



# WOOSTER SAUCE

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## Some Thoughts on Teaching Wodehouse to the Rising Generation

by Richard T. Kelly

Recently I have been teaching Wodehouse to undergraduate students seeking degrees in Creative Writing, a task that has been, for me, a great pleasure – and for my students, too, or so I hope, once they overcome a certain initial perplexity. This puzzlement has a certain amount to do – as it must – with their encountering an author whose life and times and language choices were far removed from their own. And yet, on the face of things, today's undergraduates are no more suspicious of Wodehouse than of James Joyce or Franz Kafka or Chinua Achebe. Whatever wariness they feel in entering my seminar on 'Wodehouse, Irony, and Distance' possibly arises more from an instinctual resistance to the idea of comedy as a subject of academic inquiry.

I would argue, though, that any sound curriculum within my field ought to include comic writing: it's a hugely popular genre, as well as a properly hard skill to master. That said, one doesn't want to be too po-faced about the whole business. There's a special pain – a wearying onus – in the task of having to explain or analyse why something is funny. When one's subject is so very lively, one can begin to feel uncomfortably like a sadist in performing the critical post-mortem: cutting the thing open and dissecting it so as to show how the organism functioned. Thus, whenever I stand before a class and fire up my Wodehouse Powerpoint, I do feel an innate dread that I am about to make a spectacle of myself,

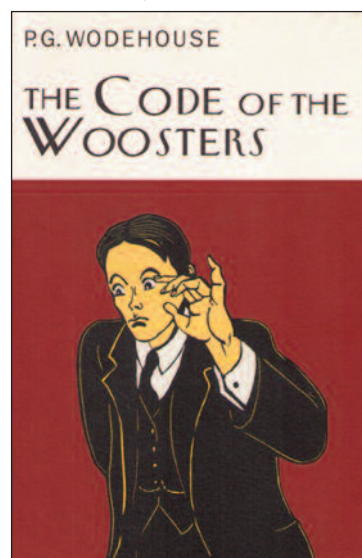
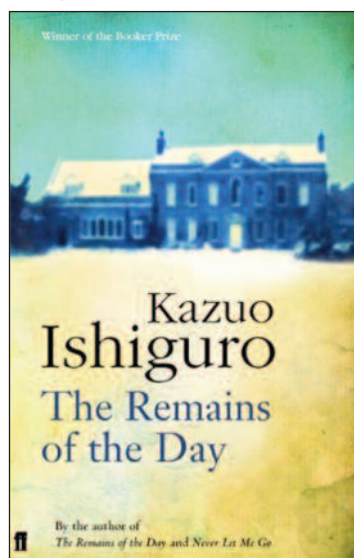
one of those tiresome eggheads who makes a fuss (cf. Wodehouse's perplexed comment on the critical regard for George Orwell).

Nonetheless, let's agree – I'm sure we all do – that it's a good thing when we take Wodehouse seriously and preach his virtues to the rising generation. The point, surely, is how to extol him as a writer of living virtues that they, too, might practise for their own good – which is to say, making a living out of writing. This 'gainful employment' aspect is, of course, very pressing upon most of us. And quite apart from the consideration of whether today's students find Wodehouse funny or are themselves drawn to the idea of amusing a reader, there is a tremendous model of industry that Wodehouse offers them as a professional wordsmith.

The habits Wodehouse cultivated throughout his working life are endlessly commendable. He paid proper attention to the life around him, talked to people (and listened to their responses) on subjects of which he knew little, and generally made himself (as Henry James counselled all writers to be) a man

on whom nothing was lost. His plotting process was exemplary, of course – revising and revising until all the pieces fitted properly. And while over time he attained the writer's idyll of getting paid to write exactly what he wanted to, in his early days he was fully ready to meet any sort of brief in order to bank a cheque.

What keeps a writer endlessly current, above all, is a readership. But



Two of the books Richard teaches in his Creative Writing class

there is much to be said, too, for the exertion of influence on subsequent writers. It's said that Balzac was delighted to see his work being imitated, taking this as a form of flattery – also an immortality of sorts. The French have a word – *hommage* – for what the rest of us might call theft. But we also speak, without slight, of 'allusion' as an honourable tribute through which a writer indicates a debt of love to one who has written before.

My undergraduate students also understand the term 'intertextuality' to refer to this allusive process – a kind of conversation between literary greats. This is why I tend to teach Wodehouse's writing alongside a great practitioner of the present day, who is both a deeply serious artist and also a good deal wittier than he's sometimes credited.

When Kazuo Ishiguro came to write his prize-winning 'butler' novel of 1989, *The Remains of the Day*, he consecrated himself to a lot of commendable reading for research into 1930s England and the profession of being a manservant. Such was the obligation, he felt, to render foursquarely his story of Stevens, a veteran butler caught in the act of recalling his service to one Lord Darlington at a grand English estate during the turbulent 1930s.

Apart from the *actualité*, however, Ishiguro also wanted to draw on the famous – if fanciful – image that so many readers retain of English society between the wars. He spoke to an interviewer of his desire to 'rework a particular myth about a certain kind of mythical England', and to create 'a world which at first resembles that of those writers such as P. G. Wodehouse'. In linking Wodehouse to myth, Ishiguro was gesturing, one suspects, to Evelyn Waugh's famous description of Wodehouse's fictional world as one 'that cannot become dated because it has never existed'.

No Wodehousian can travel very far into *The Remains of the Day* without experiencing the queer sensation that they have heard the novel's narrating voice somewhere before. Ishiguro's novel has a serious purpose, but it is not short on comic relief, of a sort that sometimes follows a familiar and beloved formula – as when Stevens recalls his being summoned to Lord Darlington's study and lumbered with an especially ticklish assignment. Darlington is being visited by his friend Sir David Cardinal, aristocrat and panjandrum in the affairs of state; and also by Sir David's 23-year-old son Reginald. What Darlington requires of Stevens – so offloading a favour Sir David had asked of His Lordship – is to explain to 'young' Reggie the facts of life. ('Birds, bees. You are familiar, aren't you?') So buttoned-up is this butler that we can't say how Stevens feels about this, or what will be his aptitude for it, though we have our suspicions. Still, what can he do but assent?

'I will do my best, sir . . .'

' . . . Awfully decent of you. Look here, there's no need to make a song and dance

about it. . . . Simple approach is the best, that's my advice, Stevens.'

In Darlington's bluster, and in Stevens' dutiful rejoinders, I'm quite sure that you, as I, can detect the same distant but delighting melody:

'The simple, direct method never fails.'

'No, sir.'

'Whereas the elaborate does.'

'Yes, sir.'

'Right ho, Jeeves.'

The Wodehousian mode of butler-speak, then, is lovingly carried over into *The Remains of the Day*. ('Jeeves was a big influence,' Ishiguro has freely admitted.) On point of acumen, however, Stevens is no Jeeves. And, arguably, the major debt of Ishiguro to Wodehouse emerges more stealthily through this novel, as we notice Stevens's stubborn inability to acknowledge the truth of what is in front of his nose, or that his knowledge is in any way deficient to his duties. He needs a Jeeves to keep him straight; but Stevens, alas, is on his own.

As writing teachers we highlight 'unreliable narration' when a narrator's voice leads us to suspect they are either trying to deceive us, or else succeeding in deceiving themselves. We speak, moreover, of 'dramatic irony' when we become aware of a disparity between the seeming truth of a situation and a character's dogged misreading of same. Thus does Wodehouse mine endless comedy from the blithe self-delusions of Bertie Wooster; whereas Ishiguro draws on this effect to make his Stevens into a figure of pity and pathos.

But there is a graver theme at play in *The Remains of the Day*, for which Ishiguro might well have borne Wodehouse in mind. Stevens's failure (or inner refusal) to address what is really going on before his eyes makes him culpably blind and silent as Lord Darlington inches toward a moral precipice in the mid-1930s: by his dismissal of Jewish staff members, by his hosting of Hitler's ambassador von Ribbentrop, and by his convening of British bigwigs sympathetic to the foreign policy of the Führer. In time Stevens will be advised by Reggie Cardinal that Darlington has made himself 'the single most useful pawn Herr Hitler has had in this country for his propaganda tricks.' Cardinal is stunned that Stevens is not more 'curious'; but the cost of this blindness will soon become clear.

We have long known as much as we need to about Wodehouse's 'German broadcasts', and the 'damned fool' he later rued himself to have been. In steering my undergraduates through a joint study of *The Remains of the Day* and *The Code of the Woosters*, I usually find it needful to rehearse a few wretched elements of the real 1930s: Sir Oswald Ernald Mosley, 'The Cliveden Set', the rhetoric of Versailles and the Ruhr and appeasement. Still, on the upside, I

get to treat them also to the deathless verdict Bertie delivers on black-shorted Roderick Spode ('Did you ever in your puff see such a perfect perisher?').

Creative Writing, though, is not a history lesson, nor a directive in how to find one's literary 'voice': students must figure out such things for themselves. We are in the business of showing them by example how to accomplish certain effects on a page. One student of mine, not an obvious Wodehousian on the face of it, sat through my seminar in silence, yet brought to the following week's workshop a keenly witty piece of dramatic irony, written in the unreliable voice of a woman who considers herself a caring neighbour but who is, in truth, a self-serving busybody and all-round Nosy Parker. I marked that paper as a fine upper second; and marked it, too, as a small but notable success for Wodehouse-as-educator.



*Richard T. Kelly is the author of the novels The Knives, The Possessions of Doctor Forrest, and Crusaders (all published by Faber and Faber). In 2016 he edited Highballs for Breakfast (Hutchinson), an anthology of Wodehouse's writings on alcohol. He lectures in Creative Writing at the University of Winchester.*

*(Photo by Caroline O'Dwyer)*

"Childe Roland to the dark tower, sir," said Jeeves, as we alighted, though what he meant I hadn't an earthly. Responding with a brief "Oh, ah," I gave my attention to the butler, who was endeavouring to communicate something to me.

*(The Code of the Woosters, 1938)*

## Society News

### *Another Blaze of Colour*

As you tore your *Wooster Sauce* hungrily from its envelope, you will have noticed a number of inserts. Please don't ignore them: these notices are important, which is why we've printed them on such deafening paper.

**THE GREEN ONE** is new, and we ask you please to **READ IT FIRST**. It is the Society's Privacy Statement, produced as part of our compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation which came into force on 25 May 2018. The Privacy Statement tells you what data we hold about you, how we use it, and how we keep it safe. It also advises you that you are entitled to see the information we have and explains your rights in relation to it. If you have any queries, please contact [pgwodehousesocietydata@aol.com](mailto:pgwodehousesocietydata@aol.com).

**THE BLUE ONE** is the application form for tickets for the dinner. If you'd like to attend, do get your application in quickly to give yourself the best chance of getting a place at the table. And don't forget that if you'd like to bring someone else, that person must also be a member of the Society in his or her own right.

**THE YELLOW ONE**, if you have it (and not everyone does), is a reminder for members who renew by cheque, PayPal, or bank transfer that we haven't yet received their 2018–19 subscription. It tells you all the ways you can pay, including the highly recommended Direct Debit option available to holders of UK bank accounts.

**THE WHITE ONE WITH BLACK TYPE** is, of course, your regular *By The Way*. Please enjoy it in the usual way.

### *Sharpen Your Wits!*

It has come to the attention of our Entertainments Impresario that 'Fake News' has been circulating in certain quarters, specifically relating to that jewel in the crown of our Society meetings, the Annual Quiz. This will be ruthlessly nipped in the bud at every opportunity; meanwhile, here are a few of the myths that have been making the rounds:

- (1) In order to take part, the back of your skull has to bulge significantly.
- (2) A diet of fish is advisable three months before the day.
- (3) It's all really serious and competitive.
- (4) Shame and humiliation await those who aren't on the winning team.
- (5) The Quizmaster is a fiend in human shape.

None of these is remotely true, particularly that last one. As the Headmaster of your school no doubt sententiously noted, "it's not about the winning but the taking part", and nothing could be truer of our Annual Quiz. Yes, one team of eggheads will inevitably win, but everyone is welcome to our splendid new home in the Savile Club to mix, mingle, fraternize, and quaff with fellow members of the friendliest literary Society in existence.

If you've never been before, why not come along and give it a try? It's 6 for 6.30pm on Monday, July 16, 2018, at the Savile, London W1K 4ER. See you there!

# Leave It to Sam

*Michael Chacksfield reports on our February meeting*

On 26 February, Society members gathered for their second innings in the delightful surroundings of the Savile Club in the heart of Mayfair. Undeterred by snow and the cold winds of the ‘Beast from the East’, the umpires inspected the pitch and play commenced at 6pm in the Drawing Room of our new and historic home.

Hilary Bruce opened the batting and brought the packed room to order, thanking everyone for another good turnout. A quick show of hands revealed that ten of the fifty or so attendees were there for their first meeting, once again confirming the enduring appeal of sharing stories in good company with like-minded coves. Indeed, it would not be a stretch to imagine popping into any of the comfortable and relaxing rooms of this 150-year-old club to find an idle Bertram Wilberforce Wooster hiding behind a broadsheet newspaper, enjoying an early evening snifter or two.

Though I had joined the Society in 2014, I was a little nervous of attending my first meeting: having read in a previous issue of *Wooster Sauce* about members being turfed out of the Savoy Tup, I had come ready and willing to fight the cause. Naturally, nothing of the sort ensued as a spirit of informality and friendliness infected the room, with everyone hitting it off like ham and eggs.

Entertainments Impresario Paul Kent was soon at the crease, introducing our guest speaker: Sam Jordison from *The Guardian*, who gave a fascinating talk on how he teaches *Leave It to Psmith* to creative writing students. A successful journalist, co-editor of the *Crap Towns* series of books and co-director of Galley Beggar Press, Sam also has several books to his credit. He commented that Plum would have surely approved of H G Wells’s father being the first bowler in professional cricket ever to get a ‘Four-fer’. It seems HGW and PGW knew each other and were pals for a while in France. In a letter to William Townend dated 1 October 1924, Wodehouse wrote:

Women are divided broadly into two classes – those who, when jilted, merely drop a silent tear and those who take a niblick from their bag and chase the faithless swain across the country with it. It was to this latter section that Agnes Flack belonged. Attila the Hun might have broken off his engagement to her, but nobody except Attila the Hun, and he only on one of his best mornings.

(From ‘Scratch Man’, *A Few Quick Ones*, 1959)

“Did you read Wells’ *The Dream*? Pretty good. But what asses his Utopians are.”

Sam also remarked on Wodehouse’s broad and enduring appeal, from the Jaipur Literary Festival to an online quote generator, and there is always a sense of decency and code within his stories. Sam observed how Plum could see through the class system. When plotting, he would work out the high spots, writing discrete and punchy scenes with lean prose that flowed effortlessly. As an example, Sam quoted one of his favourite lines in *Leave It to Psmith*: “The door opened, and Beach the butler entered, a dignified procession of one.” He confessed to attempting to conceal from writers in his group the horrifying information that Wodehouse wrote 40,000

words of this quality in just three weeks in 1922 and wrapped up the entire novel in a matter of months. When Sam asked his students to draw a diagram of the plot, he recalled “there were arrows going everywhere on the page”. In his own writing, he takes careful note of Plum’s advice to “always get to the dialogue as soon as possible. . . . Nothing puts the reader off more than a great slab of prose at the start.” At this point Sam held a well-thumbed, heavily annotated

Arrow edition aloft, scanning the text to find a single page to break this rule.

After a thoroughly deserved round of applause, Hilary thanked Sam for a wonderful and engaging talk, and presented him with three copies of Random House’s new ‘Pick-Me-Up’ books, plus two CDs of Wodehouse songs by Maria Jette (*In Our Little Paradise* and *The Siren’s Song*). She then closed the innings by reminding everyone that details for the dinner in October would be included in the next edition of *Wooster Sauce*, and volunteers were needed for the upcoming cricket match. Finally, Paul thanked everyone for coming and revealed the quiz night will be held at our next meeting on 16 July.

All around, a thoroughly splendid evening!



Guest speaker Sam Jordison, right, chats with Sir Edward Cazalet  
(Photo by Helge Thelen)

# Play on Words

Reviewed by Hilary Bruce

I have always thought that the Art Deco interior of The Crazy Coqs, the sophisticated cabaret venue within London's Brasserie Zedel, would be an excellent venue in which to hear Wodehouse's lyrics, so it was exciting to learn that Hal Cazalet was to perform his words-and-music entertainment *Play on Words* there. Gratifyingly, the first performance in October 2017 was a sellout and such a success that he was asked to return for a further three nights in February.

Hal – P G Wodehouse's great-grandson – naturally started with Wodehouse, singing his lovely 'Castle in the Air' and continuing with more gems from Plum's extensive portfolio of Broadway shows, the programme punctuated with entertaining anecdotes from Wodehouse's years on Broadway.

The audience delighted at the story of Plum pitching a show entitled *Little Miss Springtime* to Abe Erlanger, the New Amsterdam Theatre's legendary owner, who turned him away, growling, "We don't do nothing little at the New Amsterdam." Next day Plum returned with a great new idea – for a musical to be called *Miss Springtime*. "I love it – it'll run for years," said Erlanger. In fact it ran for 224 performances, but he certainly had the right idea.

There were many more tales – we learned that George Gershwin had been the rehearsal pianist for Wodehouse's *Miss 1917*, for example – but the stories didn't end there. Tales from Hal's own life brought us to other composers, lyricists, and wordsmiths, on a broad theme of 'what's great about Broadway then and now'. His first job was as driver for Peter Shaffer

(*Amadeus*). Hal, having only just passed his test, was terrified and mostly lost throughout. But they developed what was to be a long friendship, and in the course of his (driving) work, he encountered many friends of Shaffer, like Stephen Sondheim, some of whose songs we heard.



Hal with Damian Lewis & Lara Cazalet

(Photo by Clive Barda)

Hal brought various friends along with him. In October, actress and musical performer Janie Dee sang for us, and Hal's sister, Lara, sang Wodehouse's best-known song, 'Bill'. We also met the fascinating composer and jazz performer Barbara Moore, now well into her 80s. Barbara is a terrific raconteur and brilliant pianist who had played with Dudley Moore and gave a very young Elton John, then an unknown called Reg, £9 cash-in-

hand to fill in for a missing choir member after hearing him singing through an open door at Olympic Studios in Barnes.

In February, on the second night of the run, we heard Lara again, and actor Damian Lewis guested, duetting with Hal in Sondheim's 'Agony' from *Into the Woods*. Damian also read Wodehouse's 'Printer's Error' memorably well. He and Hal had been flatmates in New York, where Hal was then studying.

These were extremely enjoyable evenings. Very much at home and in command on stage, Hal made an engaging host. With luck, he will be back at The Crazy Coqs soon, but already plans are afoot to take the show to New York – perhaps October this year, perhaps spring 2019 – for performances at Michael Feinstein's sophisticated cabaret venue 54 Below.

## Cosy Moments

***Dashing for the Post*, by Patrick Leigh Fermor (2016)**

(from Christopher Bellew)

In the introduction to this book, the editor, Adam Sisman, writes:

"He was the most English person I ever met," recalled Agnes 'Magouche' Philips, later Xan Fielding's second wife: "Everything was *ripping*, and there was more talk of PG Wodehouse than of Horace or Gibbon." Indeed Paddy himself was something of a Wodehouse hero, in his boyish manner, his innocence, his gentleness, his playfulness with language, his sense of fun, and his tendency to get into scrapes, particularly when driving.

***Ian Fleming*, by Andrew Lycett (2014)**

(from Barry Chapman)

Following a copyright-related court case that Fleming lost, he received commiserations from other authors, including John Betjeman, whose letter to Fleming is quoted: "The Bond world is

as real and full of fear as Conan Doyle's. I think the only other person to have invented a world in our time is Wodehouse. This is real art. I look up to you, old boy, rather as I look up to Uncle Tom Eliot and Wodehouse and H. Moore and I suppose Evelyn."

***The President's Hat*, by Antoine Laurain**

(English translation, 2013)

(from Carolyn de la Plain)

At the back of this book, which Carolyn describes as "small but charming", is an interview with the author. In the penultimate paragraph, Laurain is asked: "Which authors have had the greatest effect on you?" The last sentence of his answer was: "And I recently discovered P. G. Wodehouse's Jeeves series – brilliant!"

# A Plum Assignment

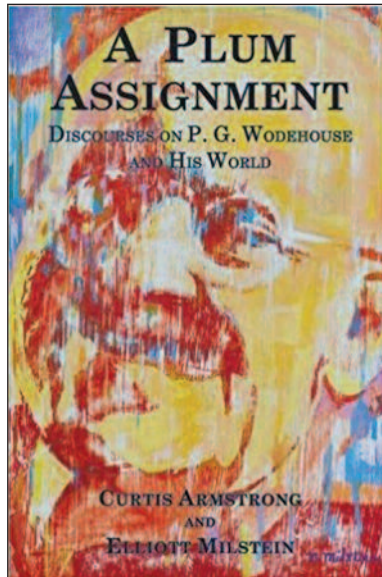
Graeme W. I. Davidson reviews a stellar new book

Curtis Armstrong, a fine American actor, and Elliott Milstein, a past president of The Wodehouse Society (TWS), are Wodehouse enthusiasts of long standing, have been chums for around four decades, and have shared a passion for, and an extensive knowledge of, the writings of Wodehouse for much of that time. They have individually and collectively long interested Wodehouse enthusiasts who attend TWS conventions in the USA as well as readers of *Plum Lines* and *Wooster Sauce*, wherein have been published discourses by Messrs Armstrong and Milstein on matters Wodehousian.

Now has come a publication that provides a wider world with a very straightforward access portal to some of their findings and commentaries. *A Plum Assignment: Discourses on P. G. Wodehouse and His World* was published in April this year by Winch and Clutterbuck, once the publishing house of quondam publisher J. Russell Clutterbuck, now the Pencil King of Bensonburg, Long Island, New York. It is a paperback, runs to some 196 pages, and includes a pleasing introductory foreword by our very own Elin Murphy as well as a 14-page appendix which, in robust defiance of apparent publishing convention for appendices, is a riveting read in itself, about which more later.

The volume houses, collected together for the first time, papers, presentations, and toasts by Messrs Armstrong and Milstein that have, over the decades, been delivered at Wodehouse conventions or shindigs, or published in Wodehouse journals. The main body of the book essentially consists of about a dozen papers, each written by either Armstrong or Milstein, and each typically preceded by a brief, chatty, and elegantly framed introduction by the other. The introductions are generously studded with little nuggets, knowing nods, and in-jokes; one of these, a gumshoe one, was silently redolent of stale smoke and rye, plus, of course, Old Alleynian Raymond Chandler.

The papers cover themes from the likes of the openings of the novels of PGW to a high-level overview study of Wodehouse's works (an abridged version of a university thesis by Milstein from some four decades ago), to the nature and development of that character essential to so many Wodehouse novels, the imposter (or impostress). There are humorous examinations of Nodders and other characters, an insider's view of *Laughing Gas*, a treatise on 'Wodehouse in a Changing World', and answers to key questions, such as 'Who is Bertie's closest chum?' – or, to use the argot of the writers, for they are American argotnauts, 'Who is Bertie's "BFF"?'



Milstein's paper on openings gives rise to the book's Appendix, which sets out the opening lines of PGW's novels, serving both as (a) a wonderful concentrated reminder of the fact that Wodehouse could so frequently, and so assuredly, start a book with the engine already purring and ready to draw the bookshop dawdler quickly to resolution to buy the book, and (b) a cheery prompt to us to revisit some novels that have too long gone un-reread for some wholly inexplicable reason, other than the absence of a handy prompt.

The great thing about books such as this one, which express not only analysis and findings but also views, is the glorious opportunity they afford

their readers to nod their heads smugly and happily in sage agreement or, equally smugly and happily, to shake their heads in astonished disagreement and mentally amble off in contented contemplation of their own thoughts on the matter under consideration.

Occasionally, and almost inevitably, the book contains a few proofing imperfections. Their inclusion in no way diminishes the overall sense of pleasure derived from the book, and indeed rather neatly and artfully prompts the reader to think back fondly and reflectively on Plum's own thoughts on such matters.

In the past we have had, and have celebrated, pairings who have achieved stellar heights. We have had Armstrong and Aldrin (admittedly, the heights attained by them being lunar rather than perhaps stellar). We have had Armstrong and Fitzgerald – Louis and Ella, that is – who too attained great heights, and did so without the cost and inconvenience of leaving the planet. And we have had the comedy team of Armstrong and Miller – Alexander and Ben – the former of whom now serves as our Society's President. To these pairings we must now add Armstrong and Milstein, for, with the publication of this splendid volume, we have a new pairing to attain great heights and to be celebrated for their achievement – and for their many years of friendship, without which this book would not have been possible.

So, go buy a copy and go on an ascent with these two coves, who are as entertaining as they are brainy, your hand held securely in theirs as they take you on a voyage where you will learn much or be helpfully and happily reminded of much. The book is priced at £12.50, and for my money that seems about as canny, informative, and entertaining a way of disbursing £12.50 out of the old oak-chest as I can readily instance.

*A Plum Assignment* is available on Amazon, Barnes and Noble, and other online retailers' websites.



# A Policeman's Helmet!

by Dean Miller



Driving my Toyota Camry westward across the state of Illinois, I am not unhappy to see, on the north side of Interstate 80, the familiar one-story bulk of the Peru Antiques Mall. Now, this section of my home state is not picturesque. Peru, Illinois, is not going to distract you with its scenic vistas or its homely charms. So far as I know, there is no other attraction worth a gape at or a stop in Peru, Illinois. The antiques mall – unless you have a hidden pash for feed-corn and soybean fields stretching to the far horizon – is *it*.

My late wife and I had stopped at this mart many times, and in fact we discovered rare and unusual objects, bibelots that simply begged to be bought and taken home. I cite the example of the banner, about a metre wide by two metres long and made of red silk, fringed, lettered in gilt, with the silhouettes of Marx and Lenin on one side, and on the other a text proclaiming (in Russian) that the glorious Communist Party was working diligently for the Victory of Communism. I mean, the Sons of the Red Dawn would have sold their (nonexistent, of course) souls and pawned their copies of *Das Kapital* to get their hands on this baby. We had to have it. It's displayed in the hall on the third floor of our house, and workmen who are up there for any reason tend to give it the fish-eye. How in the name of the Newt-God the banner came to rest at the Peru Antiques Mall I could not possibly tell you.

The mall is a big operation: at least 200 dealers, maybe more, have their various wares displayed in vitrines or in open areas for furniture or heavy pieces from Illinois antiquity (that is, a hundred years ago), and for years we observed the large spaces claimed by some dealer who must have the most severe case of Anglophilia in captivity. He or she (I have no idea who this dealer is) obviously gets to Great Britain often, with checkbook in hand or pounds sterling in wallet, and he or she does not return empty-handed. One space is devoted to burnished brass and copper bits and pieces, widgets and gadgets. A native Briton might be able to identify what they are when at home; it goes without saying that many Stately Homes have contributed their riches to this collection.

A second area, newly established, has costumes or, properly, regalia. There is a long-skirted red coat that I think belonged on a Chelsea Pensioner. There is a quilted tabard (not for sale) as worn by the corps of Royal Trumpeters. There is a mannequin wearing the full dress uniform of a Buckingham Palace sentry, complete with bearskin but without bayoneted rifle.

And on this occasion there are displayed three British policeman's helmets – for sale.

"For sale!" My Scots blood bubbled over at the words. "For sale!"

Any sentient Wodehousian will know the significance of the policeman's helmet, the icon of public order. On Boat Race Night the younger Drones (the brigade of chinless wonders) are more or less obligated by ancient custom to try to knock off or steal policemen's, or Bobbies' helmets. Policemen's helmets exercise a strange magnetic effect on these bozos, and they are overcome with the desire to illicitly seize and carry off one of these helmets.

Since they (the Drones in question) are invariably fried to the gills at the time (insert any other of PGW's impressive volley of synonyms for a paralytic drunken state), they fail ingloriously and so are nicked, inevitably ending up in Boshier Street Police Court. There they, the delinquent Drones, have to appear before a teetotal magistrate, and the grim beak gazes upon them with scarcely concealed disgust and aversion and hits them athwart the hawsehole with a sentence, if they are unlucky and they usually are, of thirty days without the option. And the next voice they hear is that of an oleaginous and noxious turnkey saying: "Will you be occupying the dungeon suite or the oubliette, sir?"

I see it and want it and buy it (for less than a century note, plus tax), and here I am with a real Brit Policeman's Helmet! Aha!

I examine the specimen. I have chosen the one with the legend 'West Midlands' on the immaculate silver-gilt hat badge, so that is Birmingham and environs – not Plum's (or the Drones') usual helmet-hunting grounds, true. But who cares? The helmet itself – unused, original and official issue – is sturdily made of a layer of black felt a quarter-inch thick, and that would be proof against a pretty healthy bop. The chinstrap goes beneath the lower lip, not under the chin, because that placement could allow an evil-intended job or wide boy to garrotte the copper with his own chinstrap.

So I have a prize – such a prize – and I wear it with pride at a subsequent meeting of the Chicago Accident Syndicate, held at Dan and Tina Garrison's, where this artefact is greatly admired and photos are taken, so there is irrefutable proof of the triumph. The helmet now sits on the bronze bonce of the bust of my late wife's son John Swift, a bust John himself created and cast, and a very handsome bronze it is, too.

I have a British policeman's helmet, excavated from an antiques mall in Peru, Illinois, and I didn't have to assault a copper to get it. Boshier Street Police Court will not see my face nor hear my plaintive plea. There may be those Brits who say, "Here's a Yank boldly making off with our cultural heritage" but I cock a snook at them, don the helmet, and say:

"Ullo 'ullo 'ullo, wot's all this then?"

That's what *I'll* say.

# My PGW Collection

by Mike Swaddling

Your PGW collection is not just a lot of books by your favourite author. It's a collection of memories, too.

Naturally, my own has always taken pride of place in my 'library'. It was in our old house that I started to build it, and as a result it was distributed randomly across the various bookshelves dotted around the house. When my wife and I recently moved to our new abode, one very important part of the refurbishment was to have a custom-made Wodehouse 'corner', and three stylish tailor-made shelves (pictured below and next page) were duly constructed and installed by a carpenter friend.



And it was while standing back and congratulating myself on my good idea, and applauding my friend's workmanship, that I realised that many of the books had another story behind them, in how they were acquired or where I read them.

When Everyman announced back in 2000 that they were going to reprint the entire oeuvre, there were no doubt many who welcomed the opportunity to have the full set in the latest 'livery'. Not me. I love the fact that my Wodehouse collection is a mish-mash of editions, roughly evenly shared between Herbert Jenkins, Penguin, Arrow, and Everyman, plus a healthy contribution from 'miscellaneous'.

I entered the world of Wodehouse through the door marked 'Jeeves & Wooster', and these comprise the Penguin section. My most abiding memory of this period is falling out of a hammock in the garden laughing at *The Code of the Woosters*. This was my epiphany, and the start of a search for a definitive list of all of the books written by this master of my mother tongue. It took a few years before I actually found one in which I had confidence, given to me by one N. Murphy.

I think the section I had most fun acquiring was the Herbert Jenkins (two of which, I've only just noticed, are actually a Methuen and a Newnes, but they look the same from a distance). At the time, I was working in a town that had a couple of second-

hand bookshops, which seemed to have a regular supply line of the orange- or green-spined hardbacks. I would slide in regularly of a lunchtime to see what new stock they had, and unsurprisingly these were the days when I was not always back to the office on time.

This was Phase 2 of my acquisition trail, and it was during this time that I really started to feel the need for that list, so that I could tick off the ones I had. I was already picking up some books and feeling uncertain whether I already had them. Looking at the first few pages was of no help, either, due to the reappearance of various characters. What I needed was to carry the list around with me, but it was to be well into the future before I remembered to do that.

With the fun came the excitement of finding one unticked on the master list. On weekends away in other towns, the other half and I would split up at the end of the High Street, and while she made a beeline for the fabric shops, I would hotfoot it to the purveyors of second-hand reading material. On one auspicious occasion in Stroud, I emerged with a record haul of four new acquisitions.

Two general memories remain from this period. The first was that the booksellers, who were invariably very likeable people, always seemed happy to talk about Wodehouse. The second was wishing on occasion that our man could have been called Bodehouse so that I didn't have to squat on the floor, often in a tight space, to get a look at the authors on the bottom shelf.

These were the books that also threw up another avenue of interest, namely inscriptions. In my 1928 edition of *The Prince and Betty*, the inside front cover bears the simple words "Please return". They probably just meant the book, but maybe it's a heartfelt plea from a jilted lover to his ex-flame to come back to him. 'Auntie Annie', 'Uncle Bill', 'Billy', and 'Grandma' all clubbed together to buy *Uncle Fred in the Springtime* for some lucky recipient, and at some time in the future someone is going to open a Hutchinson edition of *Big Money* and find a message from my wife to me on my birthday.

A special mention should also be made of a small number of books that used to belong to John Fletcher, the original website editor for the Society, which I gratefully accepted when his wife offered them after his death to anyone interested. *Jill the Reckless* is full of red underlines and a page and a half of scribbled notes inside the front. I still haven't quite worked out their full significance – they are either



inconsistencies or simply points that interested him – but either way they make a story behind the book.

My Arrow and Everyman editions were mainly obtained through a certain rather large internet site named after a South American river, the Everyman in particular being used to plug the gaps in that list as I neared the finishing line.



My latest acquisitions are probably the ones that have given me most pride. I am one book short (*Aunts Aren't Gentlemen*) into possessing the full set of the superb Folio Society editions (pictured above) illustrated by Paul Cox, which to me are living justification of my belief that books are not just for reading, but have an ornamental value as well. The *Full Moon* of this series did a lot to ease my trepidation while I sat in an NHS cubicle in nothing but a flimsy theatre gown waiting to be wheeled in

for a hernia operation! I'll bet the nurses don't hear too many people chuckling away to themselves in that situation.

Finally, the most recent addition to the bookshelf marked PGW may indicate a whole new direction – literally. In an issue of *Wooster Sauce* a couple of years ago, I related the story of how I found a huge display of the Penguin editions with covers by Ironicus in a bookshop in Budapest. My Hungarian being pretty negligible, I picked one with Bertie Wooster in the title (*Bertie Wooster allja a sarat* translates, so Google tells me, as 'Bertie Wooster holds his own').

So although I wasn't entirely sure what I brought back from Budapest, it did give me a new mission and ultimately maybe a need for a new bookshelf – to house the foreign language editions I would buy on future travels abroad. Since then I've drawn a blank in Lisbon and St Petersburg, but I've still got my carpenter friend standing by – the collection isn't finished yet. Of books or memories.

*Do you have a story to tell about your own collection? Then send it in to the Editor, as we hope this will be the start of a new and interesting series.*

## The Word Around the Clubs

### *Truly A Beautiful World*

The February 26th edition of *The Guardian* carried an article by the psychologist and science author Steven Pinker on 'books to make you an optimist'. The subheading?: "There's hope for the environment, human progress is dazzling and the world, according to PG Wodehouse, is beautiful". In this piece, Pinker describes books that deal optimistically with heavy subjects such as hunger, poverty, armed conflict, morality, and more. But for his conclusion, he turns – naturally! – to Our Hero:

[T]he best paean to optimism in the English language is in PG Wodehouse's *Right Ho, Jeeves*. In his climactic speech at the Market Snodsbury Grammar School, Gussie Fink-Nottle ticks off "the fellow with a face rather like a walnut" who said the world was in a deplorable state. "Don't talk rot," advises Fink-Nottle. "It is a beautiful world. The sky is blue, the birds are singing." After reading Wodehouse, who could disagree?

(Thanks to ROBERT BRUCE)

### *Not a Very Cosy Moment*

In *The Wind of Change* (2013), Chris Bray, a retired columnist for *The Independent*, uses Wodehouse characters to illustrate backgammon technique. Jeeves, Wooster, Oofy Prosser, the Drones Club, Brinkley Court, Madeline (misspelled as 'Madeleine') Bassett, Aunt Dahlia, and Sir Roderick Glossop all appear, albeit without any attribution to Wodehouse. KAREN SHOTTING spotted this one, and her opinion of the book has a hint of disapproval: "While it may

work as a backgammon instruction manual, as a Wodehouse pastiche it fails miserably, at least from the excerpts I saw."

### *An Unusual Pairing*

Society member TOM TRAVIS informs us that in January this year he published a book entitled *Asylum: P. G. Wodehouse Meets St. Paul*. The description of the book on Amazon.com reads: "P.G. Wodehouse is imprisoned with St. Paul and some of his Christian followers in what used to be an asylum for the mentally ill. Whilst attempting to liven up life in their windowless cell, they find themselves staging a variety show at a local amphitheatre. Philosophical and theological discussion are at the centre of this humorous and unlikely meeting of characters." The book can be purchased in bookshops and from online retailers.

### *Wooster in Myanmar*

Member BARRY CHAPMAN writes that on 18 October 2017, he watched a TV programme from 2014 entitled *Extreme Railway Journeys*. The episode he saw concerned a rail journey from Thailand to Myanmar, travelled and presented by Chris Tarrant. While in Thazi, Myanmar, Tarrant went to look at some items of historic railway interest, dating from the time of the British Raj. As he passed a characteristic English hotel along the way, he commented, "Well, just call me Bertie Wooster." Barry writes that Tarrant "then proceeded to enjoy a traditional afternoon tea, brought to him by a waiter, at a table in the hotel grounds".

# Unhappy Eyes on the Prize

On 16 May, as this issue of *Wooster Sauce* was being prepared, the Press was buzzing with headlines such as

**Wodehouse prize for comic fiction withheld after judges fail to laugh**

and

**Comic fiction award on hold because 2018 entries 'aren't funny enough'**

And more besides!

It was all true. For the first time in its 18-year history, the Bollinger Wodehouse Prize for Comic Fiction would not be awarded because none of the 62 novels submitted were deemed to have been humorous enough to make all the judges laugh out loud. So there will be no presentation of champagne, Everyman books, and a pig at this year's Hay Festival. O tempora, what?

Needless to say, literary commentators leapt on this sad state of affairs with resounding speed. Under the headline 'Funny book prize fiasco is no joke', the *Evening Standard* noted that the funniest novel of the year was *Bob Honey Who Just Do Stuff* by Sean Penn – disqualified because Penn is American and his book was actually "a serious attempt at a detective story". Meanwhile, in *The Spectator*, Sam Leith – whose novel *The Coincidence Engine* was shortlisted for the prize in 2011 – asked, "Is the comic novel dead?" While critical of the indiscriminate awarding of prizes these days, Leith also wondered: "Is there really not a single novel published this year funny enough to merit a pig?" Apparently not, but Leith speculated that next year's pig would be twice the size as a result.

Two other commentators took more jaundiced views of the situation. In *The Guardian*, Jonathan McAloon muttered that "the best comedy is found in dark, unhappy novels". He named several examples of comic novels published in the last 12 months that were rooted in depressingly serious subject matter, pointing out that this was contrary to the Wodehouse *raison d'être*. (Unfortunately, McAloon also made grossly inaccurate statements about PGW's time in Germany, apparently having not checked his facts as he should have done.)

In the *Financial Times*, Viv Groskop's opinion was that the Bollinger judges had failed "to uphold the spirit of P G Wodehouse". Groskop quoted the *Washington Post's* view of the matter – "Grumpy Brits can't find a funny novel this year" – and wondered whether the problem was not with the novels but with the judges. She pointed out: "The urge to hold writers to the standard of P G Wodehouse is understandable. But it is also unrealistic. He was writing during the heyday of the comic novel, alongside Noël Coward and E F Benson, but the genre has now become diluted and is generally regarded in publishing circles as unmarketable and old-fashioned." Dash it, can such things be?

Here at *Wooster Sauce*, we invite comment from our readers. Is the comic novel dead? Is it possible to live up to the Wodehouse standard these days? Or was the mould broken for good when he died? Let us know what you think.

Meanwhile, there is good news for next year's contenders. According to Everyman publisher David Campbell, the prize for 2019 will be doubled: "We will be awarding a methuselah of Bollinger, instead of a magnum." Let's just hope the judges find something to laugh about!

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## Brandreth on Wodehouse

In February this year, the writer and broadcaster Gyles Brandreth sent out a small blast of tweets quoting PGW, of which these were spotted and sent in by CAROLINE FRANKLYN.



**Gyles Brandreth (@GylesB1)**

14/02/2018, 09:22

My wife's favourite Wodehouse quotation (on the anniversary of the day he died): "And she's got brains enough for two, which is the exact quantity the girl who marries you will need."  
– P.G. Wodehouse, *Mostly Sally*

17/02/2018, 10:00

Yes, Wodehouse is the master. Here's a useful PG tip: "I always advise people never to give advice."

17/02/2018, 09:58

"There are moments, Jeeves, when one asks oneself, 'Do trousers matter?'"  
"The mood will pass, sir."  
– P.G. Wodehouse, *The Code of the Woosters*

19/02/2018, 09:37

P G Wodehouse tells it as it is: "At the age of eleven or thereabouts women acquire a poise and an ability to handle difficult situations which a man, if he is lucky, manages to achieve somewhere in the later seventies."

18/02/2018, 07:22

Advice from P G Wodehouse on Sunday: "It is a good rule in life never to apologise. The right sort of people do not want apologies, and the wrong sort take a mean advantage of them."

# My First Wodehouse Experience

by Jonathan Hopson

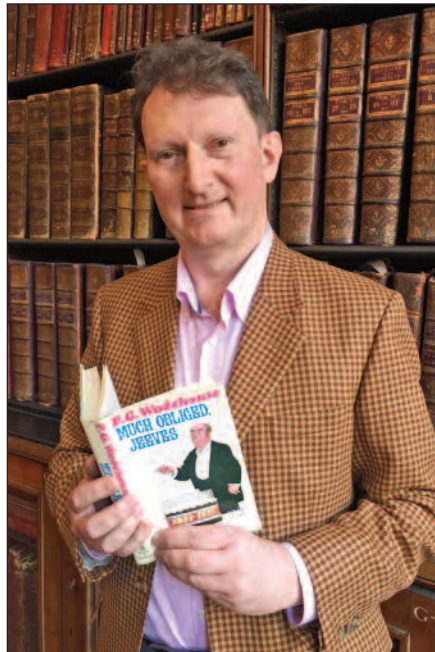
While reading Jonathan Coe’s article ‘Fearful No More’ (*Wooster Sauce*, September 2017), I experienced one of those madeleine-in-the-tea moments of intense nostalgia. Suddenly I was transported to my mid-1970s childhood, watching the BBC television series *Wodehouse Playhouse*. The early episodes were introduced by the author himself, presumably filmed shortly before his death in 1975. Aged 93, he was certainly the oldest man I had ever seen, and, though awed and impressed, I fear I was callous enough to compare him to Davros, the wizened, mobility-impaired, mad-scientist creator of the Daleks who was then terrifying young viewers of *Dr Who* at Saturday teatime.

Nevertheless, as my father assured me that Wodehouse was simply one of the funniest writers ever to sharpen a pencil, I settled down before the box and was not disappointed. I have never seen the series repeated, so cannot judge how well it stands up today, but I still remember it fondly as the adaptation that best captures the playful spirit of Wodehouse. ‘The Smile That Wins’ looms in my memory as a particularly good episode.

My enthusiasm kindled, I set about reading the works themselves. In those halcyon days, even small villages on the Welsh borders enjoyed the amenity of a public library with a varied and pleasingly eccentric selection of books. On the shelves marked W, I found several suitable volumes, including a 1967 first edition of *Company for Henry*, an Autograph Edition copy of *The Girl in the Boat*, and a 1950s reprint of *Mike and Psmith*. However, on the recommendation of my father (a schoolmaster of the old school), I made my debut with *The Little Nugget*. Hardly vintage, but I enjoyed this adventure of transatlantic kidnapers well enough to persevere. Attracted by its title, I next took up *Something Fresh*, and it’s fair to say I haven’t put Wodehouse down since. It remains a firm favourite, and I regard the scene of Baxter’s late-night encounter with the ‘nameless horror’ (a plate of cold tongue) as one of PGW’s finest and funniest.

Such humour obviously drew me to Wodehouse, but as I read on, I gradually became aware of other

qualities, namely style and structure. He was the first writer to teach me that the manner of the telling mattered as much as the tale itself, and a love of language at play has shaped my reading ever since.



Once I had exhausted the local library’s resources, I was ready to embark upon another lifelong pursuit: that of book collecting. My timing was fortunate in that the 1970s was the golden age of Wodehouse in paperback. I refer, of course, to the series of Ionicus covers for Penguin, which to my mind have never been bettered for their lovingly detailed, classical elegance. They manage to convey a sense of that entire idyllic world which can never stale (to paraphrase Evelyn Waugh’s back-cover blurb). My first Ionicus was *Jeeves in the Offing*, and I quickly realised I had chosen a quarry more

satisfying than postage stamps and football stickers. Collecting Penguins also sharpened my interest in typography, as I developed a taste for the flamboyance of Baskerville, Bembo, Garamond, and Granjon typefaces, in preference to the sober functionality of Linotype and Monotype Times.

The pleasures of reading and collecting Wodehouse have brought me other benefits. By the age of 16 I had read enough to attempt the *Sunday Times* Wodehouse quiz (set by the late Godfrey Smith), winning a bottle of Bollinger for my efforts. Familiarity with the foibles of the English upper classes gave me the confidence, as a provincial comprehensive school pupil, to apply for Oxford and gain a place at Magdalen (Bertie Wooster’s old college), where I inhabited Compton Mackenzie’s old rooms and was tutored in history by the distinguished Wodehouse scholar Angus Macintyre.

Sadly, I have since failed to achieve the blissfully idle status of a drone or knut-about-town, but my bibliophilic interests have enabled me to find (just about gainful) employment in the National Art Library, a department of the Victoria and Albert Museum devoted to the art, craft, and design of the book. Meanwhile, life in London provides the congenial society of fellow aficionados and cognoscenti to occupy those leisure hours not spent with a volume of peerless comic prose in hand.

She came leaping towards me, like Lady Macbeth coming to get first-hand news from the guest room.

(From *Joy in the Morning*, 1946)

# Cops and Robbers, and Other Hairy Tales

by Noel Bushnell

In 1934, P. G. Wodehouse had his name attached as editor to a collection of short stories titled *A Century of Humour*. This tome runs to 1,024 pages, and as Wodehouse notes in his preface: “It is not, of course, for women and weaklings, who will be unable to lift it.” He thought perhaps a “retired circus strong man who has not let his muscles get flabby” would not regret straining a bit: “I think this collection may be considered quite fairly representative.”

Further: “There are things in this book which I have not read since I was at school, but they have lingered with me down the years and when the call came to select up they bobbed. One never quite forgets a story that has made one laugh.”

Plum also never forgot a story that he could, er, adapt for his own use, as he often and freely discussed. He wrote to Bill Townend in 1935, for example: “I have now got a new system for writing short stories. I take a *Saturday Evening Post* story and say ‘now, how can I write exactly the same story but entirely different?’”

So I was more bemused than startled when, having deployed my handy household crane to shift the volume from shelf to bedside, I came across a couple of stories in *A Century of Humour* that had bits of plotlines in common with later Wodehouse yarns. M’Lud, ladies and gentlemen of the jury, I present the following exhibits, call them A and B, respectively: ‘Spare a Penny’ by F. E. Baily on page 87 and ‘The Refugees’ by Barry Pain on page 449.

Let me begin with Exhibit A. This is a complex tale featuring Bright Young Things of the Jazz Age, more reminiscent of Anthony Powell or Evelyn Waugh than of Wodehouse, but the central character, Lady Lisa Heaven, is a kind of elegant Bobbie Wickham. No need to go into the intricacies of the plot, but at one point she remarks to another character, a Detective-Inspector Snatchley, that he doesn’t *seem* like a policeman. He wears a Savile Row suit and an Old Hartonian tie, and has “the quiet confidence of one accustomed to mixing in good society”.

Inspector Snatchley produced a gold cigarette-case and offered it. “You see, Lady Lisa, things have changed in the Force. . . . I assure you that today in nine cases out of ten a policeman’s uniform is no bluer than his blood.”

It is later revealed that his nickname, carried from school, is Trousers.

Readers of these pages will be right up with me now. Of course I am drawing a parallel with the curious case of G. D’Arcy ‘Stilton’ Cheesewright, once of Eton and Oxford and now of Steeple Bumbleigh, where he is the resident copper in *Joy in the Morning*. “Half the men you know go into the police nowadays,” Stilton tells Bertie – and Bertie explains: “This was undoubtedly true. Since they started that College at Hendon, the Force has become congested with one’s old buddies.” Stilton has ambitions of “getting into Scotland Yard and rising to great heights” in his profession.

In October 1932, Wodehouse wrote to Dennis Mackail: “Incidentally did you read the story in this month’s *Strand* by F.E. Baily called Spare a Penny?”

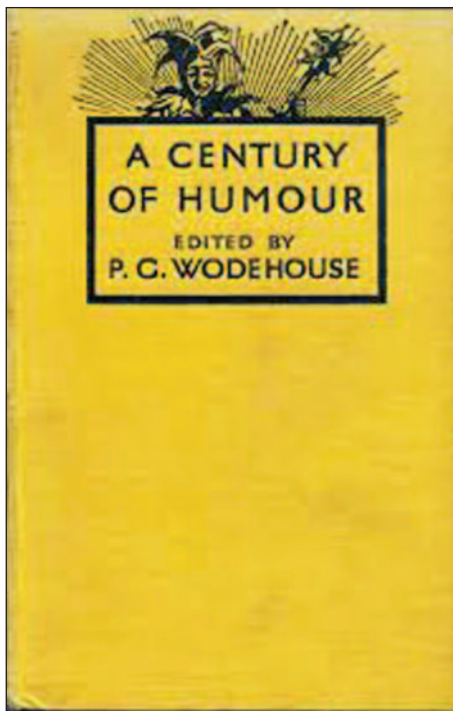
It gave me a nasty shock, being about twice as good as anything I’ve ever written. I hope he isn’t going to go on in that vein. Thank goodness, most of the stuff he writes isn’t funny. But *Spare a Penny* is great.”

Here’s the timeline. Plum reads ‘Spare a Penny’ in 1932; he includes it in *A Century of Humour* in 1934; he begins writing and almost finishes *Joy in the Morning* before being interned in 1940; he finishes *Joy* in Germany after being released and has it published in England in 1946. I’m not saying village bluebottle Stilton Cheesewright is thus proven to be in the direct bloodline of Trousers Snatchley of the Yard, but you’d have to concede the circumstantial evidence is strong.

There’s a bit more than a pennyworth in this tale. The lovely Lady Lisa has a father, Lord Tombs, who luxuriates in a beard down to his waist. Alas, another visitor to Lady Lisa has a beard reaching almost to his knees. This “human wind-vane” speaks through a “thick natural entanglement” which conceals his mouth. Lord Tombs spots the interloper and his longer beard:

“I consider it damned bad form, and in my own house, too,” Lord Tombs said coldly, and went out again.

This is more the germ of an idea than anything else, I suppose, but it surely looks like at least a possible inspiration for ‘Buried Treasure’, a 1936



Mulliner story that's collected in *Lord Emsworth and Others* (1937). This, you'll remember, is the story of Mr Mulliner's artist nephew, Brancepeth, and his encounter with the phenomenon of duelling moustaches in the rural districts of England:

"Life has not much to offer in the way of excitement to men who are buried in the country all the year round, so for want of anything better to do they grow moustaches at each other," said Mr Mulliner. "Most of the vintage moustaches nowadays are to be found in Norfolk and Suffolk. I suppose the keen, moist sea air brings them on."

I go now to Exhibit B, 'The Refugees' by Barry Pain. Plum says in his preface: "I have not looked at that since it first appeared in *Punch*. Circ. 1900, it was . . . but I remembered it without an effort." And it leapt off the page for me because of one thing. A character is telling a story of how he committed a burglary:

"In another pocket, I had a small bottle of treacle and a sheet of brown paper. . . . I found a likely window, spread the treacle over the brown paper, put that on one pane, and then smashed it with my fist. Of course, as the broken glass stuck to the paper there was no sound."

This brought me back immediately to *Joy in the Morning*, which I had just finished rereading. Bertie gets conned into faking a burglary. Boko Fittleworth, a writer of spine-chilling mysteries, wants to know whether he has the treacle and the paper:

The treacle idea was Boko's. . . . According to him, and he is a chap who has studied these things, the knowledgeable burglar's first act is to equip himself with treacle and brown paper. He glues the latter to the window by means of the former, and then hauls off and busts the glass with a sharp buffet of the fist.

Bertie is inveigled into repeating the trick in the short story 'Jeeves Makes an Omelette' (1959).

Barry Pain may or may not have been the source of this piece of felonry. It could have been any one of a number of writers around the turn of the 20th century, including E. W. Hornung, who had the gentleman burglar Raffles treacle-up regularly. Wodehouse was a fan of both and played cricket with Hornung and his brother-in-law, Arthur Conan Doyle. Indeed, I can't even be certain Wodehouse left it until 1940 to go trick-or-treaciling. Given his love of burglarising, it might be elsewhere in the canon and I just can't find it.

One further thing. Over the years I've often wondered just how genuine the treacle-and-brown-paper scenario was. I mean, I know Plum pirated stuff from everywhere, but did real burglars ever do it? The answer is emphatically yes.

I turned up from [www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org) a report of the trial on 19 July 1909 of one Curtis, Albert Edward (22, stoker), on a charge of

attempted burglary in the dwelling-house of William Irons, with intent to steal therein; being found by night, having in his possession, without lawful excuse, certain implements of housebreaking – to wit, one glass-cutter, one knife, one sheet of brown paper, and one bottle containing treacle.

Detective Sergeant John Marshall and Detective Joseph Payne both testified that treacle and brown paper were commonly used for deadening the sound of broken glass. Unlike the treacle, however, the two prototype Trousers Snatchley couldn't make the charge stick, and Albert Curtis was acquitted.

Why treacle? I suppose there must be good technical reasons for preferring this particular icky-sticky goo over similar viscous substances, such as paste, for example. Why brown paper? Why not, say, newspaper? Too thin and absorbent, perhaps?

Wodehouse claimed in an essay included in *Louder and Funnier* (1932) that his books were popular in American penitentiaries. He had had so many letters from these institutions that he was "beginning to think that the American criminal must look on one or more of my works as an essential part of his kit". He envisioned the criminal's mother putting "Wodehouse novel" in the checklist of his equipment for the night's job, then reminding him:

"Remember what your dear father used to say: Tread lightly, read your Wodehouse, and don't fire until you see the whites of their eyes."

Inexplicably, there is no mention of treacle and brown paper. I guess some things just don't cross the Atlantic well. At least until *Joy in the Morning* was published in the US in 1949. It might be worthwhile checking the crime stats to see whether



there was an upsurge after that date in burglaries per medium of windows broken in an exotic way.

## Another Cosy Moment

*A Man of Some Repute*, by Elizabeth Edmondson (2015)  
(from Ken Clevenger)

In chapter 21 of this whodunit, the author has a Roman Catholic priest "laughing at some antics in the busy life of the Empress of Blandings" in *Heavy Weather*. The body of Lord Selchester had been found buried under the Old Chapel flagstones in the castle, and in one scene the priest

and the late Earl's niece are clearing out his study. The priest notes, "I don't think of Lord Selchester being a Wodehouse man." The niece replies, "He wasn't." She goes on: "He said Wodehouse was an irredeemably middle-class writer whose view of the upper classes was entirely bourgeois." The niece then adds, significantly: "My uncle had no sense of humour." Ken writes that the book "is pretty well written in terms of descriptive narration, character, plot development, and dialogue. The author pays a compliment to Agatha Christie as well. One imagines Plum liking it, if he had read it."

# P. G. Wodehouse: The Undercover Satirist

by Arunabha Sengupta

Now, touching upon P. G. ‘Plum’ Wodehouse, it irks me to hear it repeated so often by so many smug, pedantic, opinionated ‘scholars’ in their pompous, patronising tones that he had no message. Whispers still seem to go around the lofty confines of the highbrow literary circles: “Wodehouse, yes. Jolly good chap. Solid fellow when it comes to puncturing hot-water bottles and describing chinless peers with their salver-carrying butlers. But throw him into the unforgiving seas of the real world and he will be thrashing about, all arms and legs, hardly managing to stay afloat. You see, he did not have a message.”

And, so saying, the literary cove dives into the next important novel of our times, with his remarkable capacity to convert obscure, meaningless rambling into striking symbolism of depravity in the modern world and all that absolute rot.

Yes, Wodehouse did not charge at you with ‘the message’ held as a battering ram. His intent was not to bellow his message and scatter all the weak souls who dared to indulge in reading just to have a corker of a good time. Plot, to him, was not just pretty garnishing around the all-important ‘deep meaningful essence’. That was just not his style.

As Plum himself pointed out, “There are two ways of writing a novel. One is making a sort of musical comedy without music and ignoring real life altogether; the other is going deep down into life and not caring a damn.”

That was Plum all over. Wisdom trickled without a hint of self-consciousness from the serene stream of self-effacing humility. It did not storm through like a raging tornado out of the deep deadly dimensions of a self-important mind.

If we think about it, perception in the passing, disguised as stray thoughts, is perhaps the highest form of wisdom. Plum did not write novels and short stories because he wanted to use them as footnotes to *that Great Preface*, or as the necessary evil of sugar coating for bitter pills designed to cure the human race of some malignant spiritual disease or other. He just wanted to make people laugh. One may mention in passing here that laughter has often been acknowledged as the best medicine.

He claimed to ignore real life, and he did so in much of his works. He did not go into the deep intricacies of human relationship, the moral dilemmas of truth and falsehood, of finding a reason to live and

the meaning of it all. Yet he wrote about a world that was as real as any other. According to the momentous researches of Norman Murphy, most of Wodehouse’s fiction was built on verifiable blocks of fact.

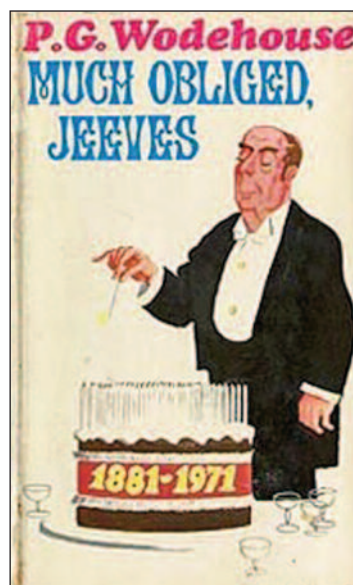
Plum took those facts as clay in his hand and constructed comic sculptures on paper. He produced laughter – that ingredient so absent in the mad rush of modern times; that faculty which perhaps marks the distinction between human beings and other life forms. Yes, he did not wrestle with the reasons to live and the meaning of life. But he produced work that became bona-fide reasons to live and laugh.

Sometimes real life did creep in as an ingredient in the tales, rather than as the theme, reflecting wisdom gleaned from that reality. And since humour was his medium and real life one of the several brushes, sometimes they combined to produce streaks of satire that can be found in the tapestry of his plots. These satirical elements did not form the framework of his works, but they were delicate veins that ran through the body; sometimes palpable, sometimes concealed, but always performing a function.

Never is this so apparent than in the modern days, with the US elections, Brexit, and peculiarities of several leaders of nations around the globe sending the planet into a frenzied fanatical deluge of opinions and arguments across traditional and social media.

In this context, let us revisit Bertie Wooster in *Much Obligated, Jeeves*, sharing this fascinating piece of wisdom. Informed by Jeeves that the debate between Mr Winship and his opponent is to take place at quarter to seven, and would go on for an hour, Bertie informs his valet that he would be back at about seven-thirty. “The great thing in life, Jeeves, if we wish to be happy and prosperous, is to miss as many political debates as possible.” Never have these words rung out so true as they do now.

We may tarry here to note that this particular novel was published in 1971, when Wodehouse was 90. If ever a sentence crystallised the learnings of a long, happy, and prosperous life, it was this one.



Both satire and wisdom are found in this book.

However, Plum never came across as didactic or preachy. Even this great piece of advice, which the human race will do well to follow in these times, was mouthed by his perpetually bungling, dim-witted hero. And there are gems like this spread across his works in fine streaks, modest, inconspicuous, but ready to be discovered.

Is it not satire mingled with real life that makes Mr Mulliner describe a civil servant in the following words:

“As Egbert from boyhood up had shown no signs of possessing any intelligence whatsoever, he had gravitated naturally to England’s civil service, where all that was required of him was to drink tea at four o’clock and between lunch and four to do the Times crossword puzzle.”

Or take the summary of the ‘reader’ in a publishing establishment, whom every diligent collector of rejections slips has to encounter through his journey in life and literature:

Every Saturday morning [movie magnate Ivor Llewellyn] was paying out good money to his wife’s cousin Egbert’s sister Genevieve — who, much as he doubted her ability to read at all, was in the Reading Department of the Superba-Llewellyn at a cool three hundred and fifty dollars a week.  
(*The Luck of the Bodkins*, 1935)

These insights into the world rise from the depths of the soul, crystallised by experience and mellowed by the sweetness and light of the Wodehousean nature. Satire was present in his work in light strokes, a remark on the side rather than the tone and voice of his tales. They did not cut one to the quick, but merely tickled one to laughter.

In *The Merchant of Venice*, another humorist was described with the following words: “Gratiano speaks an infinite deal of nothing, more than any man in all Venice. His reasons are as two grains of wheat hid in two bushels of chaff: you shall seek all day ere you find them, and when you have them, they are not worth the search.”

Wodehouse is at the other end of the jocular spectrum. The volume of his works does amount to near infinity, but it is perhaps the nothingness that serves as balm for disturbed times, lending itself to charge us back into motion just like the spokes of a wheel. Like Gratiano’s reason, two grains of Wodehousean wisdom have to be sought out of a sheaf of pages, but the pages are far from bushels of chaff. They are delightful collections of lyrical language, magical metaphors, and uncontrollable mirth.

Even if we somehow end up not finding the little nuggets of satire, the search is always worth it.

“You’re too clever for one man. You ought to incorporate.”  
(From *If I Were You*, 1931)

## Wodehouse on the Boards

After what seemed to be a bit of a dry spell for Wodehouse in the theatre world, it is reassuring to see so many new productions having taken place recently and coming up soon. Rarely reported in *Wooster Sauce* are the plays that the American Margaret Raether has adapted from many of Wodehouse’s most beloved stories. Frequently performed at regional theatres throughout the United States, the four plays she has written thus far are entitled *Jeeves Intervenes*, *Jeeves in Bloom*, *Jeeves Takes a Bow*, and *Jeeves at Sea*. Online reviews, plus reviews published in The Wodehouse Society’s journal, *Plum Lines*, indicate her adaptations are highly enjoyable and hugely successful whenever and wherever they are performed. Let’s hope that someday we get to see them in the UK as well (and elsewhere in the world, for that matter).

In the December 2017 issue of *Wooster Sauce*, we informed members of a new play adapted from PGW’s golf stories, written by Jon Glover and Edward Taylor. As you read this, *Love on the Links* is nearing the end of its run at the Salisbury Playhouse, and we know of many members who intend to see it; one has promised a review for our next issue (hurrah). There may still be tickets left, so waste no time and order yours now. Go to [goo.gl/QfmHxd](http://goo.gl/QfmHxd) for more information.

In other news, *Jeeves and Wooster in Perfect Nonsense* – David and Robert Goodale’s hit adaptation based mostly on *The Code of the Woosters* – is popping up on both sides of the



Atlantic this year and next. From May 24 to October 27, 2018, theatregoers in the Lake District will be able to see the play at the Theatre by the Lake in Keswick. In Lincolnshire, *Perfect Nonsense* will have a short run at the Stamford Shoestring Theatre Company, September 11–15, 2018. And the play will see its North American premiere at the Hartford Stage in Hartford, Connecticut, from March 21 to April 14, 2019. That production will be directed by the play’s original West End director, Sean Foley. All of these productions are listed in Future Events on page 24, including website addresses for obtaining tickets and further information.

Finally, looking even further ahead, there will be a new production of *A Damsel in Distress*, written by Ian Hay and P. G. Wodehouse, at the Whitefield Garrick Theatre in Bury, outside Manchester. Performances will take place May 11–18, 2019, and the Director, Andrew Close, is keen to meet Society members who attend this production, so be sure to get in touch if you plan to go.

As ever, we would welcome reviews of any theatre productions, so please sharpen those pencils and let us know what you think. Additionally, if you’re aware of any Wodehouse production we’ve overlooked, let the Editor know about it. Happy theatregoing!

# A Wodehouse Sampler in Clerihews

## From A to Z (excluding Q & X)

by S. Subramanian

### A

Aunt **Agatha**, Bertie's kin,  
Wears barbed wire next to her skin.  
A superior person of the upper class,  
She favours a diet of broken glass.

### B

Sebastian **Beach**  
Is among butlers a peach.  
Before addressing toffs,  
He discreetly coughs.

### C

Lady Florence **Craye**,  
Bertie's bound to say,  
Will not meetcha  
Halfway on Nietzsche.

### D

The kitchen of Aunt **Dahlia**  
Would be a complete failure  
Without the soul  
Of her cook Anatole.

### E

**Empress** of Blandings  
Requires calibrated handling:  
Fifty seven point eight thousand cal's  
Is the diet of this slender gal's.

### F

Lady Julia **Fish**  
Has a frequent wish  
Not to be pally  
With her brother Gally.

### G

Is Sir Roderick **Glossop** –  
This is a toss-up –  
A worse toad  
Than Roderick Spode?

### H

With **Honor**ia Glossop –  
Another toss-up:  
Which is more ghastly, by half –  
Her tennis, her Freud, or her frightful laugh?

### I

Frederick Cornwallis Twistleton **Ickenham**  
Is known in London, Shropshire, Ipswich and  
Twickenham  
Across England, from mile to mile,  
For providing service with a smile.

### J

**Jeeves** is to valets  
What Nureyev is to ballet:  
A leader at the helm,  
A prince of his realm.

### K

Lady Constance **Keeble** ('Connie')  
Can be very bonny  
To others  
Who are not her brothers.

### L

Bingo **Little's**  
Nerves are brittle  
From having to escort  
His poached-egg tot.

### M

On a **Mulliner** night  
You can behold the sight  
Of how he regales  
His friends with his tales.

### N

At **Nastikoff**  
You may scoff.  
As a writer he's a mouse  
Compared to P. G. Wodehouse.

### O

P.C. **Oates**  
Is a man who votes  
Against small yapping dogs  
That tug at his togs.

### P

Rupert **Psmith**  
Propagates the myth  
That a pastor  
Is really an Astor.

### R

Wickham, **Roberta**  
Is a vehement supporter  
Of the right of a terrier  
To bite and be merrier.

### S

Roderick **Spode**  
Espouses a Fascist Code  
But a lacey secret – guess what? –  
Can undermine this despot.

### T

Galahad ('Gally') **Threepwood**  
Is a defender of the just and good.  
But if you are mean and bad,  
You'll hear from Galahad.

### U

Stanley Featherstonehaugh **Ukridge**  
Will seek a loan to bridge  
A shortfall in his cash-flow  
Which is slower far than slow.



V

**Veronica** Wedge  
Her Mum-mee does fledge  
Into a beauty without brains  
But not without swains.

W

**Old Wivenhoe**  
Had a sow:  
It was as snug as a bug  
In a room shared with Plug.

Y

George Travers, Lord **Yaxley**  
Was Bertie's Uncle, act'ally.  
He did not think it odd  
To marry Maud.

Z

Ben **Zizzbaum's** celluloid  
Was rescued from the void  
By a merger in Hollywood  
Whose profits were jolly good.

*The poet is a retired professor of  
Economics, and otherwise harmless.*

## Wodehouse Quiz 27 Country Houses

by David Buckle

- Which Wodehouse novel is largely set in Ashby Hall, the scene of the theft of an 18th-century French paperweight?
- Ditteredge Hall is the residence of which of Bertie Wooster's adversaries?
- In which English county is Blandings Castle?
- In which novel is Lady Maud, daughter of the Earl of Marshmoreton, confined to her home, Belpheer Castle in Hampshire, because of an 'infatuation'?
- In UK book editions, what is the name of the country home of Bertie Wooster's Aunt Dahlia and her husband, Tom Travers?
- Claines Hall in Sussex, the country seat of Mrs and Mr Steptoe of Los Angeles, is the setting for which novel?
- What is the Hampshire seat of Frederick Twistleton, Lord Ickenham?
- In *Money for Nothing*, what is the name of the country residence of Lester Carmody and his nephew John Carroll?
- Lord Emsworth's neighbour Sir Gregory Parsloe-Parsloe owns which country pile?
- When Bertie's Aunt Agatha becomes Lady Worplesdon, what is the name of her Hampshire home?

*(Answers on page 21)*

## The Wooster Source

by Graeme Davidson

*This is the real Tabasco,  
It's the word from Bertie Wooster,  
The flâneur who is knee-deep in high-  
minded and dictatorial aunts,  
Whose exhortations to our hero are a  
depressing tirade of rants, and chants of  
'mustn'ts' and 'can'ts'.*



I was smiling sunnily as I took up the receiver.  
Not much good, of course, as she couldn't see me, but it's the spirit that counts.

"Hullo, aged relative."

"Hullo to you, you young blot. Are you sober?"

I felt a natural resentment at being considered capable of falling under the influence of the sauce at ten in the morning, but I reminded myself that aunts will be aunts. Show me an aunt, I've often said, and I will show you someone who doesn't give a hoot how much her obiter dicta may wound a nephew's sensibilities.

*Much Obligated, Jeeves (1971)*

"It may seem a hard thing to say of any man, but I would rank Sir Watkyn Bassett as an even bigger stinker than your father."

"Would you call Father a stinker?"

"Not to his face, perhaps."

"He thinks you're crazy."

"Bless his old heart."

"And you can't say he's wrong. Anyway, he's not so bad, if you rub him the right way."

"Very possibly, but if you think a busy man like myself has time to go rubbing your father, either with or against the grain, you are greatly mistaken."

\*\*\*\*\*

"Bung him in," I said dully, and in due season the Rev. H. P. Pinker lumbered across the threshold and advancing with outstretched hand tripped over his feet and upset a small table, his almost invariable practice when moving from spot to spot in any room where there's furniture.

\*\*\*\*\*

I was becoming increasingly bitter about this man Plank and the tendency he seemed to be developing of haunting me like a family spectre. I couldn't imagine what he was doing here. Whatever the faults of Tottleigh Towers, I had supposed that, when there, one would at least be free from his society. He had an excellent home in Hockley-cum-Meston, and one sought in vain for an explanation of why the hell he didn't stay in it.

\*\*\*\*\*

I don't know if you've ever tried detaching a snow leopard of the Himalayas from its prey – probably not, as most people don't find themselves out that way much – but if you did, you would feel fairly safe in budgeting for a show of annoyance on the animal's part. It was the same with Spode.

*All from Stiff Upper Lip, Jeeves (1963)*

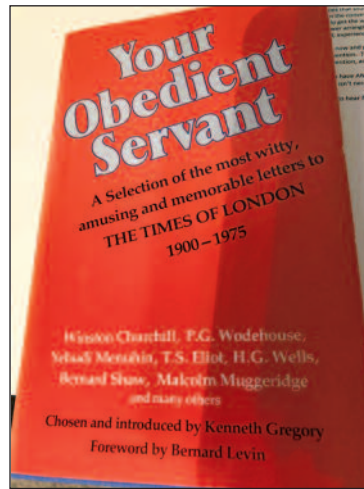


## Letters to the Editor

Reactions, Questions, and Thoughts from Our Readers

### From Elliott Milstein

Regarding ‘A Classic Letter’ (*Wooster Sauce*, March 2018, p.9), the letter on Bertie Wooster’s chin had previously been reprinted in a similar collection called *Your Obedient Servant*, published by Methuen in 1976. You will see by the picture, right, that the publishers felt the inclusion of a Wodehouse letter was of such note that they listed him second on the cover, right after Winston Churchill, to help promote the book. The letter appears on page 160 under the heading ‘The Wooster Chin’.



binder, and one of my projects is to re-bind these splendid sagas of the incorrigible schoolboy in leather – which makes my bookshelves look rather more erudite than they actually are. So I have the requisite volumes to hand, and can confirm that *William in Trouble* was indeed published before *William the Outlaw*. Much relief all round!

### From Barry Lane

The Old Alleynian Golfing Society Annual Dinner was held at the East India Club on Thursday, 8 March 2018, and you will be glad to know that the guest speaker, former Walker Cup golfer Mike Attenborough, is a Wodehouse fan. To our delight, he regaled us with several examples of the Oldest Member’s wisdom and was warmly applauded. Michael said he was particularly pleased to be speaking to Old Boys of Dulwich College as he loved Plum’s books and had partnered Peter Oosterhuis (the most famous OA golfer) in a Walker Cup match against the United States.

Next year’s Dinner could be amusing as Nigel Farage will be in the Captain’s chair. As a youngster, Nigel was an excellent low-handicap golfer and represented Dulwich in the famous Halford-Hewitt tournament held at Deal and Sandwich.

### From Ian Nilo-Walton

Many of your readers must have been worrying about the order of publication of the *William* books (‘Bibliographic Corner by Nick Townend’, March 2018, p.20). Fortunately, I can resolve this dilemma. I’m a book-

## The Emsworth Paradox Revisited

Speaking of letters, the following appeared in *The Times* on 21 April 2018. ‘Nuff said.

### Choose it or lose it

Sir: Whilst endorsing the call by the Rare Breeds Survival Trust (RBST) to eat rare breed meat . . . may I point out that P G Wodehouse got there first. The Empress of Blandings was a prizewinning Berkshire sow owned by the 9th Earl of Emsworth, and when Wodehouse made the Empress one of his most engaging principal characters, he ensured her the respect and esteem of Wodehouse enthusiasts.

For many years Berkshires have featured on the RBST watch list as a vulnerable breed. In response the P G Wodehouse Society, with sage advice from the Berkshire Pig Breeders Club, launched its ten-year Back the Berkshire campaign in 2005 to encourage people to eat Berkshire pork, urging our members to embrace “the Emsworth Paradox” and thereby help to establish a reliable niche market for Berkshire pork.

Embracing the Emsworth Paradox remains the only way to ensure that Berkshire pigs – and other rare breeds on the RBST watch list – continue to be bred, preserving carefully nurtured bloodlines and helping to ensure that rare breeds will still be with us in decades to come.

HILARY BRUCE

Chairman, P G Wodehouse Society

# We Remember

## Sir Richard Body 1927–2018

Sir Richard Body, the former Conservative MP who died on 26 February, age 90, was eulogised in the press for his independent stances on numerous political positions, often breaking with his own party in the process. He was also a man of many interests, among them Berkshire pigs, which he raised on his farm in Stanford Dingley.

It was in his capacity as a pig expert that Sir Richard became an adviser to the Society in its earliest days. In March 2000, *Wooster Sauce* published a letter in which Sir Richard took Norman Murphy to task for apparently confusing a Large Black pig (one that Murphy had identified as Wodehouse’s inspiration for Empress of Blandings) with the far nobler breed of Berkshire. Sir Richard, having once been “the proud owner of the Supreme Champion at the Royal Show”, was perturbed: “I agree wholeheartedly with Lord Emsworth. Anyone serious about keeping a future champion must have a Berkshire.” (Murphy responded that he *did* know the difference between a Berkshire and a Large Black.) Later that same year, Sir Richard welcomed members of the Wodehouse Millennium Tour to his farm, entertaining them with a discussion of the Berkshire breed.

In 2001, Sir Richard presented a talk on pigs at the Society’s February meeting. As Murray Hedgcock subsequently reported in *Wooster Sauce*, “he talked eloquently of Pigs He Had Known, and pigmen, and the revival of the Berkshire from decline, when it had almost disappeared from English farms, to be refreshed by imports from Australia, New Zealand, and the US of A.” He also commented on Lord Emsworth’s failure to do his own handling in the show ring, something Sir Richard had done himself.

Sir Richard stepped down as an MP in 2001 but continued to be a polemicist of the first order while writing books on the politics of agriculture and speaking out against the EU. The Society will miss him for his pig lore, and we extend our sympathy to his widow, Marion, and their children.



Sir Richard with Helen Murphy during the 2000 tour

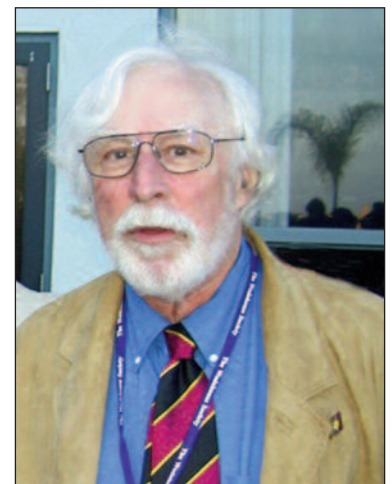
## Daniel Cohen 1936–2018

We were deeply saddened to learn of the death of Daniel Cohen on 6 May. A former editor of *Plum Lines*, the journal of The Wodehouse Society (TWS), Dan had been ill since suffering a stroke in 2009 and had been nursed since then by his wife, Susan, who is a past president of TWS.

He was born in Chicago, Illinois, on 12 March 1936, and became a journalist, then a prolific author, writing nearly 200 books, mostly for children and teenagers, on a great variety of subjects. In December 1988, he and Susan suffered the cruellest loss imaginable when their only child, Theodora, was killed in the Pan Am 103 bombing over Lockerbie, Scotland. The couple subsequently became prominent activists fighting for justice for the victims’ families and to determine the truth of what happened in the bombing.

To help cope with their grief, Susan and Dan turned to P. G. Wodehouse. They became involved in TWS activities and, with David McDonough, set up the Philadelphia chapter, calling it Chapter One. They also wrote numerous articles for *Plum Lines* and presented talks at conventions. Dan will be forever remembered for two side-splittingly funny talks, “Wodehouse at the Bar” (1999) and “Gorilla My Dreams” (2007). The former talk, which was an examination of drinks in the Wodehouse canon, began: “Gentlemen – I mean ladies and gentlemen – and of course boys. What a wonderful day this is. . . . I had intended to deliver this talk at the last convention – but I became too involved in my research.” For the conventions in 2005 and 2007, he wore a gorilla suit – highly appropriate, given his nom de Plum of Cyril Waddesley-Davenport.

In 2003, Dan succeeded Ed Ratcliffe as editor in chief of *Plum Lines*, serving in that capacity until 2007. He continued to be an outspoken critic of the Pan Am 103 investigation until his stroke in 2009. A few weeks prior to his death, Dan and Susan marked their 60th wedding anniversary. Our heartfelt sympathy goes to Susan. Funny, wise, thoughtful, and kind, Dan will be missed by all who had the good fortune to know him.



Dan during the 2005 TWS convention

# The Bibliographic Corner *by Nick Townend*

## “With a New Preface by the Author”: Part One

In previous Corners I have dealt with various examples of Wodehouse’s “introductory” writings. For example, ‘A Wodehouse Introduction, Preface or Foreword’ (*Wooster Sauce*, December 2007–June 2008) covered Wodehouse’s introductions to books by other authors (*McIlvaine* E137–E148), and ‘Omnibus Volumes’ (*Wooster Sauce*, March–September 2015) surveyed those of Wodehouse’s own omnibus volumes which contained an introduction by him (*McIlvaine*, section B). This Corner examines what I believe is the final pool of such introductions, namely the series of new prefaces contributed by Wodehouse to 14 reprints of his books, which Herbert Jenkins/Barrie & Jenkins issued between 1969 and 1975.

The 14 reprints comprised titles originally published between 1913 and 1956, with most of them being earlier titles (nine from the period to 1927, two from the 1930s, one from the 1940s, and two from the 1950s). Rather than deal with the prefaces in the order in which the first editions were originally published, I will cover them in the order in which (as far as can be ascertained) the reprints containing the prefaces were published.

Several of these prefaces are now quite hard to track down, as they have not been included in all subsequent reprints of the title. For instance, none of the prefaces appear in the standard Everyman edition. My knowledge of subsequent reprints is incomplete, but at the time of writing, for five of the prefaces, I have been unable to trace any subsequent reprints which contain the preface. Therefore, for each title I will indicate which further reprints I am aware of that do contain the preface.

Appropriately enough, the first preface appeared in the 1969 reprint (A18b23) of Wodehouse’s breakthrough title, *Something Fresh*, which had originally been published in 1915 and was, famously, his first serial to be published (as *Something New*) in the *Saturday Evening Post*. In the entry for A18b23, *McIlvaine* incorrectly states that the reprint was published under the title *Something New*. *McIlvaine* also states that the boards are black; my copy has green boards and I have also seen a copy with blue

boards. The front flap of the wrapper states “With a new Foreword by the Author”, but Wodehouse’s three-page introduction is clearly headed “Preface” in the text.

The dust-wrapper design used for *Something Fresh* was also used for the next three prefaces. The front cover and spine had a background all in one colour. On the front cover, Wodehouse’s name appeared at the top in white, edged in another colour; the title appeared in the middle, in black; and at the bottom was a small illustration in black. On the spine, Wodehouse’s name appeared in the same

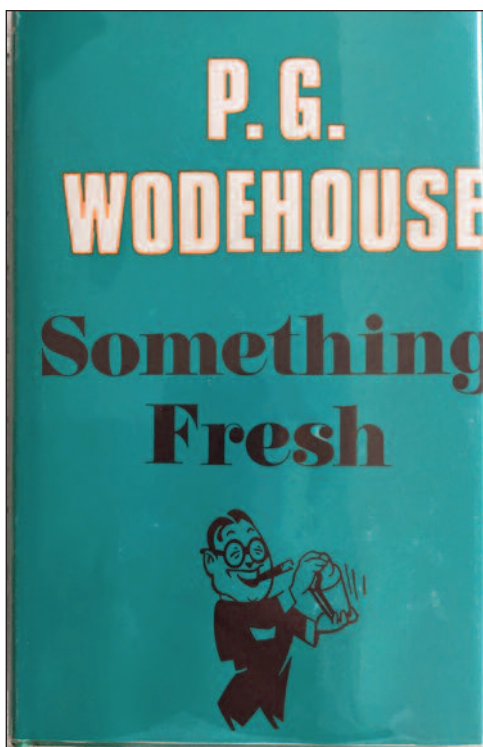
colour used to edge his name on the front cover, and the title and publisher’s name appeared in black. On the rear cover there were reviews of recent Wodehouse books. The front flap contained a plot summary and the rear flap listed titles from the Autograph Edition.

Wodehouse appears to have written the preface in 1968, as the first sentence begins “When this book was first published – fifty-three years ago”. Although the preface was described as new, Wodehouse deftly recycled much previous material in it. Of the twelve paragraphs in the preface, four are closely based on a section of *Over Seventy*, in which Wodehouse claims that it was the use of his full name of Pelham Grenville Wodehouse that

resulted in the story being accepted by the *Saturday Evening Post*, as “A writer in America at that time who went about without three names was practically going around naked”. And five of the paragraphs are closely based on an article entitled ‘The Blandings Castle Set’, which Wodehouse had contributed to *Radio Times* (16 February 1967, for the week of 18–24 February 1967; omitted from both *McIlvaine* and the *McIlvaine Addendum*) to accompany the launch of the Blandings Castle stories on BBC1.

The preface was reprinted when the title was first published by Penguin in 1979 (A18b26), and it also reappeared in Hutchinson’s New Autograph Edition in 1987 (A18b25/Kd2).

*My thanks to Peter Wightman for the information about the Everyman edition, the Radio Times, and the New Autograph Edition.*



## Little Nuggets

### Failed Connection

Fans of the BBC television game show *Only Connect* may have noticed that mentions of Wodehouse make it onto the programme at least once per season, and sometimes more. This should come as no surprise, given that the show is hosted by noted Wodehouse fan (and Society Patron) Victoria Coren Mitchell. So perhaps it was no surprise that in March this year, Wodehouse once again made an appearance.

In the show's 'Connecting Wall' round, each team of contestants have to look at a wall of sixteen words and rearrange them into four horizontal lines of four. Within each line of four, all the words must have a connection to each other. The team then has to explain what the connection within each group of four actually is. Got it? Right. On the March 5th programme, one wall of 16 included the following six words:

Wooster Glossop Threepwood Little Ukridge Psmith

The team kept trying various combinations for the obvious Wodehouse link, but always included 'Wooster', which was incorrect. See if you can work it out. The correct answer can be found in the small box at the bottom of this page.

### Spotted on the Ground

Found in the new *Shropshire and the Welsh Borders Tourist Guide*: "PG Wodehouse said Shropshire was 'The nearest earthly approach to paradise'. Welcome saints and sinners alike."

(Thanks to GWEN BOWEN)

### Spotted in the Air

In a recent issue of British Airways' *High Life Magazine* (date unknown), John Simpson wrote about his visit to the Adlon Hotel in Berlin. The result is a sympathetic article about Plum's experiences while held by the Germans during WWII. Simpson ends with a story from the BBC's John Humphries, who went to interview PGW after he received his knighthood in the 1975 New Year's Honours. Mr H "found him bashing away on an ancient typewriter, working on his latest novel. 'We did the interview . . . and he was very charming and modest and funny. Then he pulled out the sheet of paper he'd been typing and signed it for me'. Six weeks later Sir Plum died, with his wife of 61 years holding his hand."

(Thanks to CHRISTOPHER BELLEW and STEPHEN PAYNE)

## Poet's Corner

### Good Advice

("If you wish to keep cool", says Dr Yorke-Davies, "drink frequently.")

SOME folk pursue a churlish plan,  
And other people day by day shun;  
I'm one who loves my fellow-man  
Without regard to creed or station.  
All men I treat in friendly style,  
But him I worship as a brother,  
Who with a brilliant, friendly smile,  
Says "Drink it up and have another!"

And you are one of these, Yorke-D.  
What comfortable words you've spoken;  
Ne'er shall the bond 'twixt you and me,  
So far as I'm concerned, be broken.  
The finest phrase of bard or sage  
Has never equalled, to my thinking,  
That noblest product of our age,  
That single speech of yours, "Keep  
drinking."

Life now becomes a thing of cheer;  
No cloud appears on our horizon;  
Go, tap the cask of frothing beer,  
Produce what Yankees call "the pi'sen":  
What though our habits cause surprise,  
Or manners most acute suspicion,  
We're doing all that in us lies  
To keep our health in good condition.

From *Vanity Fair* (UK), August 4, 1904

### Answers to Wodehouse Quiz (Page 17)

1. *Company for Henry*
2. Sir Roderick Glossop
3. Shropshire; it lies in the Vale of Blandings
4. *A Damsel in Distress*
5. Brinkley Court
6. *Quick Service*
7. Ickenham Hall
8. Rudge Hall
9. Matchingam Hall
10. Bumbleigh Hall

### Failed Connection Answer

The connected names were:

Glossop Threepwood Ukridge Psmith

(Bertie) Wooster and (Frederick) Little were part of a group connected by the fact that all were names of characters played by Hugh Laurie.

## Recent Press Comment

### *The Lady Magazine*, February 9

(from June Arnold & Caroline Franklyn)

A clue in the Ladygram acrostic puzzle read, “Hums for Bertie Wooster and his fellow idlers” (6). Answer: Drones (in case you needed telling).

### *Daily Telegraph*, February 10

(from Carolyn de la Plain)

In the Weather Watch column, Joe Shute wrote: “There comes a point in every winter which reminds me of the PG Wodehouse story *Romance at Droitgate Spa*, where a group of invalids sit around in brine baths competitively comparing their respective ailments: ‘Discussions about cold weather often prove much the same as those concerning an ingrown toenail where, tough as it is, seemingly everybody has a story of a time when they had stoically endured much worse.’”

### *The Times*, February 10 (from Dave Anderton)

In an article on sporting heroes killed during WWI, Ben Macintyre included mention of “Percy Jeeves, the Yorkshire all-rounder, killed on the Somme but immortalised by PG Wodehouse”. (Jeeves was born in Yorkshire but was playing for Warwickshire when PGW spotted him on the Cheltenham cricket ground.)

### *Shropshire Star*, February 12

Peter Rhodes complained about the expression ‘out and about’: “The more you repeat this much-used phrase the odder it seems. ‘Out’ is plain enough but what does ‘about’ mean? Time for change. Let us replace ‘out and about’ with the more lyrical term as used by Bertie Wooster . . . ‘Hither, thither and yon’.”

### *The Daily Star*, February 13

Ramisa Hague started ‘The ties that bind us’ with Nietzsche’s words “Invisible threads are the strongest ties” and ended with: “to recall the words of PG Wodehouse, ‘there is not a time, sir, when ties do not matter’.”

### *Verily*, February 15

James Sherron polled men for their favourite love stories, and in the comedy genre he applauded the Jeeves and Wooster stories by PGW: “Some may object and say these stories are anti-romance – Wooster tries to escape an engagement, but that escape is often only realized through the restoration of another relationship. One of those polled said, ‘Wodehouse is the one satirist that seems to love, not despise, his characters’. This kind of love for his characters seems to make us all less cynical about romance as well.”

### *Daily Mail*, February 22 (from Dave Anderton)

The column ‘On This Day’ featured a quote from Wodehouse: “The fascination of shooting as a sport depends almost wholly on whether you are at the right or wrong end of the gun.”

### *The Guardian*, February 23

Actor, comedian, and writer Tom Allen wrote that the funniest book he had ever read was *Meet Mr Mulliner*, wherein “a man in a pub tells stories about eccentric characters he’s met, like the man who stutters and who tries to ask a girl out during the train crash but can only do it by singing”.

### *The Independent*, February 28

Joe Sommerlad included *Leave It to Psmith* on his list of ‘Eight underrated novels by great writers that deserve a wider audience’. Mr Sommerlad believed that this tome found the “Master comic writer at the height of his powers, pitting Psmith against Lord Emsworth and his family at Blandings Castle in a daring crossover plot. Forget Marvel, this is the cinematic universe we ought to be demanding.”

### *The Times*, February 29 (from Tony Ring)

Times 2 featured a quiz to see how many novels readers could name in relation to 25 ‘best lines ever’ which included, from *The Luck of the Bodkins*, the immortal line which hardly needs repeating referring to “the shifty, hangdog look which announces that an Englishman is about speak French”.

### *The Observer*, March 4 (from Linda Tyler)

The author Philip Hensher responded to the question “What book might people be surprised to see on your bookshelf?” with “I was going to say all of PG Wodehouse, but that’s probably not surprising”.

### *Sydney Morning Herald*, March 9

A review of Hilary Spurling’s biography of Anthony Powell included the description of Powell’s *A Dance to the Music of Time* as being ‘Proust Englished by PG Wodehouse’.

### *Liverpool Echo*, March 19 (from Philip Bowen)

Columnist David Charters wrote that Sir Ken Dodd “loved humorous writers, particularly PG Wodehouse with his delightful feel for the absurd”.

### *New Indian Express*, March 21

Subodh Sankar, co-founder of Atta Galatta, listed his favourite book of all time as *Aunts Aren’t Gentlemen* and his favourite fictional character as Bertie Wooster because “to go through life as Bertie states, ‘I know perfectly well that I’ve got, roughly speaking, half the amount of brain a normal bloke ought to possess’ is a definite recipe for a happy ending”. I think we can safely say he’s a fan!

### *The Times*, March 21

In his political sketch, Patrick Kidd described a parliamentary debate about fishing rights that went badly for Michael Gove, who became a bit defensive: “This charge really got up Mr Gove’s nose. He said that the SNP ‘have a damn cheek’ to moan when they want Britain to stay in the EU. He added that their party ‘has raised grievance to an art form’, which reminded me of PG Wodehouse’s famous line about rays of sunshine and Scotsmen. It clearly inspired John Bercow, too, for the Speaker soon piped up to tell the House that Jeeves always said that eating fish was good for the brain.”

(NB. The Speaker’s exact comment, as reported in *Hansard*, was: “Of course, Jeeves always used to encourage Wooster to eat more fish on the grounds that it was good for the brain.”)

### *The Guardian*, March 24

(from Murray Hedgcock & Terry Taylor)

In the Guardian Review, Hanif Kureishi wrote when asked about the last book that made him laugh that “You’ll often find me in the afternoon, lying in bed reading PG Wodehouse and laughing my head off.”

**Chortle, March 28**

The writers of *The Quanderhorn Xperimentations* described the book as “if aliens had horrifically grafted John Wyndham on to PG Wodehouse and made the monstrous outcome write a book”.

**Irish Times, March 31**

In ‘The Irish working-class and their place in the Irish literary canon’, Dermot Bulger wrote: ‘PG Wodehouse’s great creation Bertie Wooster may have oversimplified matters when dividing the English social class system into three neat types: ‘Toffs, Lower Middles and Tough Eggs.’ . . . In Ireland class division is entrenched, pervasive and more multi-layered than Bertie Wooster ever imagined: even if his manservant Jeeves could have wised him up.”

**Radio Times, April 1** (from Gwen Williams)

Paul Lewis used Blandings Castle to explain how gift aid works for charitable trusts.

**Lynn News, April 1**

A Cambridgeshire folk combo, the Penland Phezants, got through to the final round of the Milkmaid Songwriting Competition 2018. Their repertoire included ‘The Ballad of the Backwoods Cavalier’, “A documentary account of the Siege of Lynn as it might have been told by PG Wodehouse”. You can find the lyrics online and make your own judgement!

**The Atlantic, April 8** (from Murray Hedgcock)

An article on an upcoming change in copyright law in the USA indicated that “many stories by P. G. Wodehouse” will be among the works that will enter the public domain.

**Evening Standard, April 13**

In her review of *The Moderate Soprano*, Fiona Mountford described actor Roger Allam’s character as “A delightful maverick in PG Wodehouse mode”.

**The Times, April 15**

Apparently a training academy for butlers in Scotland is enjoying a boom. Sadly, the article starts: “In the comic gospel according to PG Wodehouse, a good *butler* such as Reginald Jeeves will quietly but confidently steer his young master round any number of life’s little difficulties. . . Bertie describes his *butler* as a ‘god-like man in a bowler hat with grave finely chiselled features and a head that stuck out at the back, indicating great brain power.’” Will they never learn?

**Mail on Sunday, April 15** (from Terry Taylor)

Craig Brown listed *Right Ho, Jeeves* among the hundred books that changed his life: “If you’re a writer’s writer then you’re not generally a reader’s writer but PG Wodehouse was both. The only thing is he’s not an academic’s writer because he’s far too enjoyable and requires no explanation. He wrote 93 books as well as hundreds of short stories. I have chosen *Right Ho, Jeeves* because it contains his funniest scene of all: the sozzled Gussie Fink- Nottle presenting the prizes at Market Snodsbury Grammar School.”

**The Times, April 17** (from Christopher Bellew)

The obituary of Fred Hamblin described him as a “Wodehousian chemist who was a key figure in the development of plastics at ICI, [who] once stole a steamroller and almost blew up his school.”

**Economic Times, April 18**

The ET Intelligence Group noted that liquor sales in India are set for a bounceback and prefaced the article with: “The juice of the grape, to quote the inimitable PGW, has seldom failed to cheer.”

**Daily Telegraph, April 20** (from David Salter)

Responding to a report that hospitals were encouraging ambulant patients not to wander around in their pyjamas, that the only time most people wore proper pyjamas was when they were in hospital, and that pyjamas were often made in stripes and patterns that were designed to be admired, David wrote: “Sir – Your leader on the subject of pyjamas being worn to be admired brings to mind Bertie Wooster’s heliotrope and gold striped jimjams.”

**Reader’s Digest, April 2018**

In telling his readers ‘Everything You’ll Need To Know About Attending The Royal Wedding’, Andy Simmons suggested that part of the preparation while waiting for the invitation to said wedding to arrive was to “[bone] up on PG Wodehouse”.

**Daily Telegraph, April 22** (from Alan Hall)

In a commentary regarding the Swaziland king’s change of his country’s name to ‘the Kingdom of eSwatini’, Daniel Hannan wrote: “Swaziland, to the anglophone, sounds at once . . . the sort of name PG Wodehouse would invent, or Noël Coward write into a song. It’s too euphonic to be allowed to fall into disuse.”

**Boston Globe, April 23**

Alex Beam is not a fan of golf: he wrote that April 29 was Global Anti-Golf Day, “a day marked with red grease pen on my calendar. . . . It was PG Wodehouse who wrote: ‘To find a man’s true character, play golf with him. In no other walk of life does the cloven hoof so quickly display itself.’”

**The Times, April 23** (from Tony Ring)

Stig Abell created a list of books ‘30 Books That Define Us’ – that is, books that help us to understand how Britain works – and split them into categories such as ‘It’s the Economy, Stupid’. This section included not only *Making Money* by Terry Pratchett, whom Abell described as “Britain’s best comic writer since PG Wodehouse”, but also PGW’s *Psmith in the City*: “I love this book’s gentle description of the tedium of life in a London bank, filled with toiling clerks and public schoolboys dreaming of a fortune in the East. The plot hinges on a cricket match, so do not read this expecting anything too startling. Wodehouse’s character of Psmith is one of the finest comic creations in British literature.”

**Indian Express, April 24**

In noting that World Book Day was on April 23 Mala Kumar could think of no better way to celebrate the week than to sit in a garden and read a book. Identifying herself as a Wodehouse fan, she cited the Blandings novels, wherein “readers can feel the caress of the flower-scented air of rural England”. She also recommended *A Damsel in Distress* and quoted a passage about Lord Marshmoreton, who “lived for his garden. The love which other men expend on their nearest and dearest Lord Marshmoreton lavished on seeds, roses and loamy soil.”

**Washington Post, May 2**

In his review of Christopher Buckley’s novel *The Judge Hunter*, Michael Dirda wrote that the central character, Balty, could be considered “an ancestor of P. G. Wodehouse’s most famous dolt. Like Bertie Wooster, Balty behaves with an irrepressible yet charming idiocy, while being at heart fundamentally decent and honorable.” Balty even has an adviser in “the omniscient, if slightly morose Huncks”, who seems to possess many characteristics similar to Jeeves.

# Future Events for Your Diary

**May 24–October 27, 2018**

**Perfect Nonsense at Theatre by the Lake**

The Goodale brothers' *Jeeves and Wooster in Perfect Nonsense* has an extended run at Theatre by the Lake in Keswick, Cumbria. Need we say more?

**May 31–June 23, 2018**

**Love on the Links at the Salisbury Playhouse**

There's still time to go see this new play adapted from PGW's golf stories.

**July 16, 2018 Society Meeting at the Savile Club**

Our July meeting will feature the now-traditional pub quiz deviously devised by our Entertainments Impresario, Paul Kent. As always, we start from 6 pm. See page 3 for more.

**August 26, 2018 Richard Burnip's Wodehouse Walk**

Richard Burnip will lead a Wodehouse-themed walk for London Walks (note: this is not a Society-sponsored event). The usual fee is £10, but our members get a discounted price of £8. No need to book a place; just be at exit 2 (Park Lane east side) of Marble Arch Underground station at 2.30 p.m., and identify yourself as a Society member.

**September 11–15, 2018**

**Perfect Nonsense in Lincolnshire**

*Jeeves and Wooster in Perfect Nonsense* will be staged by the Stamford Shoestring Theatre Company (Stamford, Lincs.), which has been praised by the national press for their sell-out productions. For more information, including how to get tickets, visit the company's website: [www.stamfordshoestring.com](http://www.stamfordshoestring.com).

**September 17, 2018 AGM at the Savile Club**

The Society will hold its annual general meeting on this night, in addition to which we will have a speaker (to be announced, when known, on our website). The Savile Club is located at 69 Brook Street, London W1K 4ER; we meet from 6 pm onwards.

**September 30, 2018**

**Richard Burnip's Wodehouse Walk**

Take a walk with Richard Burnip and enjoy a lot about and by Wodehouse along the way! See August 26, above, for details on when and where.

**October 11, 2018 Dinner at Gray's Inn**

The Society's biennial dinner will be held at our customary venue of Gray's Inn, London, and as ever it promises to be a joyous occasion. The application form is enclosed with this issue of *Wooster Sauce*; waste no time in returning yours now!

**March 21–April 14, 2019**

**Perfect Nonsense in Hartford, Connecticut**

*Jeeves and Wooster in Perfect Nonsense* will make its North American debut at the Hartford Stage next spring.

**May 11–18, 2019**

**A Damsel in Distress at the Whitefield Garrick**

The Whitefield Garrick Society will perform *A Damsel in Distress*, by Ian Hay and P. G. Wodehouse, at the Whitefield Garrick Theatre in Bury, outside Manchester. The Director, Andrew Close, hopes to meet Society members attending this production. For information and tickets, go to the White Garrick's website.

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