetness and light. The only program item was the sharing of favorite or apt short quotations from PGW on the topic of summertime. It was a good idea in theory; however, the quotations presented touched on a broader array of themes. A copy of *Summer Moonshine* was awarded to Maggie Schnader for her quotation from *The Luck of the Bodkins*, because when members were asked who didn't own a copy of the prize volume, she raised her hand.

To celebrate Plum's birthday, The Broadway Special gathered in truly substantial numbers on October 16 for a cocktail party in the M Bar of the Hotel Mansfield, 12 West 44th Street in Manhattan. As always, there was sprightly and impressive literary conversation, convivial comradeship and the welcoming of new members to our sodality. By consensus it was agreed that in future an annual dinner would mark this important occasion. Our final event of 2004 will be our attending a reading and autograph party, by and for Robert McCrum, author of the newest Wodehouse biography. The reading, featuring a brunch, will be held on December 19 at the 92nd Street Y; the cost is \$35 per person. Those wishing to attend should contact the Y directly at 212-415-5500 and have a credit card at the ready to secure a reservation.

Buck-U-Uppo Bottling Company
(Seaside, Oregon, and vicinity)
Contact: Sandy Rea
Phone:
E-mail:

On September 12 the dynamic Buck-U-Uppo Bottling Company, The Wodehouse Society's newest and most dynamic chapter, fizzed at noon at Seaside, Oregon, with Sandy Rea, Chief Bottler, presiding. Carol James came from Tigard, proving that not all Portland Plummies are in hibernation, and Ray Steen tooled in from Walla Walla. We had

frank discussion about the Modern Girl and talked about favorite books. It was decided that we will next gather in January at a beach bar and consider crashing winter waves over hot scotches and lemon. Big-city Wodehousians may look askance at a turnout of three, but Buck-U-Uppos are not counted. Buck-U-Uppos are weighed.

An audacious scheme to invite all 43 Portland Jane Austen Society members to the next party was mooted. Our best minds think perhaps 10 percent will seize the opportunity and carpool. They with their pure minds must inevitably yield to Buck-U-Uppo blandishments.

Capital! Capital!
(Washington, D.C., and vicinity)
Contact: Jeff Peterson
Phone:
E-mail:

Capital! Capital! regrets to inform the greater The Wodehouse Society of the death on November 14 of Bonnie Clevenger, chapter member and wife of Col. Ken Clevenger. Bonnie, a longtime Wodehouse devotee, succumbed to an exceptionally aggressive endometrial cancer. The charming and vivacious Mrs. Clevenger will be sorely missed by her husband, her family, her many friends, and not least by Capital! Capital!

Chapter One
(Greater Philadelphia area)
Contact: Susan Cohen
Phone:
E-mail:

Chapter One meets on Sunday afternoons. Meetings are held every two months except in the summer. Place: The Dark Horse Restaurant, Headhouse Square, Philadelphia. New members are welcome. At our September meeting we shared memories of Gretchen Worden, director of Philadelphia's famous Mutter Museum, whose untimely death last summer at age 56 came as a shock to all of us. A donation from our chapter was sent to the Mutter Museum in Gretchen's honor. For the rest of the meeting we discussed Wodehouse-related books and movies, holding a lively discussion about Jonathan Ames's *Wake Up*,

Sir! Some liked it; some didn't. We also weighed the pros and cons of the New Yorker article "Beyond A Joke," by Anthony Lane, and considered the movie *Bright Young Things*, Stephen Fry's adaptation of the Evelyn Waugh novel *Vile Bodies*. A good time was had by all. To escape our relatives and old turkey bones, we met again on the Sunday after Thanksgiving.

On Thursday, December 16, we will gather at the Philadelphia Free Library, where Robert McCrum will speak about his new Wodehouse biography; time: 7:00 p.m. The Library has asked *Plum Lines* editor Dan Cohen to introduce McCrum, and Dan, delighted, is already rehearsing his intro over and over. Don't panic: The Library is limiting Dan to two to four minutes so it will be safe for you to go. The event is free, and we in Chapter One would be delighted to have any Wodehousians in the area join us. We will meet for dinner before the talk and take Mr. McCrum out for a night on the town after his speech. It should be a hotsy-totsy evening.

The Chicago Accident Syndicate
(Chicago and thereabouts)
Contact: Daniel & Tina Garrison
Phone:
E-mail:

The chapter holds bimonthly meetings with a wide range of activities. Sometimes members of the Syndicate meet in each other's homes to enjoy a potluck supper and read Wodehouse. Sometimes we meet in an Irish pub where there's good browsing and sluicing. We enjoy theater outings followed by dinner at a restaurant, and every time the City Lit Theatre does a Wodehouse production we are in the audience. We go to the Chicago Botanical Gardens to stroll through the English garden there, while reading excerpts from Wodehouse. We play miniature golf together and have one grand croquet game every year.

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

Senior Bloodstains are held at Wodehouse Society conventions. Junior Bloodstains are held every January, part of the big annual Sherlock Holmes celebration in New York. The meetings are always great

fun. The title of the '05 Junior Bloodstain read-aloud is "Sherlock Holmes and the Unsettling Smile," written by Anne Cotton of the NEWTS.

The Drone Rangers
(Houston and vicinity)
Newsletter: *DroneStar*, edited by Carey Tynan
Contact: Toni Rudersdorf
Phone:
E-mail:

On September 11 Drone Ranger John Moore had a party to celebrate the release of his new book, *Heroics for Beginners*. On September 28 the Drone Rangers held their regular meeting and discussed *The Mating Season*. Carey Tynan gave a talk on the evening's book, and Toni Rudersdorf presented a paper on the life of PGW. On October 21 Amanda Pocock and Carey Tynan attended the U.K. Society's Wodehouse Dinner in London, and the following day, along with others, they went on the Wodehouse walk led by Norman Murphy. Everyone found it highly enjoyable.

On October 30 we held our dinner meeting at Zins, a midtown restaurant. While dining, envious Drone Rangers checked out Amanda's pics of Sudeley Castle (which boasts a Blandings connection) from her trip to England. On December 3 our meeting will be devoted to picking the books we will read and share next year. Carey votes for the Mulliner books, to get us ready for the convention. On December 31 Susan Garrett is planning a New Years Eve party. If you'll be in Dallas around that time, please join us. Since Susan lives in Dallas, that's where we expect the party will be held, unless or until told otherwise.

January 28 is the date of our next regular Drone Rangers book meeting; books for the coming year will be announced in plenty of time for leisurely pleasurable reading. In January-February the musical *Anything Goes* will be performed in Houston. The Drone Rangers are planning to see the February 12 show—this will be our "Remember Plum" event. Dinner before the show and restaurant will be announced. As always, if you happen to be in Houston on any of the dates events are planned, please let Toni Rudersdorf know, and join us.

The Mottled Oyster Club
(San Antonio and South Texas)
Contact: James P. Robinson III
Fax:
E-mail:

The Mottled Oyster Club of San Antonio and South Texas is now meeting on a more or less stable schedule, on the second Thursday of each month. However, every other month, under its nom de guerre of the Jellied Eels, the group meets at a restaurant for dinner. On the second Thursday of November, January, and March, the Mottled Oysters will gather at the Barnes & Noble on Loop 410; books to be discussed have not yet been chosen for January or March. The restaurants for the intervening months also have not yet been chosen. Interested or traveling Wodehousians are always welcome.

The New England Wodehouse Thingummy Society
(NEWTS – Boston and elsewhere in New England)
Contact: Anne Cotton, president
Phone:
E-mail:

The NEWTS gathered at Rosemary Roman and David Nolan's home in East Brookfield, Massachusetts, on a splendid fall day—the kind that inspired some poet or other to refer to "October's bright blue weather." We began with a rehearsal of our skit for next summer's Hollywood convention and then proceeded to pig out in a way that the Empress herself would have envied. We polished off the afternoon with a brief spin in the Dorwards' 1950 Chrysler Windsor, a magnificent vintage auto with its convertible top down. We are all drooling. A picture of this splendid machine, draped with NEWTS, is available on our website. Our next bash will be at Bud and Dotty Swanson's (our regular Christmas venue), with a gift exchange, skit rehearsal, and whatever else we can devise.

The Northwodes
(St. Paul, Minneapolis, and vicinity)
Contact: Kristine Fowler
Phone:
E-mail:

The Northwodes' Second Annual Birthday Toast to Wodehouse was held at the Vintage Wine Bar in St. Paul on the actual evening of October 15, in defiance of the modern trend to decide that a Friday is inconvenient for travelers and family men and to designate the following Monday as Wodehouse's birthday (Observed); although if we can get a Bank

Holiday declared, we'll consider this strategy for the future. While browsing and sluicing, we laid the groundwork for our soon-to-be-monthly book-discussion group, suggested by Comrade Pierce of this summer's crop of keen new members.

We duly met again on November 15 to discuss *Summer Lightning*, which all agreed was indeed among the best books we'd ever read entitled *Summer Lightning*, except for Comrade Eckman who had cleverly read *Fish Preferred*. The timing and the venue appeared to meet with general satisfaction, so we put *Heavy Weather* on the docket for January 24, at the same locale (Wilde Roast Cafe in northeast Minneapolis, hoping we'll be able to snaffle the armchairs by the fireplace). Meanwhile, our holiday dinner looms on December 5, for this recent tendency toward the intellectual doesn't mean we're giving up our tradition of purely frivolous gatherings; by the time you read this, the celebratory bread rolls might already have been thrown.

The Pale Parabolites
(Toronto and vicinity)
Contact: Peter M. Nixon
E-mail:

The Pale Parabolites . . . those who are seeking the Pale Parabola of Joy . . . whatever that may be. The Pale Paraolites' motto is *nil admirari*. Like the Empress of Blandings the Pale Parabolites take things as they come and marvel at nothing.

The Pelikan Club
(Kansas City and vicinity)
Contact: Sallie Hobbs

The Perfecto-Zizzbaum Motion Picture Corporation
(Los Angeles and vicinity)
Contact: Melissa D. Aaron
Phone:
E-mail:

We are looking forward to the convention next summer and hoping that all the Wodehousians who come will learn to love dear Dottyville-on-the-Pacific as much as we do. We meet the second Sunday of every month at 12:30 P.M. at Vroman's Bookstore, 695 E. Colorado, Pasadena. The readings change every month and can be found by checking our calendar or subscribing to our mailing list. For December: two golf stories, "A Mixed Threesome" and "Sundered Hearts,"

as well as our Annual Holiday Tea. In December Vroman's devotes all available space to shoppers, so this meeting usually takes place at the home of a PZMPCo member. We also occasionally attend events of interest, such as the Lanterman House Tea, a ragtime era event planned for December 4. Subscribers to our e-mail list can be kept abreast of such local amusements. Information about our mailing list and important links can be found at our website: www.lahacal.org/wodehouse.

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

Rocky Mountain Plums
(Rocky Mountains area)
Contact: Gary Hall
Phone:
E-mail:

August 27, 2004, was a plum-letter day, as a collection of Rocky Mountain-area Plum aficionados descended on Fort Collins, Colorado, to attend the OpenStage Theatre production of *The Play's The Thing*, the PGW adaptation of a Ferenc Molnar original script. Lucian J. Endicott, Gary Hall, Linda Adam-Hall, Jim and Kay Bush, and Mr. & Mrs. Bob Bruegel were the TWS members who attended, along with a smattering of Bruegelian and Bushian relatives. We gathered at a jolly place called the Moot House on a gray, rainy evening, and enjoyed (as the advertisements say) the atmosphere of a "warm, comfortable Olde English pub" and the concomitant food. Raising more than a few glasses of fine wine, but refraining from bread-tossing (either from lack of bread or to ensure that we'd be welcome in the future), we traded stories about how we'd each discovered Wodehouse and brainstormed ideas for a chapter name. Though met with great acclaim, we rejected "The Rocky Mountain Mottled Oyster Club" . . . at least for the time being.

Lucian (aka George Cyril Wellbeloved aka Sanders of the River) traveled the greatest distance, from Colorado Springs, and mentioned in his trip report that "there was considerable feast of reason and flow of soul, though for awhile it appeared that Bob's feast was to be

a Barmecidal one.” Fortunately, Bob’s food eventually arrived, and he was able to keep culinary pace with the rest of the attendees.

Dinner having run its course (or courses, as it were), we heigh-hoed to the theater, where the well-established OpenStage company regaled us with good wit and a well-paced show. TWS proved useful to the show’s success: The play’s director, Deborah Marie Hlinka, had borrowed several of Jim Bush’s Jeeves & Wooster videotapes, and Gary and Linda provided most of the show’s music, from “musicals for which P. G. Wodehouse was the lyricist, librettist, or both.” Highlights of the performance were Ken Fenwick’s astute portrayal of the playwright Turai, and Charlie Ferrie’s final-act downfall as the adulterous Almady. Mr. Fenwick’s resumé includes turns as Lear, Claudius, Falstaff, Big Daddy, and Salieri, so we were truly in the presence of Coloradan theatrical royalty.

The play ended, goodbyes were exchanged with an open-endedness to the proceedings should our unchartered club meet again, and we went our respective merry ways, cheered that the Western States are still populated with those for whom humor is a way of life.

The Size 14 HAT CLUB
(Halifax, Nova Scotia)
Contact: Jill Robinson
E-mail:

The Soup & Fish Club
(Northern Virginia area)
Contact: Deborah Dillard
Phone:
E-mail:

Volunteer Officers

Acting President of The Wodehouse Society:
Jean Tillson

Editor Emeritus: Ed Ratcliffe

Editor in Chief:
Dan Cohen

Membership Manager (new-member inquiries, dues payment, contact information changes) & Treasurer:
Amy Plofker

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

Chapter News:
Susan Cohen

Plum Lines Layout and all *Plum Lines* Contributions:
Gary Hall and Linda Adam-Hall

Printer and Mailer Liaison, Rosters, Dues Sheets:
Neil Midkiff

Website (www.wodehouse.org) Development & Maintenance: Shamim Mohamed, AKA Pongo

Thanks to Tony Ring for the photo of Jan Kaufman.

Contents

- 1 Jan Wilson Kaufman 1935-2004
- 2 Convention Time!
- 3 The Pursuit of Happiness: A Not-Very-Brief History of
The Wodehouse Society and Its Conventions
- 5 Accommodations and Roommate Matching
- 6 Collecting William Tell Told Again
- 8 Rivals of P. G. Wodehouse: Robert Benchley
- 10 Strutting our Stuff
- 11 A Few Quick Ones
- 11 A Definitive Biography
- 15 Browsing and Sluicing with the Lexicographer
- 16 The Great Wodehouse Movie Pitch Challenge
- 16 Roll Tossers Take Heart
- 17 Letter from England
- 18 *New Address for Dues!*
- 18 New Address for Material Submissions!
- 18 That Other Dulwich Boy
- 19 The Oldest Dulwich Boy
- 20 Chapters Corner

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