

from the thirties to the fifties by the 'culture and personality' school of anthropology,¹³ that there are real analogies between the personalities of individuals and those of societies is now abandoned by all anthropologists.

Is this book something more than an aggregate of the individual papers? I think so; certainly it shows that anthropologists and art historians are at least agreed on a common set of problems, and that, if anthropologists are to be congratulated on their liberation from the particular kind of sociological stuffiness which ascribed to everything from dancing to civil war 'the function of enhancing social solidarity',¹⁴ art historians should be equally welcomed for having escaped from Eurocentrism.

¹³Particularly associated with the names of Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead.

¹⁴The civil war example is not quite so silly as it sounds, since experience of conflict may lead to the emergence of 'rules of the game' to control competition in future. But, even so, the capacity to adjust to conflict, or to control it, is not quite the same thing as conflict itself, and terms like 'social integration' or 'social solidarity' suggest a static, rather than a moving, equilibrium.

Guilty Splendour

Owen Dudley Edwards

The story which Wodehouse seems to have regarded as his funniest¹—with some reason—concerned a detective novelist, but 'Honey-suckle Cottage' was primarily satire on ghost stories with subordinate satires on mysteries and slushy romance. The opening is almost appalling in its realistic reply to the normal ghost story beginning:

'Do you believe in ghosts?' asked Mr Mulliner abruptly. I weighed the question thoughtfully. I was a little surprised, for nothing in our previous conversation had suggested the topic.

'Well', I replied, 'I don't like them, if that's what you mean. I was once butted by one as a child.' (*World of Mulliner*, 117.)

As the story develops it raises the question of environment and change of predominant literary influence to which Wodehouse adverts in several Mulliner stories. Environmentalism was in many ways fashionable in Wodehouse's youth and early maturity—the America of his day was still looking respectfully at the shadow of Frederick Jackson Turner when it read history—and while Wodehouse apparently concedes much to the environmentalist he was a little slower in picking up the unconscious influences of his surroundings than most writers. Apart from occasional lapses into American usages, verbal or social, the main impact of America on him is, as I have tried to imply earlier, a fairly subtle and largely undetected one. Orwell saw Ameri-

¹Wodehouse to Townend, 1 Oct. 1924, *Performing Flea*, 29. He made it his selection for *My Funniest Story*, an anthology of stories chosen by their authors (1932).

can effects on Wodehouse in terms which suggest a parallel between Wodehouse and the classic American immigrant: the home country is vivid in the memory, but frozen with virtually no allowance for change from the date of departure. But in fact Wodehouse made long sojourns in England before World War II. The American impact here would have been to make his England a series of superimposed snapshots taken at many different, but not very extended, intervals of time. It may have been that Wodehouse showed so few superficial effects of his new environment because he was extremely conscious of its effects, and deliberately resisted them. Moreover, he looked at his environment from the standpoint of hammer rather than anvil. He viewed it as a workman and took what he wanted from it; he went to pains to make sure it did not give him what he did not want. So the historian cannot hope for many clues to the past unconsciously provided by Wodehouse. Our source usually knew what he was giving us.

It is easy to say this: the struggle cannot have been an easy one. Therefore he wrote hilariously but sensitively of the corruption of art-forms by environment. For all of his readiness to classify 'Honeysuckle Cottage' as his funniest story it contains a slight touch of the horrific about it. Here one sees the difference between straightforward parody and the true art which by giving parody something of the force of the original keeps the reader's sympathies outside of his control. Swift made his readers laugh *at* things only to discover that they were laughing at themselves, as when Gulliver was transformed from sympathetic victim to bombastic myop to cool observer to disillusioned human. Wilde set the audience of 'The Canterville Ghost' laughing their way at the absurdities of the ghost story at the mercy of materialism, only to profit by their defencelessness to get some very haunting material between their ribs. In 'Honeysuckle Cottage' the absurdity of the whole thing hits us on the head time and again, especially when Rodman finds his thriller being haunted by the squashily sentimental muse of Leila J. Pinckney:

'For an instant Lester Gage thought he must have been mistaken. Then the noise came again, faint but unmistakable—a soft scratching on the outer panel.

'His mouth set in a grim line. Silently, like a panther, he made one quick step to the desk, noiselessly opened a drawer, drew out his automatic. After that affair of the poisoned needle, he was taking no chances. Still in dead silence, he tiptoed to the door; then, flinging it suddenly open, he stood there, his weapon poised.

'On the mat stood the most beautiful girl he had ever beheld. A veritable child of Faërie. She eyed him for a moment with a saucy smile; then, with a pretty, roguish look of reproof shook a dainty forefinger at him.

'“I believe you've forgotten me, Mr Gage!” she fluted with a mock severity which her eyes belied.' (*Ibid.*, 119-20.)

(Has anyone considered the effect of this passage on the works of Ian Fleming?)

But later some element of terror enters in, when Rodman is confronted with a real Leila J. Pinckney heroine, all the more because when he leaves Honeysuckle Cottage forever one suspects Rose Maynard and her gallant protector Colonel Carteret simply vanish, slightly more aetherially than the dog Toto (who is lost to us after his bolt into the drain pipe). Had Honeysuckle Cottage had any effect outside of its own immediate environment, Colonel Carteret would presumably have pursued Rodman to London to shoot him like a dog, hence forcing Rodman to seek foreign parts in the manner of Osbert Mulliner, with the dubious assistance of the Cohen Bros. The dreamlike nature of the story is also very compelling: stock tough men like the doctor, Brady, or the literary agent, McKinnon, simply succumb to the squashy romanticism without a reservation, but Rodman's tragedy is that he remains wholly aware of the awfulness of the doom to which the Pinckney *mise en scene* is hurrying him. He is in fact the only rational human being in the story. Wodehouse allows his own style to become apparently corrupted by Pinkneyism, brought up sharply at first as Rodman catches himself and subsequently as though the same thing is happening to Wodehouse:

She was an extraordinarily pretty girl. Very sweet and fragile she looked as she stood there under the honeysuckle with the breeze ruffling a tendril of golden hair that strayed from beneath her coquettish little hat. Her eyes were very big and very blue, her rose-tinted face becomingly flushed. All wasted on James, though. He disliked all girls, and particularly the sweet, droopy type. (*Ibid.*, 121.)

And later:

The honeysuckle cast its sweet scent on the gentle breeze; the roses over the porch stirred and nodded; the flowers in the garden were lovelier than ever; the birds sang their little throats sore. (*Ibid.*, 127.)

The faint shadow of horror owes much to the fact that from Wodehouse's infancy the problem of *alter ego* and of creations coming to life had been much examined by popular writers. The student of Prague, the researches of Dr Jekyll, the L. P. Hartley story 'W. S.' in which an author is actually murdered by one of his own *dramatis personae*—these tendencies ultimately culminated in the complexities of Flann O'Brien's *At Swim-Two-Birds* where a man writes a novel about a man writing a novel whose characters begin writing a novel about *him*. This was to come later; meanwhile, Wodehouse was compounding the thing by subjecting one novelist to the alien agency of another. In one way Wodehouse himself was haunted by Leila J. Pinckney. Hitherto Bertie Wooster was threatened with marriage by Honoria Glossop

a ghastly dynamic exhibit who read Nietzsche and had a laugh like waves breaking on a stern and rock-bound coast. (*World of Jeeves*, 350.)

and with the even more domineering blue-stockings Florence Craye of whom he would later record

Florence is one of those girls who look on modern enlightened thought as a sort of personal buddy, and receive with an ill grace cracks at its expense. (*Joy in the Morning* J, 145.)

But it was after 'Honeysuckle Cottage' that he encountered Madeline Bassett

'Don't you love this time of the evening, Mr Wooster, when the sun has gone to bed and all the bunnies come out to have their little suppers? When I was a child, I used to think that rabbits were gnomes, and that if I held my breath and stayed quite still, I should see the fairy queen.' (*Right Ho, Jeeves*, P, 92.)

The situation is repeated too, in that the combined imbecilities of both her and him result in her assuming he has proposed marriage, although this time the story is naturalistic to the extent that Bertie has only his own fatuity, and not the 'subliminal ether vibrations' of Leila J. Pinckney, to blame. And the work done by Madeline, for all of her origin in Rose Maynard and her Pinckney parent, is very different in its effects from theirs. She creates pure farce; their impact is eerie as well as hilarious. It is a fine instance of divergent use of sister creations.

Wodehouse was much less sympathetic with the hero and heroine of 'Unpleasantness at Bludleigh Court', the pastel-in-prose-writer Aubrey Trefusis and the verse-vignettician Charlotte Mulliner, whom he mildly dislikes as moneyed literary phonies. Nor has he much use for the hearty blood-sportsmen against whom both of them are in revolt. This story is once again concerned with environment and the temporary displacement of literary style and personality by alien surroundings, but since Wodehouse had far more respect for detective stories than for vignettes in verse or pastels in prose, the visitation of Charlotte by a huntin', shootin' and fishin' muse probably improves her verse out of all measure :

When cares attack and life seems black
How sweet it is to pot a yak,
Or puncture hares and grizzly bears,
And others I could mention :
But in my Animals 'Who's Who'
No name stands higher than the Gnu
And each new gnu that comes in view
Receives my prompt attention.

(*World of Mulliner*, 203-03.)

And onward for three splendid verses.

The story is also considered with the problem of the artist and an alien home environment, about which much mawkish self-pitying autobiography had saturated the literary scene. Interestingly the next Mulliner story to take this up is also involved in displacement of personality, though this time not of artistic method, partly because the artist in the case is a painter (in which sphere Wodehouse was less able to wield technicalities) and the agent of alien influence is a cat. 'The Story of Webster' is an interesting conflict of life-styles, with the cat winning all the way by means of gradual encroachment on the

attitudes of his temporary master Lancelot Mulliner; but the alternative form of conversion, that of instant, revivalistic change, ultimately obtains to result in the cat's capitulation to Lancelot's world and a drastic adoption of its values in an extremist form. As the cat had originally been a Vicarage cat, its Fabian tactics in the conversion-process are admirably in keeping with reality, as is the stress on manners and the snobbery of attitudes. Its own conversion, the revivalistic principle in reverse, is a nice comment on its cultural vulnerability, and the point is to be commended to the historian of Anglicanism and Methodism. We run into yet another case of personality displacement, this time with the more obvious agency of a clerical error in a correspondence school, in 'The Voice from the Past', and the old headmaster's capacity for returning Sacheverell Mulliner to his lost inferiority complex is a nice tribute in reverse to the force of school training which is so evident in Wodehouse himself as man and artist.² Wodehouse continued to play with personality transference, at one point flatly championing environment over heredity in *If I Were You* where the real Earl is a decent Cockney barber incapable of adopting aristocratic interests when stuck with them. And, of course, the final stage of the joke was reached in *Laughing Gas* where a beefy English nobleman found himself occupying the body of a child star whose personality was directly switched with his own. In the process, some hard words were uttered about movies, stars, publicity-hunting, scene-grabbing, contractual cruelties and the destruction of freedom in the pursuit of wealth. Little Joey Cooley is too tough a nut to compel real sympathy for the hardships imposed on him by his exploiters, and Lord Havershot, when stuck with being Cooley, is too funny to evoke much sympathy either. ('The woman I loved had kicked me in the pants'—*Laughing Gas*, p. 187). But the happy ending for Cooley, that of escaping forever from Hollywood back to his home because of the world's belief he was a midget and not a child, is a reminder, if we are prepared to listen to it, that the life of a child star was one from which any sensible child would want to escape. When one remembers the hellish existence to which Judy Garland was subjected in the background of 'Somewhere, Over the Rainbow' it is evident how accurate he was.

²The story is symptomatic of allied themes in other Wodehouse stories. The Bishop of Stortford and the Headmaster of Harchester revert to schoolboy days in 'The Bishop's Move' (*Ibid.*, Ch. 4), under the influence of an overdose of Mulliner's Buck-U-Uppo (when Wodehouse tried out the idea again in 'Gala Night', *Ibid.*, Ch. 27, it failed because of the absence of the time-dimension). In 'The Crime Wave at Blandings' a boy's airgun has similar effects on Lord Emsworth, Beach and even Lady Constance Keeble. Very sensibly, the whole atmosphere here is entirely one of elation with adolescent fears of reprisal from authority; not in any way psychological unease. The other *motif* in 'The Voice from the Past' is sex-relationship, Sacheverell moving from submissive to dominant to submissive. Wodehouse frequently enjoyed portraying tough woman and clinging man, employing exactly the stock language of the reverse idiom. See notably *The Girl on the Boat*, with its sub-plot on the romance of Eustace Hignett and Jane Hubbard. There is a suggestion of this sort of thing in the attitudes of Honoria Glossop, Heloise Pringle and even Florence Craye to Bertie, although the compliment is not returned. In this genre again, however, Wodehouse enjoyed surprising the old customers: mousy little man rules the roost when he marries big game-huntress in 'There's Always Golf' (*Lord Emsworth and Others*, Ch. 5), which among other things derives from the great execution done on Ethel M. Dell in this story.

The Mulliner Hollywood stories came after the author's own experiences of that city, but there was an interesting early comment on the needs of the movie in 'Came the Dawn'. Here the subordination of plot to topic is again clear. The story is deliberately ridiculous, with a wholly unsympathetic, absolutely irrational hero, and a jerkiness of execution alien to the measured development of the ordinary Wodehouse narrative. In fact, it is in style and content, as well as in theme, a satire on the fatuity of the silent movie. Wodehouse had taken many swipes at this—the 'Fixing it for Freddie' story of *Carry On, Jeeves*, originally a Reggie Pepper item, is one, and Freddie Threepwood's philosophising and later scenario-writing are others. But here the attack is head on. Of course by this stage Wodehouse, whatever the dictates of his satire on another medium at its most banal could not rob himself of his love of Byzantine complexities in describing the obvious. But he very pointedly leaves such descriptions to matters of sound or of written artefacts (in this case Lancelot's frightful *vers libre* commercial for pickles). Moreover, such intricacy manages to suggest what is unheard behind the silent movie :

A sound like the sudden descent of an iron girder on a sheet of tin, followed by a jangling of bells, a wailing of tortured cats, and the noise of a few steam-riveters at work, announced to their trained ears that the music had begun. Sweeping her to him with a violence which, attempted in any other place, would have earned him a sentence of thirty days coupled with some strong remarks from the Bench, Lancelot began to push her yielding form through the sea of humanity till they reached the centre of the whirlpool. There, unable to move in any direction, they surrendered themselves to the ecstasy of the dance, wiping their feet on the polished flooring and occasionally pushing an elbow into some stranger's encroaching rib.

'This,' murmured the girl with closed eyes, 'is divine.'

'What?' bellowed Lancelot, for the orchestra, in addition to ringing bells, had now begun to howl like wolves at dinner-time. (*World of Mulliner*, 65.)

The girl's line would of course be a title in a silent movie. Lancelot's answer would not, but it is the realistic response inserted by the author's sardonic juxtaposition of sound and written dialogue.

The silent movie's obsession with repetition, to get gags, to win loyalty by familiarity, and to save money in shooting, is perfectly captured when Uncle Jeremiah Briggs, in response to Lancelot's ghastly threnody, takes action :

'You rang, sir?' said the butler, appearing in the doorway.

Mr Briggs nodded curtly.

'Bewstridge,' said he, 'throw Mr Lancelot out.' (*Ibid.*, 69.)

Lancelot, despite 'a large bruise on his person which made it uncomfortable for him to assume a sitting posture', hurries to plead his case with the girl's father, the Earl of Biddlecombe, who after selling him a few white elephantlets

'You wouldn't care for a scarf-pin? Any ties, collars, shirts? No? Then good-bye, Mr Mulliner.'

'But—'

'Fotheringay,' said Lord Biddlecombe, 'throw Mr Mulliner out.' (*Ibid.*, 71.)

(The Earl's conversation with the rejected suitor would of course be inaudible on the silent movie: it is Wodehouse's malicious interpretation of their gestures that the old man spends the entire interview selling him unconsidered trifles.) And then the girl prefers money to love:

'You would allow this man to buy you with his gold?'

'Don't overlook his diamonds.'

'Does love count for nothing? Surely you love me?'

'Of course I do, my desert king. When you do that flat-footed Black Bottom step with the sort of wiggly twiggle at the end, I feel as if I were eating plovers' eggs in a new dress to the accompaniment of heavenly music.' She sighed. 'Yes, I love you, Lancelot. And women are not like men. They do not love lightly. When a woman gives her heart, it is for ever. The years will pass, and you will turn to another. But I shall not forget. However, as you haven't a bob in the world—' She beckoned to the hall-porter. 'Margerison.'

'Your ladyship?'

'Is it raining?'

'No, your ladyship.'

'Are the front steps clean?'

'Yes, your ladyship.'

'Then throw Mr Mulliner out.' (*Ibid.*, 73.)

And the movie mogul who promptly signs him up because of the splendid facial registration sums up the banalities with the perfection of his art-form:

'I know just what has happened. Mammon has conquered Cupid, and once more youth has had to learn the old, old lesson that though the face be fair the heart may be cold and callous.' (*Ibid.*, 74.)

For a generation which has never known the worst silent movies, Wodehouse is a goldmine. And it must be remembered that in much of his other work of the period he maintained glancing allusions and even grace-notes. At the height of tension in *Summer Lightning* there is a direct use of the great silent movie scene-shifting cliché title:

And meanwhile, if we may borrow an expression from a sister art, what of Hugo Carmody? (J, 278.)

The charge that Wodehouse repeated himself is about as justifiable as a comparable charge against Liszt for composing variations. Although his Hollywood Mulliner stories are concerned with talkies, he was able to build on his earlier triumph of mogul concern with facial registration. In 'The Rise of Minna Nordstrom' an unsympathetic Mr Schnellenhamer receives a voluntary demonstration of registration from his parlourmaid:

She smiled.

'Joy.'

She closed her mouth.

'Grief.'

She wiggled her ears.

'Horror.'

She raised her eyebrows.

'Hate.' (*Ibid.*, 473.)

It may be doubted whether any communications industry has ever given itself quite such noisy accolades as the movie world. Wodehouse lost no opportunity in his exposés of Hollywood to deflate every pretention in publicity. It is worth stressing that the good four of the five Hollywood Mulliner stories are essentially about the confrontation of publicity with the antecedent reality, or the implication of the vested interests lying behind decisions. (The fifth story, 'The Castaways', unhappily yields to a very understandable temptation to portray script-writing by contract as slavery in its classic form.) Montrose Mulliner encounters a gorilla who

was one of the cast of the super-film 'Black Africa', a celluloid epic of the clashing of elemental passions in a land where might is right and the strong man comes into his own. Its capture in its native jungle was said to have cost the lives of some half-dozen members of the expedition . . . (*Ibid.*, 430.)

Publicity dictates that the gorilla get more coverage :

'At five sharp this evening, Standard Pacific time, that gorilla's going to be let out of its cage and will menace hundreds. If that doesn't land him on the front page . . .'

Montrose was appalled.

'But you can't do that!' he gasped. 'Once let that awful brute out of its cage and it may tear people to shreds.'

George Pybus reassured him.

'Nobody of any consequence. The stars have all been notified and are off the lot. So are the directors. Also the executives, all except Mr Schnellhamer, who is cleaning up some work in his office. He will be quite safe there, of course. Nobody ever got into Mr Schnellhamer's office without waiting four hours in the ante-room. . . .' (*Ibid.*, 437.)

Ultimately Montrose meets the gorilla and is taken aback by its fluency in English :

The gorilla waved the compliment aside modestly.

'Oh, well, Balliol, you know. Dear old Balliol. One never forgets the lessons one learned at Alma Mater, don't you think? You are not an Oxford man, by any chance?'

'No.'

'I came down in '26. Since then I have been knocking around a good deal, and a friend of mine in the circus business suggested to me that the gorilla field was not overcrowded. Plenty of room at the top, was his expression. And I must say,' said the gorilla, 'I've

done pretty well at it. The initial expenditure comes high, of course . . . but there's virtually no overhead. Of course, to become a co-star in a big feature film, as I have done, you need a good agent. Mine, I am glad to say, is a capital man of business. Stands no nonsense from these motion-picture magnates.'

Montrose was not a quick thinker, but he was gradually adjusting his mind to the facts.

'Then you're not a real gorilla?' (*Ibid.*, 440.)

Montrose kindly takes charge of the baby the gorilla ('Waddesley-Davenport. Cyril Waddesley-Davenport.') has removed from its perambulator. ('If you want to know what is the matter with me, I am too much the artist'—*Ibid.*, 440.) And Wodehouse, having done his worst on the fraud behind the furore, closes with an icy comment on mother love, Hollywood style. Previously he had observed in the context of the baby :

It is a very unambitious mother in Hollywood who, the moment she finds herself and child doing well, does not dump the little stranger into a perambulator and wheel it round to the casting-office in the hope of cashing in. (*Ibid.*, 438.)

So, when Montrose restores this particular infant :

'No, no, please,' he went on. 'A mere nothing.'

For the mother was kneeling before him, endeavouring to kiss his hand. It was not only maternal love that prompted the action. That morning she had signed up her child at seventy-five dollars a week for the forthcoming picture, 'Tiny Fingers', and all through these long, anxious minutes it had seemed as though the contract must be a total loss. (*Ibid.*, 441-2.)

Wodehouse's most famous revelation about Hollywood concerned conferences :

'It is not easy to explain to the lay mind the extremely intricate ramifications of the personnel of a Hollywood motion-picture organization. Putting it as briefly as possible, a Nodder is something like a Yes-Man, only lower in the social scale. A Yes-Man's duty is to attend conferences and say "Yes". A Nodder's, as the name implies, is to nod. The chief executive throws out some statement of opinion, and looks about him expectantly. This is the cue for the senior Yes-Man to say yes. He is followed, in order of precedence, by the second Yes-Man, or Vice-Yesser, as he is sometimes called—and the junior Yes-Man. Only when all the Yes-Men have yessed, do the Nodders begin to function. They nod. . . . There is also a class of Untouchables who are known as Nodders' assistants. . . .' (*Ibid.*, 443-44.)

The story of Mr Mulliner's distant connection Wilmot Mulliner also did some nice work on the vulnerability to blackmail of moguls who feared the midgetry behind child stars could get out. *Laughing Gas* is resolved by a mistaken report of this nature; 'The Nodder' is resolved by the suppression of a possible truthful one. The charm of the thing is that Wilmot Mulliner had no recollection whatever of his

drunken meeting with the midget, and what Mr Schnellenhamer took to be quivering, gloating and scowling were in fact various hangover effects. The sequel, mostly concerned with dieting, has less to tell us, although the light-hearted treatment of the cruelty of weight-clauses in contracts does not disguise the exploitation and indifference to human suffering at the heart of the whole business. There was money in stars, and hence their whole bodies were commodities in which business investment had been made. The commodities had to be retained in the condition contracts specified. It is with some sense of Nemesis that Wodehouse lets the Empress of Molten Passion loose with a sword borrowed from one of the Roman soldiers in 'Hail, Caesar'. After this, it is hardly surprising to find a story in which a star succeeds in being born by letting three moguls steal the liquor supplies of a fourth, having already had their own stocks seized by police enforcing the Volstead Act. At one point, Mr Schnellenhamer tries to bribe the police who rise to the occasion in the true spirit of Hollywood:

'Jacob Schnellenhamer,' he said coldly, 'you can't square me. When I tried for a job at the Colossal-Exquisite last spring I was turned down on account you said I had no sex-appeal. . . . No sex-appeal!' he said with a rasping laugh. 'And me that had specially taken sex-appeal in the College of Eastern Iowa course of Motion Picture Acting.' (*Ibid.*, 482.)

The story begins with Mr Schnellenhamer explaining that his decision to elevate 'a totally unknown girl to stardom' was because 'I saw that it was the only thing to be done.' Which in a sense was true, of course.

'You had vision?'

'I had vision.' (*Ibid.*, 472.)

One suspects that the use of a favourite term in the Ukridge context here was very deliberate. And it was, perhaps, a characteristic verdict on film moguls: successful Ukriges. The greatest irony of all is that when Wodehouse first went to Hollywood he wrote to Bill Townend:

Oddly enough, Hollywood hasn't inspired me in the least. I feel as if everything that could be written about it already has been done.

As a matter of fact, I don't think there is much to be written about this place. What it was like in the early days, I don't know, but nowadays the studio life is all perfectly normal, not a bit crazy. . . . I don't believe I shall get a single story out of my stay here. (18 August, 1930, *Performing Flea*, P, 60-61.)

It was one of Wodehouse's greatest strengths that he was prepared to learn, and had no hesitation in acknowledging where he was wrong.

An identification between Ukridge and Mr Schnellenhamer offers us a unity of Wodehouse's communications analyses. The arts have more in common with each other than their very different manifestations suggest. Wodehouse constantly makes the point, both in the similarity of many of the challenges and difficulties, and in the fact

that his classical treatment is mostly about Mulliners. The Sage of the Angler's Rest supplies a symbolic unity of personnel and a series of common frontiers of experience. Yet Wodehouse suggested that Mulliner's emphasis on his own veracity was a means to justify the telling of tall stories (Preface to *World of Mulliner*; 7-8). The initial ones are a bit tall; and of the first seven the only one concerned with communications is the deliberately unreal adventure of the future silent-movie star Lancelot. But subsequently his material began to dictate a commitment to a firm foundation in reality, and a hint that he was talking about the nature of his own business. This expressed itself in clues that Mr Mulliner might in fact be telling the truth. At the end of 'Honey-suckle Cottage' Mr Mulliner makes an uncharacteristic analysis of his own anecdote to suggest points in favour of its veracity, while admitting that it stands on the single testimony of James Rodman. Agnes Flack and Sidney McMurdo in 'Those in Peril on the Tee' later make several appearances in the narratives of the Oldest Member, and to imply that two divergent liars could invent the same people would place too great a strain on our credulity. We can swallow the Mulliner of the middle period, but we cannot swallow that. Bobbie Wickham and her mother make their *débuts* in three of Mr Mulliner's narratives, this time immediately following his visit to Skeldings Hall, and Bobbie Wickham's later appearances in a story in the third person ('Mr Potter takes a Rest-Cure', *Blandings Castle*, Ch. 7), and in four of Bertie Wooster's reminiscences,³ supply both in themselves and in what they tell of her catastrophic effects on pin-headed young men the degree of confirmation a historian demands.

The Mulliner stories, then, were conceived as fantasies and ultimately became the means by which Wodehouse was enabled to say what he wanted to say of his own profession, a need which clearly reached urgency in the Hollywood connection. The urgency implies some level of difference as well as kinship, and in his portraits of the heroines of narratives touching the film world, it is curious how hard they are. Montrose Mulliner's love rejects him because he will not get married in the gorilla's cage, despite the assistance the publicity would give her in her career. Wilmot Mulliner's rejects him firstly on snobbish grounds, because he is a nodder (*World of Mulliner*, 445-46), and secondly because he accepts a salary cut (*Ibid.*, 459); her main aim in life otherwise is to convince a sceptical Hollywood that cuckoos say 'wuckoo', her specialism, and the resultant controversies are a fine Wodehousian revelation of the trivialities which led to battles royal between Pedantry and Monied Ignorance. Bulstrode Mulliner's is a bully who proves to be gutless (*Ibid.*, 490-92, 493). Lancelot Mulliner's we have encountered. Brancepeth Mulliner, Disneyesque film artist in the making, is perfectly satisfied to accept the priorities of his lodestar:

'Oh, Brancepeth,' said the girl, her voice trembling, 'why haven't

³'Jeeves and the Yule-Tide Spirit'. 'Episode of the Dog McIntosh'. 'Jeeves and the Kid Clementina', *Jeeves in the Offing*.

you money? If you only had the merest pittance—enough for a flat in Mayfair and a little weekend place in the country somewhere and a couple of good cars and a villa in the South of France and a bit of trout fishing on some decent river, I would risk all for love. But as it is . . .’ (*Ibid.*, 550.)

Appropriately, the promise of love finally looks like being fulfilled when it becomes clear that her father’s hideous countenance will supply the needed inspiration for Ferdinand Frog. She is bringing the requirement for a successful movie marriage—something to be exploited.

Curiously, the Mulliner saga has little to say of the theatre, on which Wodehouse elsewhere capitalised so well on his experience. Apart from finance people, his theatre portraits are usually kinder. Sue Brown, after all, is of the chorus, and how far removed she seems from the heroines we have just classified! His remarks are packed with information although the student will find himself with a very wide-ranging if extremely enjoyable search for all of it. *Summer Moonshine*, for example, has useful facts on changes in the chorus over the years as revealed by the placidity of Lady Abbott :

. . . if this placidity should seem strange in one who had once earned her living in the chorus of musical comedy, it must be remembered that it is only in these restless modern days that the term ‘chorus girl’ has come to connote a small, wiry person with india-rubber legs and flexible joints, suffering, to all appearances, from an advanced form of St Vitus’s dance.

In the era of Lady Abbott’s professional career, the personnel of the ensemble were tall, stately creatures, shaped like hour-glasses, who stood gazing dreamily at the audience, supporting themselves on long parasols. Sometimes they would emerge from the coma for an instant to bow slightly to a friend in the front row, but not often. As a rule, they just stood statuesquely (P, 89).

The one Mulliner story which touches directly on the theatre—apart from such details as Egbert’s Evangeline going to see Tchekov’s ‘Six Corpses in Search of an Undertaker’ (*World of Mulliner*, 390) and Cyril meeting his beloved at ‘The Grey Vampire’ (*Ibid.*, 398)—is the last of the three Archibald Mulliner narratives. It is in some ways a little irritating to the constant reader. Archibald’s Aurelia, having previously been possessed of no more family than a dotty Baconian aunt,⁴ is now supplied with a father who bores his relatives and butler to extinction with the same story : on the other hand, any annoyance at this is offset by the response to Archibald’s *nolle prosequi*, especially when the butler adds his voice to the gratitude of the family (*Ibid.*, 521-22). And when Archibald tries to have his engagement terminated by producing an actress to play the part of a betrayed former love, we meet one of Wodehouse’s finest creations from the theatre :

‘I say,’ he said, ‘how about stepping up to the Bodega for a small port? I’ve a little business proposition I should like to put to you.’

⁴*Ibid.*, 137. The Baconian craze obtains a magnificent profile in the story.

She seemed suspicious. Her gaze, unlike her waist-measurement, was narrow.

'Business?'

'Strictly business.'

'You don't want to cover me with jewels?'

'Absolutely not.'

'Well, then, I don't mind if I do,' she said, relieved. 'You've no notion how careful a girl has got to be these days,' she added. 'I've had men in places like Huddersfield offer me guilty splendour on the strength of my having accepted a Bath bun and a small cocoa at their hands.'

'Baronets?' asked Archibald, for he had heard that there was a good deal of moral laxness among that class.

'I think so,' said his companion. 'Disguised.'

And they proceed to sketch out the act :

'Then you follow the scenario?' he said. 'You see what I'm driving at? You really will breeze along to the Savoy tonight and play the role of a betrayed girl?'

Miss Maltravers coughed with a touch of rebuke.

'Not betrayed, dearie. I've always kept my Art clean and always shall. You don't read the *Bexhill Gazette*, do you? "She is purity personified", it said. I put it in my professional ads. for a time. That was when I was "Myrtle" in *The Hand of Doom*. If you will allow me to make a suggestion—we're all working for the good of the show—I'd say let me be someone unspotted who's bringing a breach of promise action against you.'

'That's just as good, you think?'

'It's better,' said Miss Maltravers firmly. 'It's the duty of all of us in these licentious post-war days to put our hands to the plough and quench the flame of this rising tide of unwholesome suggestiveness.'

...

'You come in—'

'Enter,' corrected Miss Maltravers.

'That's right.'

'Left. I always enter left. It shows up my best profile.'

'And you accuse me of having trifled with your affections—'

'In a nice way.'

'In a perfectly nice way . . . at . . . where would you say?'

'Middlesbrough,' said Miss Maltravers with decision. 'And I'll tell you why. My affections actually were trifled with in Middlesbrough once, so it'll help me give colour and movement to the scene. When I remember Bertram, I mean to say. That was his name—Bertram Lushington. I put him over my knee and gave him a good spanking.'

'That won't be necessary tonight, will it?' asked Archibald a little anxiously. 'Of course, I don't want to interfere with your conception of the role or whatever you call it—'

'It's how I *see* the part.'

'Dress trousers are dashed thin, you know.'

'Very well,' said Miss Maltravers regretfully. 'Just as you like. Cut business. Lines only.'

'Thanks awfully.'

'... You won't mind if I call you a heartless cur who should blush to think that he sullies the grand old name of Englishman?'

'Not at all.'

'It got a round at Eastbourne. All right then, Nine-fifteen to-night.' (*Ibid.*, 524, 525, 526.)

Actually, that story turns on a weight specification too. The economics of acting under free enterprise can be as tyrannical as the totalitarian regime of Hollywood. But how it did resolve the situation, I leave to you to enjoy finding out. Or else, to the charms of returning to one of the best of friends a reader can have.

Epitaph

'Nectar or ambrosia, my lord?'⁵

That was Wodehouse's idea of the first thing Lord Emsworth would hear after death, from a Beach faithful unto eternity. It is a little tempting to dream on, now that he can give us no more.

'I say, Jeeves, we're dead!'

'Indeed, sir?'

* * *

'As I have remarked in other cases, Comrade Jackson, every man has his hobby. In the case of Comrade Peter, I think a small colloquy on fishing might not be out of place. You will forgive me should I find it necessary to introduce you as the leading *aficionado* of trout-fishing in the Severn valley?'

'But that's rot, Smith. You can't let us in for rot here. I mean, it would be rotten if anything went wrong. He knows perfectly well I'm not.'

'I fear that Comrade Peter would take but a dim view of us, Comrade Jackson, if we accorded to him anything less than the courtesies we have bestowed on lesser—I should say, on *any* mortals.'

* * *

'Well, Michael, old horse, if you ask me, all you need to succeed in this business is a partner with vision. We'll say that the profits of the first hour of Judgment Day at a conservative estimate. . . .'

* * *

My nephew Lucifer (said Mr Mulliner). . . .

* * *

When he died, I asked a Carmelite friend of mine to remember him at Mass. He looked at me from two deep, dark, blue Kerry eyes.

'Well, I will, since you ask me. But in the case of someone who brought such joy to so many people in the course of his life, do you really think it's necessary?'

⁵*Over Seventy*, 57.