

WOOSTER SAUCE

The Quarterly Journal of The P G Wodehouse Society (UK)

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September 2019

West End Wodehouse: *Leave It to Psmith* (1930–31)

by Clive Beautyman

Saturday the 25th October 1930 was a cold, blustery day in London. Anthony Heap, a 20-year-old clerk at Peter Robinson's, spent the afternoon in Regent's Park before going to the Shaftesbury Theatre to hire a stool in the queue for the evening performance of their hit show. He then popped over to the Avenue Pavilion to see the 50-minute newsreel before returning for curtain up at 8:30 pm. He was back home in Grays Inn Road by 11:20 pm. The play he had chosen that evening was *Leave It to Psmith*, by Ian Hay and P. G. Wodehouse – "A Comedy of Youth, Love, and Misadventure" based on Wodehouse's 1923 novel.

It had opened at the Shaftesbury on the 29th September, having done a short pre-West End tour

opening at the Kings Theatre in Southsea on the 8th, Golders Green Hippodrome on the 15th, and Streatham Hill Theatre on the 22nd. Omens were good: Wodehouse noted in a letter that "Psmith did twenty-four hundred quid at Golders Green and two thousand and seventeen first week at the Shaftesbury", sums equivalent to £110,000 and £92,000 in today's money.

The Aberdeen Press and Journal reported on the First Night:

Ermine tails are being used as trimming just now, and at the first night of Major P.G. Wodehouse and Ian Hay's very amusing play, *Leave It To Psmith* at the Shaftesbury Theatre, one of the most attractive frocks I saw in the



audience was of black net, the sleeves of which were trimmed from the cuff to the elbow with ermine tails. Another woman in black was wearing over her frock an attractive little black velvet jacket with a high Medici collar lined with ruched white velvet. Another pretty jacket was in red velvet with long loose fitting sleeves and tiny cape. Leave It To Psmith is packed full of wholesome fun and amusing situations. Even the crooks in the play are quite lovable characters with a sense of humour. Basil Foster makes the most out of [the] part of the irresponsible, imperturbable Psmith, who works out a masterly plan of stealing a diamond necklace and giving it back again. The women in the cast wear some wonderfully pretty frocks. The one I liked best was deep cream lace and net and very, very long.

After a decent run of 16 weeks at the Shaftesbury, *Leave It to Psmith* was replaced by the musical comedy *My Sister and I* (which closed after one week), but the box office had still been good enough for *Psmith* to transfer to the Lyric for a further two weeks, filling a vacant slot between the well-loved comic whimsy of *Toad of Toad Hall* and Eugene O'Neill's punishing tale of insanity, abortion, and sordid extramarital affairs, *Strange Interlude*.

The production then toured with (unusually) the same company to the Glasgow Alhambra, opening on 2 February 1931, and to the Lyceum Theatre in Edinburgh, opening on the 9th, where it played to packed houses in Ian Hay's native city with the theatre "ringing with laughter throughout the evening" (*The Stage*).

Leading the company as Psmith and garnering a host of good reviews was Basil Foster (1882–1959), who had made his name as the debonair star of musical comedies before the Great War. "He is exceedingly droll and screamingly funny in his efforts as an amateur detective and love-maker which are always productive of mirth," enthused the Portsmouth Evening News. In the interwar years he continued acting and also moved into production, a dual role he fulfilled with this play. He subsequently took on a number of theatre jobs, retiring only in 1958 after five years as front-of-house manager at the Salisbury Playhouse. However, Wodehouse scholars know him for another reason: in the early years of the century, he had decided to become a stage actor only so he could also play first-class cricket (which he did 34 times for Worcestershire, the MCC, and Middlesex), and thus he became the inspiration for the immortal Catsmeat Potter-Pirbright.

The female leads were also strongly cast. Eve Halliday was played by Jane Baxter (1909–96), whom Winston Churchill once described as "that charming lady

whose grace personifies all that is best in British womanhood". However, she had been born in Germany, where her mother, Hedwig von Dieskau, was lady-in-waiting to the sister of Kaiser Wilhelm II. Jane Baxter first came to prominence in the 1928 London production of Wodehouse's *A Damsel in Distress*, playing Lady Maud Marsh, and went on to a distinguished stage and film career, the high point of which was probably as Cecily Cardew in the Broadway production of *The Importance of Being Earnest* with John Gielgud and Margaret Rutherford.

The ladies' wonderfully pretty frocks commended by the *Aberdeen Press and Journal* had

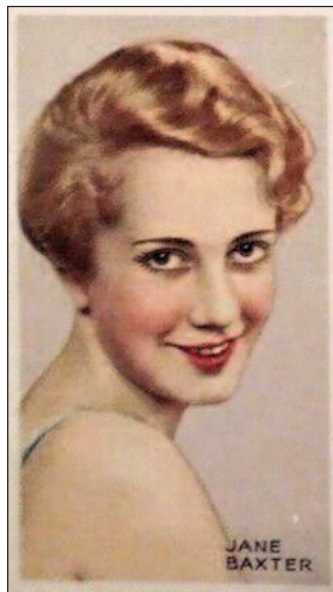


Costume Designer
Val St. Cyr
(courtesy Miles Golding)

been designed by Val St. Cyr (1890–1969?), the flamboyant owner, with his partner Ernest Pacey St. Cyr Sands, of the society fashion business House of Baroque. Born Arthur Andrews Hilder in Kent – his nom de plume was apparently based on the Saint-Cyr-en-Val area in France – Val was still a schoolboy when he started drawing for magazines and illustrating school stories. In his teens he became an actor and then a costume designer. At its height his House of Baroque was designing for the court dressmaker; London high society; and stage productions in London, New York, and Europe (including dresses for the Folies Bergère). The V&A holds many of his design sketches.

Two familiar names appear among the cast's spear carriers. The prim waitress Gladys Rumbelow was played by 24-year-old Joan Hickson (1906–98), later to find fame as the definitive Miss Marple in the BBC TV productions of the 1980s and '90s. Rupert Baxter, the secretary, and the glum Lift Man were both played by the versatile Edward Chapman (1901–77), who later found fame as the long-suffering Mr Grimsdale in the Norman Wisdom films, and notoriety for reputedly being thrown out of Sir Laurence Olivier's dressing room when trying to organise a petition against Sir John Gielgud.

Despite its success the play was never revived in London, and plans fell through for a new version on Broadway after World War II.



Jane Baxter
Gallaher Cigarette Card
(1935)

For notes and references, see my blog at <https://theolddays.wixsite.com/mysite>. All comments, corrections and additions are welcomed.

Society News

October Meeting: Something Special

Following hot on the heels of the AGM at our October 7th meeting, we will have the official launch of Paul Kent's new book, *Pelham Grenville Wodehouse: "This is jolly old Fame"*.

Available as a handsomely bound hardback, it is the first volume in what will, by 2021, have grown to a trilogy examining every aspect of Wodehouse's writing and the imagination that created it – novels, stories, poems, journalism, plays, and song lyrics. Moreover, it compellingly argues the case for why Wodehouse should be regarded not just as a first-rate comic writer, but as a first-rate writer, *period*. Volume 1 focuses on the ingredients that came together to create Plum's comic world and forge his peerless writing style, covering all 75 or so years of his writing career.

At the meeting, Paul will be giving a short reading from his book, followed by a Q&A session. Copies will be available on the night at a special discounted price, and the author will be happy to sign them. If you can't make it to the meeting, the book will be available direct from the publisher

To order the volume, go to the website www.canofworms.net/shop; or you can email sales@canofworms.net to arrange your order.

See the review of Paul's book on page 8.

Lynne Truss, Patron

We are thrilled to announce that the multitalented Lynne Truss has agreed to become a Patron of our Society. Perhaps best known for her bestselling book *Eats, Shoots & Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation*, Ms Truss is an author, journalist, dramatist, and radio broadcaster with six novels to her credit, as well as six books of nonfiction and two grammar guides for children; she has also written radio plays and series. While she has produced some dramatic work, her comedies and great affection for



Wodehouse are what make her a perfect fit for our Society. Quite recently she included *The Code of the Woosters* in a list of her five favourite novels. We're absolutely delighted Lynne has become a Patron, and hope we'll be seeing and hearing a lot of her in the future.

Last Chance to Renew!

In June many of our members received notices that their subscriptions were up for renewal. Thank you to all those who have re-upped their memberships of the Society! For those who have not yet renewed, this will be your last issue of *Wooster Sauce* unless you sign up again now. Renewing is very easy and can be done in a variety of ways, including Direct Debit (our preferred method), PayPal, and cheque. If you have received a yellow notice with this issue, simply follow the instructions thereon in order to continue enjoying the benefits of membership.

A New Printer

As Robert Bruce reports on page 4, the contents of the envelope in which you received this issue of *Wooster Sauce* were inserted not by a team of Society volunteers but by a mailing house. Furthermore, starting with this issue, we have a new printer, who – not coincidentally – is also doing the mailing: Joshua Horgan Print and Design, located in Oxford. For 22½ years, our printing was done by the inestimable firm of Baines Design & Print in Cuffley, Hertfordshire. It was a wrench to say goodbye to the terrific folks at Baines, who provided exceptional service to us over the years, printing not only *Wooster Sauce* and *By The Way* but also our membership leaflets and menus for our dinners, as well as other things, and we are grateful to them. However, the move to Joshua Horgan will, we believe, prove beneficial to both the Society's finances and its members, not to mention the teams of volunteers who stuffed envelopes quarterly for so many years. Our thanks go to Patrick Horgan and Yvonne Fry, who have been so helpful and supportive as we become used to a new way of printing and despatching the journal to members. Do let us know what you think of the new envelope, complete with logo, and any other reaction you may have to this change.

A Spiffing Offer for Members

Some 11 years or so ago, we learned of the existence of a pub in Copythorne, Hampshire, called the Empress of Blandings – and a thoroughly wonderful place it is. Owned by the brewery Hall and Woodhouse, the Empress of Blandings features not just porcine themes but also books by Wodehouse, pig pictures aplenty, and even a cheeky pub sign featuring a black Berkshire sow. A quotation from Wodehouse describing the noble Empress adorns the exterior wall.

Way back when, the pub owners extended an offer to Society members: if you bring, and present, a copy of

Wooster Sauce with you when you visit the pub, you will receive a 20% discount off your meal. Recently they



wrote to extend the offer, so waste no time in taking advantage of it! The Editor can attest to the yumminess of the food served at the Empress of Blandings, so this,

on top of the whimsical atmosphere and Wodehouse-themed décor, makes it a very worthwhile visit.

The Empress of Blandings is located on Romsey Rd, Copythorne, Southampton SO40 2PF. Have a good time!

The End of an Era

by Robert Bruce

History is made this month and with this issue of *Wooster Sauce*. And all history demands a footnote.

For the first time, this issue has been put carefully into envelopes, franked, and dispatched by a mailing house rather than by a dedicated band of Society volunteers. It is a much more efficient and, we hope, trouble-free method of getting the journal to Society members. But it brings to a close the sequence of quarterly gatherings of volunteers and the camaraderie, eccentricity, fun, and dedicated work involved.

Initially, from 1997, it took place at the home of the then-editor Tony Ring and his wife, Elaine. In more recent years it has been carried out at the home of the Chairman, Hilary Bruce, deep in the tree-lined streets of Maida Vale in West London. There, at a table in the bay window, half a dozen members sat and put the thousand or so copies of the latest issue into envelopes, affixed labels and stamps, sealed them up and then put them into boxes, later mailbags, to be collected by the local post office. These events became known as ‘stuffing parties’, which amongst the ‘stuffers’ became the stuff of legend. To quote one, it was always “a jolly time and such a social event, sharing stories and sharing jokes”. For another it was simply a question of “sitting round the table, having a riotous time and



The Chairman jubilantly surveys the completed stacks.

putting the world to rights, and having an awful lot of laughter, whoever was there”.

Not that it was always straightforward work, particularly in the earlier years, when different supplements and other sheets of related Wodehouse material went out with the magazine to different members. At one point there were up to 25 different possible permutations, depending on which member was due to receive what instalment of what insert. It was complex brainwork, beyond the powers of a Wooster, but not of a Jeeves.

To help it all along, there were always many plates of biscuits. For me I was always tempted, when dealing with the envelope of an old friend, to drop a chocolate biscuit into the mailing. Though I never did. And once it was all done and the happy people from the Post Office had collected the bags, there was always the extensive lunch prepared by the Chairman. Her cauldrons of Cullen Skink became legendary. And then there was more time to sit around the lunch table, talking and having the odd glass or two. Wodehouse people are never short of something to talk about.

Looking back, the whole operation was extraordinary – the staggering logistics, the enormous fun, and the simple pleasures of friends around the table doing something that brought, through the post over the following days, great and lasting pleasure to the Society’s members.



Tim Andrew stuffs his last envelope.

“Shall I take the fork, your lordship?”

“The fork?”

“Your lordship has inadvertently put a fork in your coat-pocket.”

Lord Emsworth felt in the pocket indicated, and, with the air of an inexpert conjurer whose trick has succeeded contrary to his expectations, produced a silver-plated fork. He regarded it with surprise, then he looked wonderingly at Adam.

“Adams, I’m getting absent-minded. Have you ever noticed any traces of absent-mindedness in me before?”

“Oh, no, your lordship.”

(From Something Fresh, 1915)

A Quizzing Triumph

by Peter Thompson

If you read your June edition of *Wooster Sauce* as carefully as you should, you would have seen, under the heading ‘A Fiendish Reminder’ (page 4), a short article by Paul Kent advertising the forthcoming Society meeting on the 8th July, featuring the Annual Quiz, which Paul himself sets and conducts. He claims two things in that article: first, that the quiz is not ‘fiendish’; and, second, that he, as setter, is not a ‘close confidant of Machiavelli’. Maybe not, but certainly a second cousin by marriage.

I along with others tipped up at the Savile Club, which whereabouts seem to be known to only about four people in London, none of whom did I accost in my one-hour yomp from Oxford Circus. The room was buzzing – there were about 40 members present – and it has to be said that by claiming the Savile as our venue for meetings, we have struck gold. Lovely setting; friendly, helpful, obliging staff.

Following a brief set of Parish Notices from Chairman Hilary, mostly to do with the forthcoming memorial dedication at Westminster Abbey, the Quiz got under way with the redoubtable Paul wielding the questions. Teams were made up at random with anywhere from four to eight people, and as ever the names they chose were quite clever. This year we had Ignominy in the Offing; The Fink-Nottles; The Bosham Bandits; Ancient and Modern; The Youngest Members; Sofa, So Good; and my team, The Five Fotheringay-Phipps.



Paul (far left) prepares to reveal the answers to the contestants.

I was particularly fortunate in my chosen group, which included our illustrious editor of *Wooster Sauce*, Elin Murphy; Christine Hewitt, our Society’s wonderful Secretary and Membership Secretary; Carolyn de la Plain; and Sarah Stanfield, a new member that night and a refugee from The Lewis Carroll Club. Elaine Ring sat in to listen. We were determined to have the fun advertised in Paul’s article – and without any doubt we did. We believed we were not going to win, but we were going to have the most laughs.

I have to admit that, much as I love Wodehouse, my knowledge is, as Jeeves might be the first to say, negligible. The other four were carrying me – I admit it. But without me, they would have been lost. I provided the paper upon which the answers could be written. Crucial, though I say it myself. We all chipped in with answers, but there is no question but that I chipped in the least.

And the winning team was – The Five Fotheringay-Phipps. We were astonished. And delighted as we each received a copy of *The P. G. Wodehouse Miscellany* by Norman Murphy. To think I was on that team. I did not even think up the name. But I did provide the writing paper.

We modestly hired an Open Top Bus for the parade around London the next day.

A lovely evening, and a really big thank you to Paul Kent, without whom we would have had no quiz and not as many laughs.



Four of the victorious Fotheringay-Phipps, with Elaine Ring

Some Kent Quiz Samples

(Answers on page 6)

1. What is Jeeves’s first name? For a bonus, in which novel do we discover this amazing fact?
2. True or false – Jeeves was involved in World War I.
3. Jeeves and Wooster have been played on stage, screen and radio by some famous partnerships. I’m going to give you the Berties, if you’ll be so kind as to provide me with their corresponding Jeeveses:
 - A. Hugh Laurie (TV)
 - B. Richard Briers (Radio)
 - C. Ian Carmichael (TV)
 - D. David Niven (Film)
 - E. Terry-Thomas (LP)
4. In *Piccadilly Jim*, and in the novel that bears his name, what is the actual name of ‘The Little Nugget’?
5. The name, please, of Florence Craye’s younger brother, a boy scout who thinks it’s a terribly good idea to clean out the chimney of Wee Nooke using gunpowder and paraffin, with disastrous results.

My First Wodehouse Experience

by Albert Fenton

I thought I would just share with you how I first became acquainted with the Master. In 1957, aged 14, I, like Bertie Wooster, very proudly won a prize for Scripture knowledge. The exam was called the Synod Examination, a test in religious knowledge for pupils of Church of Ireland secondary schools in the diocese of Dublin, and I took first prize, which was a generous book token, probably about half a crown in old money. As I was always mad into books, this could not have been better, so off I went to the designated bookshop in Dublin, the Association for Promoting Christian Knowledge, to choose my prize book. The one I chose – God knows why at age 14 – was *Island in the Sun* by Alec Waugh. Those readers old enough to remember it will recall that it was a very raunchy novel of sex and interracial relations set in the Caribbean; the Pan Books paperback had a gloriously colourful cover of a beautiful but rather scantily clad native woman in a slightly (very!) provocative pose. Come to think of it, that was possibly my very reason for choosing it as, at age 14, I could not possibly have read reviews of it or known anything about it. (Whether the contents reflected the promise of the cover, I never found out as I never purchased or read it! Read on.)

Anyway, I took my prize to the counter, where a very nice young female assistant gently informed me that as the Archbishop of Dublin was to be presenting the prizes, this particular book with its lurid cover might not be the best choice. (Knowing



the said Archbishop very well in later life, I don't think it would have bothered him in the slightest.) I think that I argued the merits of my choice, though on what grounds I cannot imagine, but the young lady assistant was gently but firmly insistent, so I was sent off to choose again. (Remember, this was a very Christian and Protestant bookshop).

Presumably I wandered around, doubtless in some chagrin at my choice of literature having been refused, but why on earth I chose *Very Good, Jeeves*, I have no idea. Perhaps the cover drawing on the 1957 Penguin edition, of Bertie hanging on to the second last ring over the pool in the Drones club, was what appealed. Anyway, this was the book I chose, probably rather reluctantly.

I was hooked immediately (I have just reread the opening story and can see why!), and that led to what is now a 62-year-old devotion. I had never heard of P G Wodehouse at the time, but from then I was spending all my pocket money on the Master's works, and at one stage

had every single work of his on my shelves. And I am the proud owner of a handwritten letter to me from Plum and several inscribed books.

So, whilst I would probably have found him on my own eventually, I am extremely grateful to that possibly slightly over-prudish young woman who inadvertently sent me on the literary experience of my life. I still have that 1957 Penguin of Wodehouse's on my shelf, with its proud inscription "Albert J Fenton, Synod Examination Prize, Mountjoy School, 1957".

Letter to the Editor

From Barry Lane

I am ashamed to say I was not aware of Plum's great enjoyment of and liking for the Nero Wolfe stories. [See Richard Heller, 'A Wodehouse Favourite: Rex Stout', *Wooster Sauce*, June 2019.] However, I have been told that Winston Churchill was a great fan, also. My own complete (paperback) Wolfe collection is well-thumbed and includes all the Robert Goldsborough Nero Wolfe Revival books, which have been extremely well received by the critics. A favourite Wolfe quotation is perhaps: "Humility is only false modesty strutting on the Parade Ground."

Answers to Some Kent Quiz Samples

(page 5)

1. Reginald. Bonus: 1971's *Much Obligated, Jeeves*
2. True. In *Ring for Jeeves*, when asked by Lord Rowcester if he was in the First World War, Jeeves claims he "dabbled in it to a certain extent".
3. A, Stephen Fry; B, Michael Hordern; C, Dennis Price; D, Arthur Treacher; E, Roger Livesey
4. Ogden Ford, a small, fat boy of 14 who smokes, drinks, and gambles.
5. Young Edwin. The conflagration was, according to Jeeves, "his last Friday's act of kindness".

Well, you know how it is when you're in some public spot and a stranger comes in wearing the old school tie. You shove a hasty hand over your own and start to sidle out before the chap can spot it and grab you and start gassing.
(From 'Tried in the Furnace', 1935)

Books, Books, and More Books!

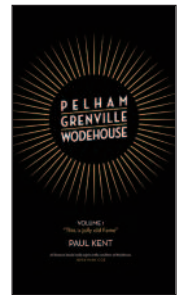
All seems to be right with the world, given that we've been receiving news of a variety of books about or including Wodehouse. It all goes to show that we can never get enough of the Master! Here's the rundown on the latest new publications to add to our PGW-related reading pleasure.

–ELIN MURPHY

***Pelham Grenville Wodehouse* by Paul Kent**

Volume 1: *'This is jolly old fame'*

Published by Can of Worms Press (you heard right), this is the first of three volumes that will explore Wodehouse's rich literary life and legacy. Society committee member Paul Kent has produced what is probably the first in-depth examination of PGW's "unique comic world and the imagination that created it" (as per the book's jacket). Paul will be officially launching the book at our Savile Cub meeting on October 7. For a preview of what's in store at that meeting, and information on how to order the volume, see Society News on page 3. For a review of the book by Michael Chacksfield, just turn the page.

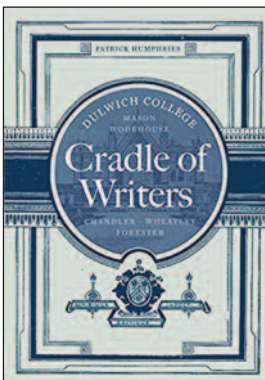


***The World of Jeeves* by Tamaki Morimura**

(In Japanese only)

A longtime member of our Society, Tamaki is known for her translations of PGW books in her native Japan, and she has spent several years writing this, her master work on Wodehouse. *The World of Jeeves*, published by Kokushokankokai, has a mere four chapters, but each has several sections. The first chapter, 'Wodehouse Walks with Norman Murphy', pays tribute to Norman and his ground-breaking research. Chapter 2, 'Tell Me, Jeeves!', provides contexts and explanations for many of the cultural references found in Wodehouse, including such topics as clothing, magazines, cars, football, drinks, and more – even a section on Greta Garbo and Clara Bow. Chapter 3 covers 'The Life of P. G. Wodehouse, Retracing with Jeeves Books' (the translation is a bit vague), while Chapter 4 is entitled 'The World of P. G. Wodehouse Expanded' and includes examinations of Bertie Wooster's world, PGW dramas and musicals, plaques and significant places, characters in the Jeeves books, and a Wodehouse chronology. We congratulate Tamaki on her book and can only hope that there will eventually be an English-language version!

Two from Dulwich



How delightful that Dulwich College has published two very different books with much to interest Wodehouseans! The first, by Patrick Humphries, is entitled *Cradle of Writers: Mason, Wodehouse, Chandler, Wheatley, Forester*, and takes a close look at the wealth of literary talent that graduated from Dulwich. The second – *Our School Stories: Tales Inspired by Dulwich College and P.G. Wodehouse* – contains eleven short stories, of which nine are by Old Alleynian authors, one by a current Alleynian, and one by Joseph Spence, the current Master of Dulwich College. Nick Townend will be reviewing both tomes in our December issue. They can be ordered through the Dulwich College shop: <https://shop.dulwich.org.uk/>.



'His Captain's hand on his shoulder smote' by Eric Midwinter

(No image available)

The subtitle of this interesting volume, published by the Association of Cricket Statisticians and Historians, is: *The incidence and influence of cricket in schoolboy stories*. It is number 6 in a series called 'Cricket Witness', and it can be ordered online through some of the major retailers. You will not be surprised to hear that Wodehouse figures significantly in this book, so who else to review it but our own Murray Hedgcock? See page 10.

Pelham Grenville Wodehouse *Volume 1: ‘This is jolly old Fame’*

Reviewed by Michael Chacksfield

In his first of three salubrious slabs exploring how PGW developed what a mid-1920s *New York Times* reviewer called “the P. G. Wodehouse manner”, Paul Kent leaves no stone unturned. Fastidious in research but never finicky in delivery, he soon overtakes the obvious observations of whimsy, nostalgia, and escapism to boldly go where no biographer has gone before.

Of his knowledge and meticulous research there can be no doubt as Mr Kent promises to “always enhance and never explain” the passage of PGW’s work from stage to page. As a reader, I felt like a trusted participant on this journey, and with such forensic analysis of Plum’s writing provenance, this book deserves our time and attention. As I chaise-longued my way through the initial pages of this ambitious and impressive opener in a series of three books scrupulously entitled *Pelham Grenville Wodehouse*, any reservations I had as to why I might invest time in more than 270 pages were soon dismissed as the author confirmed and thanked his illustrious predecessors who had already researched, reported, and rejoiced in the mastermind of Wodehouse, clearing the runway for Kent’s own take-off. Indeed, if I had had to take another trundle through the school stories and the hack work at the Globe progressing into musical comedy, while laughing along at ludic lines I love, it might all have felt . . . well, frankly . . . a bit overdone. Thankfully,

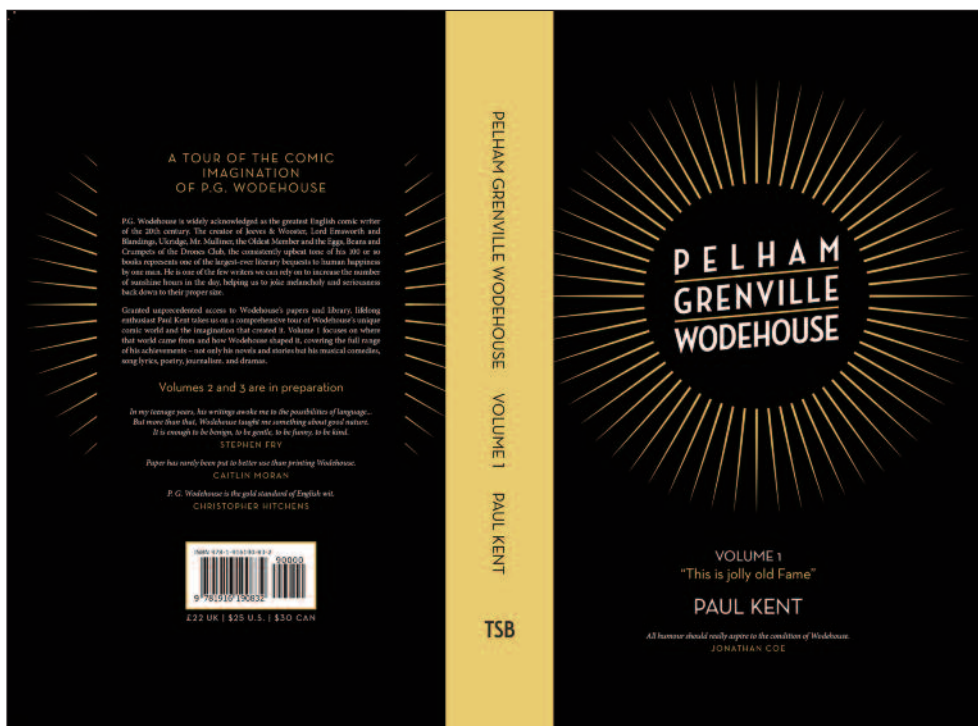
Kent never takes us there. Instead, he freshly fillets the career of our Old Alleynian hero into digestible slices of mouth-watering content, exploring, among other things, how fans range from the Queen Mum to Lemmy of Motörhead.

Kent’s quest to find out how any given PGW story is greater than the sum of its parts focuses on the origins and development of Wodehouse’s writing style. While other seasoned chroniclers typically point to an absence of parental love and the obvious disappointment at not following his brother Armine to Oxford, Kent disagrees that this affected Plum’s art. Rather, he asserts that writing was cathartic for Wodehouse and therefore did not represent an unburdening, pointing out in a straightforward way: “It was the working out of his creative compulsion, not the working through of his personal problems.” Plum himself put the matter beyond doubt, driving the point home in a letter to Bill Townend in 1945: “Do you find your private life affects your work? I don’t.”

Having been given access to Sir Edward Cazalet’s personal archive, Kent slides open a sash window, blowing fresh perspective into those stuffy establishment rooms full of recycled opinion. For example, I was surprised and saddened to learn that Plum endured inapt snobbery throughout his professional life. How could such a popular and successful writer, who outsold so many of his

contemporaries, have been so neglected by the establishment? How could his honorary D.Litt have proved controversial? The further I read on, the more upright I sat, perturbed at Plum’s remarks from that time: “I have always been alive to the fact that I am not one of the really big shots.”

Luckily, Kent is on hand to help us process why such appalling English snobbery was directed at such an appealing English writer. He points out that comedy is considered subversive, and it is this central irony, he argues, that accounts for why Plum never quite made it onto literature’s top table.



‘His Captain’s hand on his shoulder smote’

Book review by Murray Hedgcock

PGW is recorded as agreeing *Mike* to be his best book – and we who combine appreciation of Wodehouse with a love of cricket are inclined to agree. Eric Midwinter’s study on “the incidence and influence of cricket in schoolboy fiction” is therefore irresistible, because we can be sure of finding *Mike* within.

Midwinter, a social historian and prolific author of ten earlier books on cricket plus many on wider issues, is disarming with his somewhat surprising admission that he did not possess a copy of *Mike* and had to borrow one for his research. He looks back to 1939, when, age seven, he was intrigued by the boys’ comics of the day, proceeding to similar books:

I enjoyed reading cricket stories, the huge majority school-based, and learned much about the manners and techniques of the game. But this is not an exercise in nostalgia, although I do trust that there may be some ancient readers who find pleasure of a reminiscent kind in these pages.

Midwinter proposes that “the place of cricket in the public psyche . . . together with its place in educational circles in particular, was heavily influenced by this penetration of school-age literature, with cricket often the dominant sporting element.” The strong moral tone of much of this work is emphasised, with the emphasis on “Play the Game” not only on the sports field, but also in life. Many of the books made Sunday School prizes, their tone seen as suitably improving for the young mind.

Critics have noted the slight oddity that while these tales were set almost exclusively in the public school world of the upper and moneyed classes, they were probably read more by middle-class boys whose ambitions were limited to the grammar school. (Devouring such books in distant Australia in the Forties, I was puzzled by the divide between public and grammar schools: it was years before I was to resolve the matter.)

Midwinter says the genre began with *Tom Brown’s Schooldays*, published in 1857 “but set around 1840”, to which he devotes an exhaustive chapter. Next comes Talbot Baines Reed’s *The Fifth Form at St. Dominic’s*, actually made into a silent film in 1921 but “never enjoying the screen coverage of *Tom Brown*”, which rated a 1940 Hollywood production.

Chapter 3 offers “The Outcrop: Walpole, Waugh, Wodehouse et al”, listing more than 40 “school-based books, many with cricket featured”. Our interest, of course, is with *Mike*. Midwinter sums up:

One book stands out as the quintessential successor to ‘the great-souled’ Hughes’s *Tom Brown*, and Reed’s *Dominic’s*. This was P.G. Wodehouse’s simply titled ‘*Mike*’, published in book form in 1909, the finest of several still very readable Wodehousian school titles, such as ‘*The White Feather*’, ‘*The Gold Bat*’, ‘*The Head of Kay’s*’, and ‘*A Prefect’s Uncle*’. Indeed, much of ‘*Plum*’ Wodehouse’s schoolboy fiction is available in print form today.

Recording Wodehouse’s time at Dulwich, Midwinter comments: “No-one could have been more perfectly placed, by attitude and aptitude and, with fluent pen, ability, to write the anthem to Athleticism as that cult reached its acme in the Edwardian era. Furthermore, his yarn of Michael Jackson and his brothers was inspired by the famous Fosters of Worcestershire.”

At this point the author adds: “To my shame, I do not possess a copy of *Mike*, but I know a bloke who does – and my good friend Julian Baker . . . the Wodehouse devotee, kindly loaned me his.” He notes the second half of the book produced “under the title of ‘Enter Psmith’, a character for whom both his readers and (PGW) himself had a strong affection, and whose adventures were a forerunner of the *Wooster* and *Blandings* tales”. Midwinter muses on Psmith but wrongly records him as “a Manchester United supporter”: this was a pretence to curry favour with Psmith’s immediate superior in the New Asiatic Bank, where he and *Mike* found themselves after schooldays.

“Cricket is the motif,” says Midwinter of *Mike*, summarising the plot with the thought that “the style is unmistakably felicitous” and terming it “the most fluidly crafted schoolboy book of them all. The credo of Athleticism is pure and unadorned, freed by Wodehouse from even a wisp of its previous clothing in Christian theology, although the ethic of ‘manly’ sportsmanship remains constant.”

Midwinter recalls how Benny Green, “that diverting polymath who adored Wodehouse as much as he did cricket, surmised that Wodehouse was waxing critical of the original authors of such stories and the school system as well. . . . It was ever good clean fun, with no malice or aforethought.” He agrees that PGW’s school yarns “served as a basic training exercise for his later exquisite fiction. . . . There is no more pressing argument about the prominence of school literature in his period than that, among the hundreds of books written around fictional boarding schools and their games, so illustrious a star of English literature should choose to use the genre for his apprenticeship.”

Further chapters study later books by a variety of authors, marked by increasing realism.

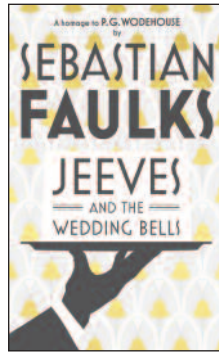
Midwinter believes that the school story maintains its appeal, recording one enthusiast terming it “permanent adolescence”. And he quotes J. B. Priestley’s description of PGW as “a brilliant super de luxe schoolboy”. What fun for all us male Wodehousians, to qualify on the first count, even if we can never hope to attain the Olympian heights of the second.

‘His Captain’s hand on his shoulder smote’ – The incidence and influence of cricket in schoolboy stories, by Eric Midwinter, retails for £15. 156 pp; card cover; ACS Publications, 2019.

A Daily Dozen of “Who’s Wodehouse?”

by Ken Clevenger

Back in 2013, when, with the Wodehouse Estate’s blessing, novelist Sebastian Faulks published *Jeeves and the Wedding Bells*, there was among the cognoscenti a fair amount of carping, if not outright sniffing, about the thing not being the done thing. The novel certainly never hit the big time, and there were no reports of television or movie interest, but clearly Wodehouse, as an immensely popular author, survived the episode with his reputation intact.



I was a middle-of-the-roader then. I enjoyed reading it. I knew Wodehousian purists who could not stand it at any price, but I found some merits.

Then the Estate gave permission for Ben Schott to write a new homage to Wodehouse, *Jeeves and the King of Clubs*, published last year. It has had some rather more favorable critical reviews in the press, but again there are some purists who have drawn a figurative line in the sand and set their face against it. And again, I have read it with interest and not a little pleasure.



Like Faulks’s book, the latest authorized homage is not Wodehouse, and I think it was less intended to be so. But it is not without merit and is distinctly Wodehousian, and that alone is not a bad goal to score. If you have read it, doubtless you have an opinion, and as the French say, *chacun à son goût*. But if you haven’t read it, let me try to persuade you that it is worth the time and money to give it a try. After all, so few things are new and distinctly Wodehousian that we ought to welcome contenders into the fold.

My methodology assumes that you have largely forgotten the Faulks novel. So I am going to set out a dozen quotes. Some are pure Plum, some are from *Jeeves and the Wedding Bells*, and some are from *Jeeves and the King of Clubs*. Feel free to mark them as ‘T’ for True Wodehouse, ‘F’ for Faulks’s work, and ‘S’ for Ben Schott’s homage.

1.____: “Medical research has established, sir, that the ideal diet is one in which the animal and vegetable foods are balanced. A strict vegetarian diet is not recommended by the majority of doctors, as it lacks sufficient protein and in particular does not contain

the protein which is built up of the amino-acids required by the body. Competent observers have traced some cases of mental disorder to this shortage.”

- 2.____: “Remember who you’re confiding in. Graves are garrulous, tombs talkative when compared to me. Is that not so, Jeeves?”
“Your discretion has frequently been remarked upon, sir.”
- 3.____: As we descended to the front door, I was assailed by a qualm, assuming such things are sold to the public in the singular.
- 4.____: We Woosters are capable of more than “the frivolous work of polished idleness” – despite what many an aunt has accused, more often than not in writing.
- 5.____: I’ve never really understood why girls fall for chaps at all, to be quite frank, but I suppose if a 24-carat popsy like Pauline Stoker can declare undying love for an ass like Chuffy Chufnell, then all things are possible.
- 6.____: “There can be no love where there is not perfect trust.”
“Who told you that?”
“Jeeves, I think; it sounds like one of his things.”
“Well, Jeeves is wrong. There jolly well can be love without perfect trust, and don’t you forget it.”
- 7.____: The scene ahead, as I knocked at the library door, was therefore what Jeeves calls *terra incognita*.
- 8.____: Joy had made him the friend of all the world. He was more like something out of Dickens than anything human.
- 9.____: Cats are, of course, excellent judges of character.
- 10.____: I was draining the remnants of my cocktail when I heard a familiar, unwelcome voice.
- 11.____: The Red Lion was a four-ale bar with a handful of lowbrowed sons of toil who looked as though they might be related to one another in ways frowned on by the Old Testament.
- 12.____: I gave him the desiccated stare that had once been fixed on me from the bench by a particularly Draconian beak.

For the answers and more, go to page 19.

Journey into Fantasy: The Psmith Novels of P G Wodehouse

by Richard Heller

This is an edited version of a lecture Richard gave to the Lahore Literary Festival in 2015. Somehow your dozy Editor managed to lose track of it; profound apologies to the author for the long delay in printing this article. Richard writes: “The Master is very popular in Pakistan, and not just among older people. Most of my audience were university students and recent graduates, who appreciated PGW as a supreme stylist.”

P G Wodehouse once wrote: “I believe there are two ways of writing successful novels. One is mine, making the thing frankly a fairy story and ignoring real life altogether; the other is going right deep down into life and not caring a damn.”¹

I focus on Wodehouse’s Psmith tetralogy – the four novels, originally magazine serial stories, about the dandy Edwardian schoolboy who decides that his family name of Smith is too ordinary and adds to it an unsounded P. These novels show the Master’s transition from gifted but conventional storyteller into fantasy and genius.

Psmith first appears in *The Lost Lambs* (later *Mike and Psmith*), the sequel to the school career of the cricket star Mike Jackson. Psmith meets Mike at Sedleigh, the public school where they have both been exiled to improve their academic performance. At once he delivers one of the most important lines Wodehouse ever wrote. Psmith asks (with obvious upper-case letters): “Are you the Bully, the Pride of the School, or the Boy who is Led Astray and Takes to Drink in Chapter 16?” Here is Wodehouse pointedly mocking the conventions of the school stories which he loved and had written with great success. But now he signals that he is moving on to comedy and satire, and his new character, Psmith, will take charge of the narrative in place of Mike. Although Mike has much more depth and colour than the conventional schoolboy hero, he has no chance against Psmith.

Immediately, Psmith signals his break with conventions, most obviously by adding the P to his name, addressing everyone as Comrade, and proclaiming himself a Socialist: “It’s a great scheme. . . . You work for the equal distribution of property and start by collaring all you can and sitting on it.” Actually, Psmith is an anarchist whose mission is to subvert authority. He achieves this by patronizing all the masters.

In conventional school stories, a visit to the headmaster’s study is a grim ordeal. Psmith turns it

into a social call and has a superb put-down ready for the headmaster:

“May I go now, sir? I am in the middle of a singularly impressive passage of Cicero’s speech, *De Senectute*.”

“I am sorry that you should leave your preparation till Sunday, Smith. It is a habit of which I altogether disapprove.”

“I am reading it, sir,” said Psmith with simple dignity, “for pleasure.”

The next three Psmith novels move further and further away from the school milieu and have less and less of Mike. He does not even share billing in the title of *Psmith in the City*, in which Psmith follows Mike into a dreary junior clerical job in a bank. Much of this novel could be a modern satire on office life, and it draws deeply on Wodehouse’s gloomy memories of his career in the lower reaches of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank. Psmith puts more energy into avoiding work than doing it, and in vexing the bank’s manager, Mr Bickersdyke, particularly by haunting him at the gentleman’s club of which they are both members. Wodehouse also develops Psmith’s mannerism of talking about himself in the third person, which he would later apply with success to Bertie Wooster: “The cry goes round the clubs, Psmith is baffled.”

Mike is absent for most of the third novel, *Psmith Journalist*. The pair are now at Cambridge University and have fetched up in New York in the long summer vacation. It is one of Wodehouse’s most realistic novels. Psmith encounters a serious social problem – slum housing – and is shot at by gangsters (characteristically he is annoyed by the irreparable damage to his hat). But I also think that this novel has Wodehouse’s first excursion into full-blown fantasy. Psmith takes over a magazine of excruciating dullness, called *Cosy Moments*. There were magazines like this, designed as safe reading for American families, but none so ludicrously banal as Wodehouse’s creation. “*Cosy Moments* had reached the highest possible level of domesticity. Anything not calculated to appeal to the home had been rigidly excluded.” The contents include a “Moments in the Nursery page, which bristles with little stories about the nursery canary by Jane (aged six) and other works of rising young authors. There is a Moments of Meditation page conducted by the Reverend Edward T. Philpotts and . . . a Moments of Mirth page, conducted by an alleged humorist of the name of B. Henderson Asher.”

¹ PGW to William Townend 1935, cited in Sophie Ratcliffe, ed., *P. G. Wodehouse: A Life in Letters* (Arrow Books, 2013), p 8.

Psmith turns this magazine into a muck-raking scandal sheet under the magnificent banner: “*Cosy Moments Will Not Be Muzzled.*”

Mike becomes an offstage presence in the final novel, *Leave It to Psmith*. The pair have left Cambridge, and Psmith has briefly been forced to take up conventional employment in his uncle’s wholesale fish business. Not surprisingly, he abandons this and sets out his own stall, offering his services in a very long small ad:

Psmith Will Help You. Psmith Is Ready For Anything. DO YOU WANT Someone To Manage Your Affairs? Someone To Handle Your Business? Someone To Take The Dog For A Run? Someone To Assassinate Your Aunt? PSMITH WILL DO IT. CRIME NOT OBJECTED TO. Whatever Job You Have To Offer (Provided It Has Nothing To Do With Fish) LEAVE IT TO PSMITH!

Notice briefly that this advertisement anticipates one of Wodehouse’s regular comic tricks – verbosity in a small space (more usually a telegram) and the use of aunts as an enemy figure.

This novel is much more complexly plotted than the previous three, again anticipating Wodehouse’s later great work, but all the threads (including Psmith falling instantly in love with a girl in the rain) take Psmith to Blandings Castle. The castle and its main inhabitants appeared eight years earlier, in *Something Fresh*, but now they are more fully developed: its dreamy proprietor, Lord Emsworth; his tyrannical sister Constance and her appalling ally, the Efficient Baxter; and his irritating son Freddie. The Empress of Blandings is missing: Wodehouse had not yet seen the comic possibilities of pigs, and he gives Lord Emsworth an obsession with flowers. This novel also contains a regular Wodehouse plot device: impostors. They target Blandings, in particular, like wasps swooping on a forgotten smear of jam.

Anyway, Psmith travels to Blandings, impersonating a poet. As the plot unfolds, he frustrates two other impostors, delivers Lord Emsworth from the Efficient Baxter and Lady Constance, and unites all the sundered hearts (including his own). Psmith’s journey is now complete: from school story character to conventional comedy and satire, to the fantasy world of Blandings.

Psmith then disappears from the canon, but his journey to Blandings Castle showed Wodehouse the possibilities of imaginary worlds. Wodehouse’s great characters are rarely, if ever, in contact with contemporary life. That said, he produced a superb satire on Britain’s Fascist leader of the 1930s, Sir Oswald Mosley as Roderick Spode. (Roderick is always a menacing name in Wodehouse.)

Spode apart, one can read Wodehouse’s greatest work and discover very little about any major 20th-

century event. His characters have scarcely been touched by the Great War. Although they contain many young men of military age, only one, Archie Moffam (pronounced ‘Moom’ to rhyme with ‘Bluffingham’) has done any military service. All the country houses have the same number of servants (for comic possibilities) as they did before the War. There is a sprinkling of writers and artists and parsons, but most of the characters have no occupation. Those in positions of authority (such as Sir Roderick Glossop, the eminent psychiatric therapist) are targets of mockery. Only Aunt Dahlia has any sort of regular occupation, as editor of *Milady’s Boudoir* and publisher of Bertie Wooster’s authoritative article on ‘What the Well-Dressed Man Is Wearing’. But this is another fantasy magazine, along the lines of *Cosy Moments*, as is the infants’ journal *Wee Tots*, edited precariously by Bingo Little.

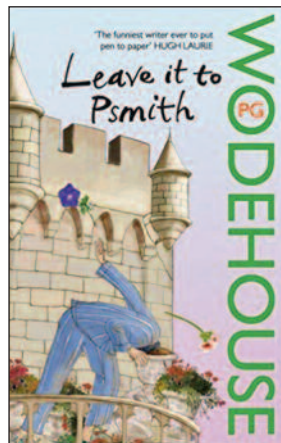
Most of the action in Wodehouse’s great novels happens in private places, not public ones, especially characters’ homes, ranging from great estates to suburban villas, tumbledown cottages, and clubs. By cutting his main characters off from dreary realities, Wodehouse could let rip on their personalities. He not only gave them colourful, even extravagant dialogue and behaviours, he created a world where new conventions are established, and such dialogue and behaviours become natural and predictable.

Sustaining this fantasy world requires an iron discipline. Wodehouse’s people stay in character and their relationships never change. The discipline is so strong that it can accommodate the contradictions in Bertie Wooster. His place in the imaginary world requires him to be a silly ass. Jeeves at one point describes him as mentally negligible. But Bertie is nearly always his own narrator – in which he is a startlingly good writer. He

regularly uses colourful metaphors: “Unchain the bacon and eggs, Jeeves.” He employs inventive literary devices, particularly referring to himself in the third person and referring to things by their initials (“I took a deep draught of the b and s.”). He is a master of hypallage (transferred epithet): “I lit a thoughtful cigarette.” Bertie’s only academic distinction is a prize at preparatory school for Scripture Knowledge, but he uses many literary and historic allusions, foreign languages and even legal technicalities: “Aunt Dahlia, I must enter a firm *nolle prosequi.*”

Apart from these purely stylistic gifts, Bertie is superb at the basic skills of narrative: construction, characterization, dialogue, setting. Wodehouse exploits all of these gifts but still keeps Bertie in his required role place as a silly ass.

The Efficient Baxter makes a brief appearance in Richard Heller’s 2016 book (with Peter Osborne) White On Green, which celebrates the drama of Pakistan cricket. It is published by Simon & Schuster.



P G Wodehouse and ‘The Message’

Part 1

by Brian Wagstaff

In his interesting article ‘P. G. Wodehouse: The Undercover Satirist’ in the June 2018 edition of *Wooster Sauce*, Arunhaba Sengupta bemoans the fact that literary scholars claim Plum’s novels have no ‘message’. His argument is that the merit of Wodehouse’s novels lies in casual satirical observation of the world, quoting as an example Bertie’s statement from *Much Obligated, Jeeves* – “The great thing in life, Jeeves, if we wish to be happy and prosperous, is to miss as many political debates as possible” – rather than a promulgation of any systematic moral view. While I agree with the general thrust of Mr Sengupta’s remarks (and especially with his frustration at the solemnity and pompousness of many literary scholars), I believe that a study of Wodehouse’s novels and stories reveals quite a systematic set of moral values which do, in fact, amount to a message, although it is so charmingly integrated into the stories that we easily overlook it.

This two-part article will give an overview of what I think the systematic moral view I have referred to is and the ‘message’ (if that is the correct term for a wholly implied code of values) that we can derive from Wodehouse’s work.

At the heart of Wodehouse’s fiction, I believe, is Polonius’s advice to Laertes in *Hamlet*, “To thine own self be true”¹; or, to put it conversely, “Do not pretend to be what you are not.” An extreme example of such pretence is that of Archibald Mulliner in ‘The Reverent Wooing of Archibald’², whose ‘pinheadedness’, in the words of Mr Mulliner, his uncle,

so far from being ordinary was exceptional. Even at the Drones Club, where the average intellect is not high, it was often said of Archibald that, had his brain been constructed of silk, he would have been hard put to it to find sufficient material to make a canary a pair of cami-knickers.

Archibald falls in love with Aurelia Cammarleigh. In his attempts to woo her, he feels compelled to hide from her the extent of his pinheadedness and his one outstanding talent, that of giving the best imitation of a hen laying an egg in all of West London. Knowing that Aurelia’s aunt is a firm convert to the view that Shakespeare’s plays were written by Bacon, Archibald bones up on the subject and engages her in conversation on it. Strangely, despite all his hard work, Aurelia shows

¹ A play by the late William Shakespeare, as Jeeves would no doubt remind us.

² In *Mr Mulliner Speaking*, 1929

less and less interest in Archibald, until the fates ensure that she overhears him demonstrating his one true skill. Wodehouse gives surely the most inspired description in English literature of a man imitating a hen laying an egg (lasting over a page in the Penguin edition), and Aurelia falls into his arms. What she wanted in a man was not intellect but someone who was good fun, someone who could do farmyard imitations.³

Wodehouse stories are full of male characters who do not dare to be themselves,⁴ have not discovered who they are, or who are too shy to say what they really mean.⁵ A notable example in the Jeeves and Wooster novels is Gussie Fink-Nottle, who is too timid to declare his love for Madeline Bassett. When Bertie takes it upon himself to woo on his friend’s behalf, the inevitable misunderstanding happens and he finds himself unintentionally engaged to her. Jeeves-Wooster novels combine at least one love story with a ‘reverse love story’ in which Bertie is desperately trying to escape matrimony, frequently from the woman his friend wishes to woo. Of course, the whole problem could all be sorted out with a heart-to-heart, but Bertie will never admit that he does not wish to marry the woman himself – ostensibly because he aims to be a *preux chevalier*,⁶ and this is not what a man does if he is *preux*. But the underlying reason seems far more likely to be that Bertie is spineless and unable to say “no” to anyone – not to Jeeves, nor to aunts and pals who expect him to do daft things like stealing 18th-century cow creamers and policeman’s helmets (*The Code of the Woosters*) or statuettes (*Stiff Upper Lip, Jeeves*), to take just two examples. Bertie is manipulated by Jeeves, who would find it

³ I make no apology for giving away the ending of the story. The enjoyment of reading Plum is not in knowing how it ends (which we guess from the beginning) but in following how he brings the denouement about and in his superb dialogue and descriptions along the way.

⁴ Perhaps this is why Wodehouse quotes Lady Macbeth’s lines so often about “letting ‘I dare not’ wait upon ‘I would’ like the poor cat i’ the adage”.

⁵ One of the reasons so many Wodehouse characters are afraid to be themselves, I believe, is that the rather repressed British society does not *allow* them to be true to themselves, in Wodehouse’s view. I will come back to this thought in Part 2, where I contrast Plum’s presentation of British and American society.

⁶ The phrase occurs in many novels, but see, for example, *Much Obligated, Jeeves*, chapter 16.

inconvenient for his employer to be married, and taken advantage of by his friends – and much of the comedy of the novels stems from the fact that *we* see this, and Bertie, the naïve first-person narrator, does not. Bertie is a kind-hearted soul but has very little self-knowledge.

Still greater flaws than not being true to oneself, in Wodehouse's novels, are disguise and intentional deception. Plum's plots abound in disguises – and they are usually disastrous or at least unsuccessful. One reason for this is that they are so easy to see through. This is perfectly illustrated by Henry Pifield Rice, a detective in the story 'Bill the Bloodhound':⁷

If there was one thing on which Henry prided himself it was the impenetrability of his disguises. He might be slow; he might be on the stupid side; but he could disguise himself. He had a variety of disguises, each designed to befog the public more hopelessly than the last.

Going down the street, you would meet a typical commercial traveller, dapper and alert. Anon, you encountered a heavily bearded Australian. Later, maybe, it was a courteous old retired colonel who stopped you and inquired the way to Trafalgar Square. Still later, a rather flashy individual of the sporting type asked you for a match for his cigar. Would you have suspected for one instant that each of these widely differing personalities was in reality one man?

Certainly you would.

The target, of course, is the myth of 'the master of disguise' in popular fiction of the time. The progression of the paragraphs I have quoted leads us to believe that the story is going to be an example of this subgenre, but our expectations are delightfully overturned by the last sentence.

Henry has been hired to trail an actor in a musical comedy, *The Girl from Brighton*, and when he is unmasked, the star of the show persuades him to carry on observing the troupe, claiming that he is their mascot and good for business. This gives Wodehouse the opportunity to comment on disguise on the stage, such as: "[I]n 'The Girl from Brighton' almost anything [such as a shrub on stage] could turn suddenly into a chorus girl"; and "very soon the daffodils were due on stage to clinch the verisimilitude of the scene by dancing the tango with the rabbits."

These remarks lead on to a paragraph that neatly sums up the ridiculousness of musical-comedy conventions of disguise:

The hero, having been disinherited by his wealthy and titled father for falling in love with the

heroine, a poor shop-girl, has disguised himself (by wearing a different coloured necktie) and has come in pursuit of her to a well-known seaside resort, where, having disguised herself by changing her dress, she is serving as a waitress in the Rotunda, on the Esplanade. The family butler, disguised as a Bath-chair man, has followed the hero, and the wealthy and titled father, disguised as an Italian opera-singer, has come to the place for a reason which, though extremely sound, for the moment eludes the memory. Anyhow, he is there, and they all meet on the Esplanade. Each recognises the other, but thinks he himself is unrecognized. *Exeunt* all, hurriedly, leaving the heroine alone on the stage.

The stage disguise, which fools no one, exactly mirrors Henry's own failure in real life.

Eventually life and art collide when Henry, who has been allowed to watch the performance in the wings, invades the stage convinced that this is the right moment to declare his love for a member of the troupe whose heart he has long dreamed of winning. He springs forward, but is foiled by a raised board on the stage:

Stubbing it squarely with his toe, Henry shot forward, all arms and legs.

It is the instinct of Man in such a situation to grab at the nearest support. Henry grabbed at the Hotel Superba, the pride of the Esplanade. It was a thin wooden edifice, and it supported him for perhaps a tenth of a second. Then he staggered with it into the limelight, tripped over a Bulgarian officer who was inflating himself for a deep note, and finally fell in a complicated heap as exactly in the centre of the stage as if he had been a star of years' standing.

The insubstantiality of the stage set, mirroring the flimsiness of the theatrical illusion, adds one more layer to a study of pretence in life and art. On the surface, *Bill the Bloodhound* is a happy, farcical story of an incompetent private detective who wins the heart of the minor actress he loves, but at a deeper level it is a nuanced meditation about disguise on the stage and in the real world.

This is frequently true of Plum's work: if you care to look through an apparently flippant plot, you often find that more serious themes are lurking beneath. No author more accurately confirms the maxim "Many a true word is spoken in jest".



Illustration for 'Bill the Bloodhound'
by Arthur William Brown
(Thanks to Madame Eulalie's Rare Plums)

Part 2 of this article, to be published in December, will explore disguise on the stage and in society in Wodehouse's work a little further, contrast the way Wodehouse presents British and American society, and look at his treatment of the British establishment.

⁷ In *The Man with Two Left Feet*, 1917

Blandings in Berlin

by Martin Breit

In the summer days of 1943, some weeks after (and before) Berlin experienced heavy air raids by the Allied forces, an unexpected scene took place in the southern outskirts of the city. Herr Bruch, an awkward private investigator, stopped his shabby car in front of an impressive manor house. He had been hired by the man of the house, Theobald von Langendorff, to look after his precious sow, Prinzessin Anastasia, and to protect her from Langendorff's neighbour and rival, Eberhard Matthesius. Meanwhile, Theobald's sister Julia was busy trying to prevent her brother Hans-Heinz from publishing his indelicate memoirs. Hans-Heinz finally gave in, under the condition that Julia would give her permission for her young nephew Helmut to marry ballet dancer Ilse.

Of course, these familiar happenings were not reality but part of the outdoor shots for the German comedy movie *Der Meisterdetektiv* (The Master Detective). Although there were no characters substituting for Monty Bodkin and Lord Tilbury, this was going to be the first film version of P. G. Wodehouse's *Heavy Weather*. The author did not know that it was being produced.

Wodehouse had previously been released from the internment camp at Ilag Tost in Upper Silesia, and he was not being allowed to leave Germany. He had no access to his accounts in England and America and thus had to look for other sources to finance his and Ethel's involuntary stay. He later disclosed to Major Cussen all sources of his money, including the sale of Ethel's jewellery and the sale of the movie rights for *Heavy Weather* to Berlin-Film GmbH. It was part of the arrangement between him and the company that the film would not be produced or released before the end of the war, that all persons and settings would be developed into German characters and places, and that the movie should not contain any kind of propaganda.

During the air raids of March 1943, the film company's premises were destroyed, as were, unfortunately, all files connected to the pre-production of *Der Meisterdetektiv*. Among those files must have been Wodehouse's contract, which may be why the film's production had gone ahead. A final report on the production is available in the German

Federal Archive, and it sheds some light on the conditions of producing the film during the war.

Shooting began in May 1943 under the working titles *Ein X für ein U* (which was the rather meaningless title of the German translation of *Heavy Weather*) and *Eine reizende Familie* (A Charming Family). Certainly nobody had thought it necessary to inform Wodehouse, who had been living more than 200 kilometres away in Degenershausen, about the ongoing adaptation of his work. The movie's premiere, which took place in Berlin's Kurfürstendamm one year later, also must have been unknown to him as by then he had moved to Paris, which was liberated by the Allies just a few weeks later.

The outdoor shooting took place on a manor in Teltow, just about 20 kilometres south of Berlin's centre. Nine days were scheduled, but due to bad weather conditions and the illness of actress Dorit Kreysler, in the end 28 days were needed. This increased the shooting costs, as did the actors, who were paid on a daily basis. The highly prominent cast included Georg Alexander, Grethe Weiser, and Erich Ponto (the mentor of *Goldfinger* Gert Fröbe), who all earned 900 Reichsmark (RM) per day.

Because the studio in Berlin had been destroyed, the indoor shooting had to be done in Holland, where preparations were delayed due to air raid warnings and strikes. Nevertheless, director Hubert Marischka was able to save a couple of days in the studios and finally reduced the production's

total costs.

Now, as we are dealing with a movie called *The Master Detective*, why should we not consider a real crime plot in all this? I'm just speculating with what follows, but it is worth a thought.

Confusion arises over the actual amount of money paid to Wodehouse. The Cussen Report (which sums up MI5's investigations of Plum's case after the war) states the sum of 40,000 RM was paid for the manuscript rights to *Heavy Weather* and options on more stories. On the production side, information varies. On the one hand, a report of Berlin-Film's annual spending states a total of 30,000 RM was paid to Plum, 10,000 being for *Der Meisterdetektiv* and the rest for unused material. On the other hand, the movie's production report states



A scene from *Der Meisterdetektiv*, which has been released in Germany on DVD and VHS.

a total of 52,000 RM was paid solely for *Heavy Weather* and claims that 25,000 RM had been paid in advance, with another 1,000 paid as commission to the actress Charlotte Serda, who had contacted Wodehouse in the matter. Given that Wodehouse received 40,000 RM and not less, at least 12,000 RM appears to have vanished. The other papers indicate that he only received 30,000 RM, of which only 10,000 was charged for this movie – so the whereabouts of up to 42,000 RM are open to question and speculation.

The money was not used for the screenplay, which had been written by Felix von Eckhardt and Kurt Walter and was charged separately for a total of 78,000 RM. All files giving the definite amount of money paid to Wodehouse had been destroyed, while he (and, presumably, his copy of the contract) was many miles away from Berlin (although shortly due to return to that city). So we can speculate: did someone take the chance to make money out of this situation – Wodehouse so far away and files destroyed – and put thousands of Reichsmarks in his own wallet? We will never know. Yet even if Wodehouse had received the whole sum of 52,000 RM, this was a cheap bargain for the Berlin-Film GmbH, as other authors of their films received up to 90,000 RM for manuscript rights.

Plum's name was completely omitted in the credits and advertisements. I recently found a note in the archive files that clearly indicates this had been done on purpose. Unfortunately, the rest of the document is missing, so we do not know the reason

his name was omitted. But it is astonishing because certain people at the Foreign Office expected propagandistic benefits from the release of a Wodehouse movie abroad. The film itself does not contain any kind of direct propaganda in either style or content. Its purpose for the Reich, as with the many other entertainment films of those days, was to be distraction for the war-torn Germans, who by watching the film could dream themselves into the peaceful, Eden-like grounds of the German Blandings. The film was advertised with the slogan *Wer lacht, hat mehr vom Leben* – “those who laugh have a better life”.

Still, many people must have been irritated by the different movie the title promised – a film featuring a smart detective and a compelling crime plot. A contemporary critic mentioned her disappointment, as she had expected a film of “Sherlock-Holmesian style”. The best part of the movie, she wrote, was the lovely credit sequence; the story sank in buffoonery and antique humour, though the brilliant actors were able to give some life to it.

In fact, the film shows hardly any trace of the wit and spirit of a Wodehouse tale. It is quite indicative that calling the German version of Sir Gregory Parsloe-Parsloe ‘Eberhard’ is one of the better jokes, as *Eber* is the German word for ‘boar’. Also the detective’s name is a pun, as *Bruch* means ‘burglary’ in colloquial language. In the end, the shortened story had been made into a laboured and dull comedy film that is only of interest to us now because of its previously unexplored history.

The Word Around the Clubs

Happy Anniversary, Dulwich College!

BARRY LANE has reminded us that this year is a highly significant one for Dulwich College: it's been 400 years since the Elizabethan actor-manager Edward Alleyn founded the college. Celebrations took place in June, and no doubt that has a lot to do with the publication of the two books mentioned on page 7. Dulwich counts among its graduates (known as Old Alleynians) some great names, including authors C. S. Forester, Raymond Chandler, and A. E. W. Mason; actors Leslie Howard and Chiwetel Ejiofor; and others from journalism, sports, the arts, politics, and science. But there can be little doubt that its two most famous Old Alleynians are the explorer Sir Ernest Shackleton – and, of course, P. G. Wodehouse. Our very best wishes to a great educational institution!



A Fine Line

In the July 8th issue of *The Spectator*, the literary challenge set by Lucy Vickery was to submit a piece of commentary on the Women's World Cup as “delivered by a figure from the world of fact or fiction, dead or alive”. Among the winners was D.A. Prince, who earned the £5 bonus prize with her take done in the

voice of Bertie Wooster. Ms Prince certainly hit the nail on the head with lines such as: “Watching an aunt in full cry, covering the turf like a ravenous hyena at its first sniff of carrion, takes a strong stomach.” To read the full

entry, go to: bit.ly/2M1ielb

Plum on One

On 11 June this year, the revered cricket commentator – and our Society's patron – Henry Blofeld was a guest on *The One Show*. Hosts Matt Baker and Emma Willis asked Henry about his love for the works of P. G. Wodehouse and hinted that they had a treat for him later in the programme. When it came at the end, it was a corker: on behalf of “the Wodehouse family” (meaning Sir Edward Cazalet and his family), they presented him with one of Wodehouse's walking sticks. Wodehouse had kept it by the back door of his house in Remsenburg – and then it was revealed that Guy Bolton had given the stick to Plum! The studio audience burst into applause as Henry, clearly overcome, said, “Do you know, I think that's just about the best present I ever had in my life.”

P. G. Wodehouse in the Bertrand Russell Archives

by Roger Baxter

You certainly are qualified to rank as a chartered member of Blandings!

(PGW to Bertrand Russell, 10 February 1954)

Readers of *Wooster Sauce* may be interested in an online article reporting a brief correspondence between Bertrand Russell and P. G. Wodehouse in early 1954. Both Wodehouse and Russell carried on voluminous letter writing to a wide circle of people until the end of their very long lives. This is in complete contrast to Wodehouse's illustrious creation, Bertie Wooster. Sophie Ratcliffe suggests that Wooster "belongs to the minimalist school of letter writers" (*P. G. Wodehouse: A Life in Letters*, 2011, p.1).

The website article features the carbon copy of a letter from Russell plus the original copy of Wodehouse's reply. It was created by the librarians at the Bertrand Russell Archives of McMaster University in Hamilton Ontario and can be found at: <https://dearbertie.mcmaster.ca/letter/wodehouse>

Essentially, Russell was declaring his interest in and admiration for Wodehouse's novels; he also outlined some "far more weighty" claims to the world of Wodehouse. In his reply, Wodehouse agreed that Russell indeed qualified as a "chartered member of Blandings". His reply is typical of his style of correspondence, revealing something of himself (as good correspondence should). He makes thoughtful reference to Russell's text and is respectful but not overly formal.

While some of Wodehouse's correspondences became 'pen friendships', it is likely that this instance was a one-off letter and reply exchange. Russell properly directed his letter to Wodehouse's London publisher, Herbert Jenkins, Ltd. Wodehouse's response indicated his postwar New York City home, the last before his move to Remsenburg. The two letters that make up this exchange were displayed as part of a "Bertrand Russell Reading Room" exhibition held in 2018 at the McMaster Museum of Art. They can also be seen in the Twittersphere as a single image.

A number of commentators have stated that Wodehouse was Russell's favourite humorist; Russell particularly enjoyed reading about Bertie Wooster and Jeeves. His personal collection of books held in the Russell Archives includes eleven works by Wodehouse: eight Penguin paperbacks (listed below) and three hardcover titles (without jackets) – *Louder and Funnier* (Faber & Faber, 1932); *Barmy in Wonderland* (Herbert Jenkins, 1952); and *Service With a Smile* (Herbert Jenkins, 1962). The two Herbert Jenkins novels are first editions. Russell's copy of *Barmy in Wonderland* was a birthday gift from Edith Finch. On the front flyleaf is inscribed: "B.R. / from E.F. / May 18th 1952"

– Russell's 80th birthday. Finch and Russell married later that year.

The eight titles in Russell's paperback collection are: *Carry On, Jeeves* (1959); *Laughing Gas* (1959); *The Little Nugget* (1959); *The Man Upstairs and Other Stories* (1962); *The Mating Season* (1958); *Summer Lightning* (1960); *Uncle Fred in the Springtime* (1961); and *Very Good, Jeeves* (1959). All are Penguin Paperback reprint editions with the exception of *The Little Nugget*, which is a Penguin Paperback first edition. All were priced at 2s/6d except *The Man Upstairs and Other Stories*, whose cover price was 3s/6d.

Idiosyncratically, Russell used pipe cleaners as bookmarks. (As a pipe smoker, he would have had these at hand.) One of these – among a number preserved in the Archives – was found, at the time of acquisition by the Archives, between pages 26-27 of his copy of *Summer Lightning*. It is unclear whether any Russellian (or Wodehousian) contextual analysis is in order.

One further item of related interest: Concluding his review of Bertrand Russell's *Portraits From Memory* (1956) – a series of "vivid and amusing" character sketches – in the 13 October 1956 issue of *The Tablet*, Christopher Hollis declared: "Among the outstanding, living English humourists, [Russell] is to my mind second to Dr Wodehouse alone." (Wodehouse was not a *Portraits* subject.) In a letter to Russell's publisher (the carbon copy of which is held in the Russell Archives), Edith Russell mentioned Hollis's review and noted that her husband was "enchanted to be bracketed with PG Wodehouse in whom he delights" (Edith Russell to Sir Stanley Unwin, 15 October 1956).

Among the talents of both men was the ability to find (and write) something interesting about what might appear to be an uninteresting subject. In a nutshell, Wodehouse wrote light comedies that were intricately plotted, making glorious use (and inspired abuse) of language. Russell's writing dealt with serious subjects in plain English. Summon up the mental image – split screen, if you wish – of two elderly men, pipes on their lips, one facing his typewriter, the other facing his stenographer (Bertrand Russell did not type).

In these two letters, readers will find a modest communication between two extraordinary writers.

Acknowledgements and Note: A correspondence with Tony Ring, Editor of *By The Way*, provided the incentive to write this article. The librarians at the Russell Archives generously provided assistance and material relating to the P. G. Wodehouse—Bertrand Russell connection. The Bertrand Russell Archives at McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, is home to the scholarly study of Bertrand Russell (1872–1970), British philosopher, logician, essayist, and renowned peace advocate.

Who's Wodehouse? (Continued from page 11)

The answers are:

1. T. Source: *Stiff Upper Lip, Jeeves*, as cited in *Wooster's World* by Geoffrey Jaggard, p.76
2. F, p.15 in the first US edition by St. Martin's Press, November 2013
3. S, p.205 in the first US edition by Little, Brown & Co., November 2018
4. S, p.3
5. F, p.229
6. T, *Joy in the Morning*, per Jaggard, p.98
7. F, p.232
8. T, *Stiff Upper Lip, Jeeves*, per Jaggard, p.151
9. S, p.144
10. S, p.47
11. F, p.45
12. S, p.16

I deliberately selected the three True Wodehouse quotes from a known source of 'nuggets' just to try to be fair and let someone else's judgement decide what is good Wodehouse. And in addition to cherry-picking the four 'F' quotes from Sebastian Faulks – admittedly for having what I thought was a good sound of Plum – I identified at least a dozen other passages that might have been chosen. Likewise, for the Ben Schott book I selected the lines I thought had the best Plum-like sound and could have used about a dozen others. A favourite I could not work in above was: "The seventh Earl of Sidcup is a sore for sighted eyes."

I confess to thinking Schott's homage had, overall, less of a Wodehouse-like flair to his language and sentence structure than Faulks. On the other hand, Schott's book was more obvious in the use of Plum's birthdate for Bertie, referring to Jeeves as the "Master", a couple of nods to the colour "plum", some corrupted Wodehouse book titles, and even a respectful comment about Dorothy L. Sayers.

I enjoyed the Faulks book. I do not say it was Wodehouse, but in my opinion, taken as a whole, it is more than merely Wodehousian, although that alone would not be a bad outcome. And a large part of the controversy relates to whether you are a die-hard 'pure' Plum fanatic or are a more moderate 'let-the-word-go-forth' type who hopes that keeping the Wodehouse name in the public eye will eventually bring more appreciative fans to the real Master's originals. I can see both sides – but, honestly, I am all for the 'new' Wodehouse.

It is in that vein that Ben Schott's book scores with me. One would not read it instead of Wodehouse, no, but one can enjoy it as Wodehousian. I confess that, for me, the plot and its resolution were not as compelling as most of Plum's novels. And some of the slang as language seemed un-Wodehousian, e.g., 'poggled', 'curate's egg', 'sub-cheese', 'Shabash', and 'stickybeak', to name a few. In fairness, Schott does have a short annotation section at the end of the book, which one discovers like a cocktail

Wodehouse Quiz 32

Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?

by David Buckle

1. In which novel does G. G. Waddington of Waddington's 97 Soups feature? (His daughter is Violet, the fiancée of Anthony Claude Wilbraham Bryce, 5th Earl of Droitwich.)
2. In *Company for Henry*, what does J. Wendell Stickney of Stickney's Dairy Products collect that attracts him to Ashby Hall, the home of Henry Paradene?
3. In which Blandings novel does Freddie Threepwood come to England from America in order to promote his father-in-law's pet food, Donaldson's Dog-Joy? (An extra point for naming the short story in which, again, Freddie flogged Donaldson's Dog-Joy, which preceded the novel by 16 years.)
4. In *French Leave*, who are the millionaire owners of the Clear Spring Sparkling Table Water Company?
5. In which Jeeves novel does Aunt Dahlia attempt to sell *Milady's Boudoir* to the newspaper tycoon L. G. Trotter?
6. John B. Pynsent, millionaire head of the Pynsent Export & Import Company, is the title character's uncle in which novel?
7. In *Summer Moonshine*, who is the millionaire brother of Lady Alice Abbott?
8. In *Something Fresh*, what did Lord Emsworth unknowingly steal from the collection of American millionaire J. Preston Peters?
9. Which Drones member is known as the club millionaire?
10. In *Jeeves in the Offing*, with which rich American does Bertie's Uncle Tom attempt, not without difficulty, to make an important business deal?

(Answers on page 21)

whose ice has rather melted beforehand. The best bit is the one-page note Schott appends reflecting his personal appreciation of Plum; it is frank, manly, and honest.

I cannot speak for the Estate, but one would hope somebody has quoted Matt. XXV, v. 21-23: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."

The Bibliographic Corner *by Nick Townend*

“With a New Preface by the Author”: Part Six

Continuing our review of the series of new prefaces contributed by Wodehouse to 14 reprints of his books issued by Herbert Jenkins/Barrie & Jenkins between 1969 and 1975, three new prefaces were issued in 1974. As it is unclear in what order they were issued, I am dealing with them in the order of the publication date of the UK first edition. On that basis, the first 1974 title, *Joy in the Morning*, was covered in Part Five of this series of articles.

The second 1974 title is *Pigs Have Wings* (McIlvaine, A73b5). The dust wrapper, with a red panel on the front cover, follows what had been established by the seventh title in the series, *The Little Nugget*, as the standard format through to the end of the series (see Part Four of this series of articles for details). McIlvaine notes the presence of the new preface but describes neither the dust wrapper nor the book, which had black boards with gold lettering on the spine. When Barrie & Jenkins reprinted the title in 1976 (A73b6), the preface was included. McIlvaine provides no details other than date and price for this edition (the rampant inflation of the 1970s had caused the price to increase from £2.25 in 1974 to £3.95 in 1976, an increase of some 76% in two years). Once again, the dust wrapper was in the standard format, with a red panel on the front cover, and the book had black boards with gold lettering on the spine, with the lettering being of a different size and font to that used for the 1974 edition.

Wodehouse’s preface begins by stating, “Let us have no false modesty. . . . I state frankly that *Pigs Have Wings* is darned good. . . . The first essential for a writer’s affection for any given book is that the writing of it should have caused him the minimum of blood, sweat and tears. . . . I wrote it from start to finish with the effortless smoothness of a hen laying an egg.” Apropos Maudie Montrose, Wodehouse confirms that his fiction is based on fact as he reveals that he “modelled her with loving care on the barmaids I had known in my youth, when barmaids were barmaids and had the masses of golden hair which you now see mostly on young gentlemen you meet in the street”. Wodehouse manages to extend the preface to two pages by filling the last half page with a quotation from the report in verse “from the Bridgnorth, Shifnel [sic] and Albrighton Argus”, which concludes the book.

The final 1974 title to consider is *French Leave* (A78a3). McIlvaine notes the new preface but does not describe either the dust wrapper, which followed the standard pattern with a gold panel, or the book, which had black boards. When Barrie & Jenkins reprinted the title in 1976 (A78a4), the preface was included. McIlvaine provides no details other than date and price for this edition. Once again, the dust wrapper was in the standard format, with a gold panel on the front cover, and the book had black boards. When Penguin first published the title in 1992 (AAan78), the preface was included.

Wodehouse’s preface contains several points of interest. He states that “The book ought to belong to the period 1930–35, when I was living near Cannes and trying to learn French by going to the local Berlitz school and reading . . . the plays of Georges Courteline [sic]. . . . Pencils, owing to my instructress at Berlitz, were the only subject on which I was able to speak with authority. . . . If some French manufacturer of pencils had happened along, I would have held him spellbound with my knowledge of his business, but in general society the difficulty of working pencils into the conversation was too much for me and after a while I gave it up and stuck to the normal grunts and gurgles of the foreigner who finds himself cornered by anything Gallic.”

Wodehouse goes on to say: “I am lucky in not being able to detect anything wrong with my stuff. . . . It seems to me that Nicolas Jules St Xavier Auguste, Marquis de Maufringneuse et Valerir-Moberanne is pretty good. I don’t say he doesn’t owe something to Georges Courteline, but even Shakespeare had his sources.” (For more on Wodehouse’s debt to Courteline, see Anne-Marie Chanet, ‘How Wodehouse Made Use of His French Lessons’, *Wooster Sauce*, September 2001, pp2–3; and NTP Murphy, *A Wodehouse Handbook*, Vol. 1, 2006, pp81–82.)

Wodehouse concludes with “A word on the title. I have not actually come across them, but I assume that everybody who has written a novel with a French setting must have called it what I have called mine. I wonder my American publisher did not change it. Changing titles is an occupational disease with American publishers. . . . For some reason my *French Leave* got by and joined all the other French Leaves. I can only hope that it will be found worthy to be included in the list of the Best Hundred Books Entitled *French Leave*.” The comments about American publishers reflect Wodehouse’s irritation with the title changes imposed on him by Peter Schwed. He could be much more acerbic in private, writing to his British publisher about the dust wrapper of *The Brinkmanship of Galahad Threepwood* (the US title of *Galahad at Blandings*): “Taken in conjunction with the loathsome title one feels that P. Schwed ought to rent a padded cell in some not too choosy lunatic asylum” (Sophie Ratcliffe, *PG Wodehouse: A Life in Letters*, 2001, p518; see also Robert McCrum, *Wodehouse: A Life*, 2004, p387). And the comment about “the list of the Best Hundred Books” is of course a recycling of the same gag which Wodehouse had originally used for his preface to *Summer Lightning* in 1929.

The Wooster Source

by Graeme Davidson

*This is the real Tabasco,
It's the word from Bertie Wooster,
A decent and kind-hearted Drone, oft blighted or
blessed with a dozy view and a foggier aperçu,
The scion of a family infested with
cloven-hoofed Aunts,
And whose modest quota of brain cells
scarcely numbers but a few.*



"You speak lightly, Jeeves, but I've known some dark work to take place in school treat tea tents."

"It is odd that you should say that, sir, for it was while partaking of tea that a lad threw a hard-boiled egg at Sir Watkyn."

"And hit him?"

"On the left cheek-bone, sir. It was most unfortunate."

I could not subscribe to this.

"I don't know why you say 'unfortunate'. Best thing that could have happened in my opinion. The very first time I set eyes on Pop Bassett, in the picturesque environment of Boshier Street Police Court, I remember saying to myself that there sat a man to whom it would do all the good in the world to have hard-boiled eggs thrown at him. . . . What's the boy's name?"

"I could not say, sir. His actions were cloaked in anonymity."

"A pity. I would have liked to reward him by sending him camels bearing apes, ivory and peacocks to his address."

Stiff Upper Lip, Jeeves (1963)

I drained my glass and lit a moody gasper. If Tottleigh Towers wanted to turn me into a cynic, it was going the right way about it.

"There's a curse on this house, Jeeves. Broken blossoms and shattered hopes wherever you look. It seems to be something in the air. The sooner we're out of here, the better. I wonder if we couldn't –"

I had been about to add "make our getaway tonight," but at this moment the door flew open and Spode came bounding in, wiping the words from my lips and causing me to raise an eyebrow or two. I resented this habit he was developing of popping up out of a trap at me every other minute like a Demon King in pantomime, and only the fact that I couldn't think of anything restrained me from saying something pretty stinging. As it was, I wore the mask and spoke with the suavity of the perfect host.

Stiff Upper Lip, Jeeves (1963)

"I hate you, I hate you!" cried Madeline, a thing I didn't know anyone ever said except in the second act of a musical comedy.

"You do?" said Gussie.

"Yes, I do. I loathe you."

"Then in that case," said Gussie, "I shall now eat a ham sandwich."

And this he proceeded to do with a sort of wolfish gusto that sent cold shivers down my spine, and Madeline shrieked sharply.

"This is the end!" she said, another thing you don't often hear.

When things between two once loving hearts have hotted up to this extent, it is always the prudent course for the innocent bystander to edge away, and this I did. I started back to the house, and in the drive I met Jeeves. He was at the wheel of Stiffy's car. Beside him, looking like a Scotch elder rebuking sin, was the dog Bartholomew.

Stiff Upper Lip, Jeeves (1963)

Poet's Corner

The Modern Babe

O Time, our beliefs you destroy;
Our fondest illusions you shatter.
It once used to fill us with joy,
Whenever our babies grew fatter:
Our hearts, ever anxious, it cheered,
As we marked them grow daily more tubby,
And saw how their rubs disappeared
And their cheeks became bulbous and chubby.

Those days are, alas! at an end.
No more the glad father announces
To every relation and friend,
"He's put on a couple of ounces!"
Ah! no, as each infant we weigh,
We groan if his figure increases;
It fills us with pain and dismay –
No baby, if healthy, obese is.

In future, oh! newly-made dad,
You must strictly taboo any dish you
Consider it likely to add
To your babe's stock of adipose tissue.
Rejoice if you find that your son's
Inclined to be meagre and skinny;
Just think of the danger he runs,
If he needs a large waist to his pinny.

In future all infants must train,
Avoid every food in which starch is,
From sweets they must wholly refrain,
And go in for a course of route marches.
And when through its delicate skin
With glee papa marks the bones start, he
May then (and then only) begin
To look on his baby as hearty.

From Daily Chronicle, 3 October, 1903

Answers to Wodehouse Quiz (Page 19)

1. *If I Were You*
2. *Antique paperweights*
3. *Full Moon* (and the short story was 'The Go-Getter')
4. *Chester and Mavis Todd*
5. *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit*
6. *Sam the Sudden*
7. *Sam Bulpitt*
8. A scarab (specifically, a Cheops of the fourth dynasty)
9. *Alexander 'Oofy' Prosser*
10. *Homer Cream*

I should imagine that if there's one thing that makes a fellow forget that he's in holy orders, it's a crisp punch on the beazer. A moment before, Stinker had been all concern about the disapproval of his superiors in the cloth, but now, as I read his mind, he was saying to himself "To hell with my superiors in the cloth," or however a curate would put it, "Let them eat cake."

Stiff Upper Lip, Jeeves (1963)

Recent Press Comment

New Indian Express News, May 14

Swami Nagarajan wrote that when he discovered the works of Wodehouse, his “passion for the English language was kindled and set ablaze”. He went on to describe some of Plum’s best-loved characters and books, and concluded that even after 30 years, his “tryst with Wodehouse’s world continues unabated”.

Birmingham Live (website), May 18

An article about drawing pins being left on the road that runs through Badger, Shropshire, mentioned the fact that “Bertie Wooster author PG Wodehouse lived close to Badger”. (Badger Dingle, which is just a few hundred yards from PGW’s old home, is the original of Badgwick Dingle in *The Pothunters*.)

Daily News-Miner, May 22

Writing from Fairbanks, Alaska, Greg Hill was led into an examination of Knuts thanks to P. G. Wodehouse, the subject of an Osher Learning Institutes course he was planning to teach in the autumn term. Having discovered PGW shortly after the author’s death in 1975, Hill found himself enchanted by Plum’s “authorial voice and penchant for metaphorical frolic and wordplay”. Having encountered the term *Knut* in his reading, he could not rest until he knew what that was, which led him in turn to also look into Canute the Great – and nuts. He concluded: “‘Nut’ is also a slang term for ‘head’, and few places are better equipped for ripening your nut than your public library.”

Londonist, May 24

A list of recommended things to do on this day included a visit to the Candlelight Club with its 1920s speakeasy atmosphere: “Think Bertie Wooster, cucumber sandwiches, and plenty of gin.”

Daily Mail, May 24 (from Dave Anderton)

In the ‘On This Day’ column, the quote of the day came from PGW: “there is no surer foundation for a beautiful friendship than a mutual taste in literature.”

Splice Today, May 27

Another favourable review of *Jeeves and the King of Clubs*, in which Matthew Surridge pointed out the book’s deficiencies but also noted that Ben Schott did well with the characters and conjured up the Wodehousian milieu in a “most interesting and distinctive” way. Surridge concluded that the book “whets the appetite for a return to Wodehouse’s originals”.

Printmonthly.com, May 31

Printed a report on the shortlist for the Comedy Women in Print prize, newly created to celebrate female writers of humour as a response to the lack of female winners for such awards as the Bollinger Everyman Wodehouse Prize (which has had only three female winners over 19 years).

Budapest Times, June 3

In a review of *Maigret’s Memoirs* by Georges Simenon, the unidentified reviewer attempted to explain how Simenon had written himself into the book so that his character Maigret meets him. The reviewer puzzled for this over: “[W]hen did P.G. Wodehouse drop in at his very own Drones Club for a Buck’s Fizz cocktail with Bertie Wooster, Pongo Twistleton, Psmith, Freddie Threepwood, Bingo Little, Freddie Widgeon, Catsmeat Potter-Pirbright and all the others?”

DissMercury, June 3

A review of a one-man play, *Old Herbaceous*, described the title character, Herbert Pinnegar, as “very much of the P G Wodehouse model; larger than life and unforgettable.”

New York Times, June 4

Carried an article on “What Happened After PG Wodehouse was Captured During World War II”. The article detailed the story by sharing press cuttings from the time, showing how it was reported in the *New York Times*. (To read the article, see: <https://nyti.ms/2OJgv6n>)

Book Riot, June 8

A column pairing books with certain types of tea noted: “Best served piping hot and sweetened slightly with a dash of milk, Earl Grey pairs beautifully with a comedy of manners, such as any of P. G. Wodehouse’s Jeeves and Wooster novels” – specifically, *The Code of the Woosters* with its stolen cow-creamer subplot.

Daily Telegraph, June 8 (from Carolyn de la Plain)

Question 35 across in the General Knowledge Crossword was: “Nickname of Drones Club member Reginald Twistleton in P.G. Wodehouse’s Uncle Fred stories and novels (5).”

The Hindu, June 10

Srinivasa Ramanujam paid tribute to the late Mohan Rangachari (known as ‘Crazy’ Mohan) by remembering interviews with the Indian actor, comedian, and writer, which “were always a laugh-fest”. Ramanujam wrote that Mohan was a great fan of Wodehouse and would say: “He is PG Wodehouse, and we comedians will always be only UG Wodehouse.”

The Telegraph (e-paper), June 10

Anasuya Basu reported on the Calcutta-based Bengal Club Library, which held a ‘Wodehouseian [sic] Evening’ that included readings, a quiz, and clips from *Jeeves and Wooster*, among other things. “A good hearty laugh and some well-earned prizes rounded up the evening.”

Daily Telegraph, June 12 (from Carolyn de la Plain)

The cryptic crossword had a rather tough one at 21 down: “Who Wooster might have addressed as bald one casually (3, 4).” (The answer: Old Bean)

The Conservative Woman, June 14

In a piece describing the angst involved in taking A-levels, Alan Ashworth began: “There is a classic moment in one of PG Wodehouse’s golf stories when a player who has missed a putt claims he was distracted by the beating of a butterfly’s wings in an adjacent meadow.”

Independent, June 14

Writing of the Mini, Sean O’Grady noted that its creator, Alec Issigonis, “mixed the forcefulness of Henry Ford and André Citroën, the engineering standards of Ferdinand Porsche and a boyish enthusiasm that PG Wodehouse would have been proud to create”.

The Hindu, June 16

In ‘Wodehouse, undistilled’, Saumya Balasubramanian paid tribute to PGW and touched on the unfortunate Berlin broadcasts, finding that “war and malice can take any inane thing and wring it out of shape and proportion”. He further reflected that Wodehouse “was a man who was not only the world’s funniest author, but was also the most hardworking, shy, kind and gentle person, who magnanimously shared with the world the gift of his sunny mind”.

The Guardian, June 16

Reminisced about a piece by PGW published in the *Observer Magazine* of 9 March 1975; it had originally been the introduction to the book *Son of Bitch*. The article recapped PGW’s piece and quoted freely from it, including this reflection on whether dogs have a sense of humour: “My own opinion is that some have and some

don't. Dachshunds have, but not St Bernards and Great Danes. Apparently a dog has to be small to be fond of a joke. You never find an Irish wolfhound trying to be a stand-up comic."

Thrive Global, June 16

Summer Turner began her article on motivating oneself to overcome inertia by citing the case of one Bertram Wooster, who always had to rely on Jeeves to get him out of jams. Turner pointed out that Jeeves's great power "was to consider 'the psychology of the individual'", a technique that could be very helpful in many areas.

The Economist, June 22 (from Morten Arneson)

An article on the current state of Britain's magistrates begins: "It is tricky to decide whom the comic novelist P.G. Wodehouse most enjoyed mocking: cops or magistrates." PGW's view of magistrates was summed up when he wrote: "When a fellow hasn't got the brains and initiative to sell jellied eels, they make him a magistrate."

The Times, June 22 (from Andrew Bishop)

In response to a leader commenting on Rory Stewart removing his tie during a debate, and the uproar it created, a reader wrote to the Editor to note that "surely Jeeves remains the defining arbiter of the matter. When Bertie Wooster, in *Jeeves and the Impending Doom*, asks 'What do ties matter . . . at a time like this?' Jeeves replies: 'There is no time, Sir, at which ties do not matter.' As Rory Stewart found, one ignores such sound advice at one's peril."

Mail Online, June 22

A review of *Berkmann's Cricketing Miscellany* included a picture of Percy Jeeves and described how he had impressed PGW, who saw him play in 1913 and remembered his name when he needed it for Bertie Wooster's valet.

The Week, June 22 (from Lesley Tapson)

Included this delightful PGW quote: "I always strive, when I can, to spread sweetness and light. There have been several complaints about it."

The Times, June 24 (from June Arnold & Andrew Bishop)

Responding to a letter printed on the 22nd, one reader wrote: "It is tempting to achieve 'a small degree of flamboyance' by means of one's socks. However, if Jeeves were around, that would be less than advisable. In *Jeeves and the Chump Cyril*, he deeply disapproves of Bertie Wooster's purple socks: 'He fished them out of the drawer as if he were a vegetarian fishing a caterpillar out of a salad.'"

The Times, June 29 (from Leila Deakin)

In an interview, author Deborah Moggach confessed that she'd like to "die listening to Wodehouse".

Daily Telegraph, June 29 (from Carolyn de la Plain)

A letter to the Editor suggested that Bobbie Wickham might be a better model for a heroine of light fiction than those found in Enid Blyton's Malory Towers books: "Her first name is rather suggestive. So is her description: 'She resembled a particularly good-looking schoolboy who had dressed up in his sister's clothes.' Unlike the Malory Towers heroine, Miss Wickham had no difficulty in expressing herself fully."

Daily Mirror, July 6 (from Babioli Lillington)

Question 14 in the General Knowledge Quiz was: "Which odd couple of English literature first appeared in the 1915 P. G. Wodehouse short story 'Extricating Young Gussie'?"

Book Riot, July 8

Similar to Ken Clevenger's quiz (see page 11), Christine Ro set readers a challenge of identifying quotes as being genuine Wodehouse or from an homage. To take the quiz, go to: <https://bit.ly/33ijwNU>

Outlook India, July 10

Satish Padmanghan described the search engine Google as "Jeeves to the power of infinity and makes a woolly-headed Bertie Wooster of all of us".

The Oldie, July 15 (from Paul Kent)

In a blog, Henry Blofeld revealed: "It may be a difficult choice, but Blandings has always had my vote over Jeeves." He went on to explain why and concluded: "My Dear Old Things, what a splendid Wodehouse collection to help steer me towards the proper job I've been lucky enough never to have."

Daily Telegraph, July 25 (from Carolyn de la Plain)

An article about the new Comedy Women in Print awards included mention of the Bollinger Everyman Wodehouse Prize, stating the latter prize has had only three female winners in 20 years.

Mail Online, July 19

In an article on the cost of private schools, Tom Utley wrote of his youngest son's negative reaction to the prospect of attending Dulwich College, PGW's alma mater: "The boy was horrified. Nothing would persuade him to go to 'posh school', he said." Utley went on to say that given the variety of boys attending, he would not consider Dulwich to be 'posh', and that when his older sons went there, "I didn't encounter a single adolescent Bertie Wooster or Lord Emsworth among their schoolmates."

Salt Lake Magazine, July 21

A short piece on a hotel in Salt Lake City recommended going to the Gibson Lounge, where the bartender "is dressed in proper black and white, as if Bertie Wooster or Nick Charles had been the last gentleman to be served". (The author added at the end: "If you don't know who Nick Charles or Bertie Wooster are, you deserve to drink sweet and sour mix.")

Bioidentical Hormone Health (blog), July 29

In 'Foods for a Long, Healthy Life', AnnA (yes, that's how it's spelled) Rushton recommended fish, noting that "Bertie Wooster always referred to it in the P G Wodehouse novels as 'brain food' and he was quite right to do so".

Times Literary Supplement, July 31 (from Hilary Bruce)

Reprinted a review of Norman Murphy's *In Search of Blandings*. The review, by David Cannadine, was originally published on August 8, 1986, and bestowed high praise on Norman's classic work.

The Times, August 3 (from Carolyn de la Plain)

Clue 36 across in the General Knowledge Crossword was: "Bertie Wooster's valet in stories by P.G. Wodehouse, played by Stephen Fry in a television comedy series (6)." Think hard.

The Conservative Woman, August 4

In a piece on Jerome Kern, Margaret Ashworth included a description of his collaboration with Guy Bolton and P G Wodehouse on the Princess Theatre shows, noting they came to an end when Kern and Wodehouse disagreed about money.

The Times, August 5 (from Babioli Lillington)

"Who is this English-born comic novelist?" – question number 15 in the Daily Quiz – was printed underneath a photo of You Know Who.

Country Life, August 6

Writing about how to make the perfect mayonnaise, Jason Goodwin noted: "Once Carême laid down the rules for sauce, which Escoffier enlarged, the reputation of French cooking rose to stupendous heights, like a soufflé, acclaimed by everyone from Talleyrand to the Duke of Wellington and Bertie Wooster's Aunt Dahlia."

Future Events for Your Diary

Are you aware of an upcoming or future event, such as a play or a radio programme, not listed here? Please let the Editor know!

September 29, 2019 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.

October 7, 2019 Society AGM at the Savile Club
Something really special is in store following the Society's Annual General Meeting. Our Entertainments Impresario, Paul Kent, has written a book, and we will have a launch party for it this evening. See pages 3 and 8 for more about Paul's book. We meet at the Savile Club at 69 Brook Street, London W1K 4ER, from 6 pm. Gents, no tie is necessary, but please be sure to wear a jacket. For all: no jeans or trainers.

October 17–20, 2019 TWS Convention in Cincinnati
The Wodehouse Society will be holding its 20th biennial convention, 'Pigs Have Wings', in Cincinnati, Ohio, at the

Netherland Plaza Hilton in Cincinnati, Ohio.

February 10, 2020 Society meeting at the Savile Club
There is no word yet on the entertainment for this meeting, but as ever it will be a corker of a good night. We'll share more in the December issue; also keep an eye on the website.

October 8, 2020 Dinner at Gray's Inn
Advance notice that the Society's biennial Formal Dinner has been scheduled for this date, as usual at Gray's Inn. Mark your calendars now! Further details will, of course, be published in future issues of *Wooster Sauce*.

Gatherings which allow Society members to meet each other can take place anywhere, if members in the area volunteer to organise them. For example, there was a very successful lunch in Edinburgh earlier this year. Why not see if you can get something going in your area? If you do, let us know about it and we can list it here.

"Have you known Lord Emsworth long?" asked Eve.

"I met him the first day I met you."

"Good gracious!" Eve started. "And he invited you to the castle?"

Psmith smoothed his waistcoat.

"Strange, I agree. One can only account for it, can one not, by supposing that I radiate some extraordinary attraction. Have you noticed it?"

"No!"

"No?" said Psmith, surprised. "Ah, well," he went on tolerantly, "no doubt it will flash upon you quite unexpectedly sooner or later. Like a thunderbolt or something."

(From *Leave It to Psmith*, 1923)

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