**P. G. Wodehouse**

Sir Pelham Grenville Wodehouse, KBE (15 October 1881 – 14 February 1975) was a comic writer who enjoyed enormous popular success during a career of more than seventy years and continues to be widely read over 30 years after his death. Despite the political and social upheavals that occurred during his life, much of which was spent in France and the United States, Wodehouse's main canvas remained that of prewar English upper-class society, reflecting his birth, education, and youthful writing career.

An acknowledged master of English prose, Wodehouse has been admired both by contemporaries such as Hilaire Belloc, Evelyn Waugh and Rudyard Kipling and by modern writers such as Douglas Adams, Salman Rushdie and Terry Pratchett. Sean O'Casey famously called him "English literature's performing flea", a description that Wodehouse used as the title of a collection of his letters to a friend, Bill Townend.

Best known today for the Jeeves and Blandings Castle novels and short stories, Wodehouse was also a talented playwright and lyricist who was part author and writer of fifteen plays and of 250 lyrics for some thirty musical comedies. He worked with Cole Porter on the musical Anything Goes (1934) and frequently collaborated with Jerome Kern and Guy Bolton. He wrote the lyrics for the hit song "Bill" in Kern's Show Boat (1927), wrote the lyrics for the Gershwin - Romberg musical Rosalie (1928), and collaborated with Rudolf Friml on a musical version of The Three Musketeers (1928).

Wodehouse, called "Plum"[1] by most family and friends, was born prematurely to Eleanor Wodehouse (née Deane) whilst she was visiting Guildford. His father Henry Ernest Wodehouse (1845–1929) was a British judge in Hong Kong. The Wodehouse family had been settled in Norfolk for many centuries. Wodehouse's great-grandfather Reverend Philip Wodehouse was the second son of Sir Armine Wodehouse, 5th Baronet, whose eldest son John Wodehouse, 1st Baron Wodehouse, was the ancestor of the Earls of Kimberley. His godfather was Pelham von Donop after whom he was named.[2]

When he was just 3 years old, Wodehouse was brought back to England and placed in the care of a nanny. He attended various boarding schools and, between the ages of three and 15 years, saw his parents for barely 6 months in total. (McCrum, 2004, pp 14-15) Wodehouse grew very close to his brother, who shared his love for art. Wodehouse filled the voids in his life by writing relentlessly. He spent quite a few of his school holidays with one aunt or another; it has been speculated that this gave him a healthy horror of the "gaggle of aunts", reflected in Bertie Wooster's formidable aunts Agatha and Dahlia, as well as Lady Constance Keeble's tyranny over her many nieces and nephews in the Blandings Castle series.

Wodehouse was educated at Dulwich College, where the library is now named after him, but his anticipated progression to university was stymied by family financial problems. Subsequently he worked for the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank in London (now known as HSBC) for two years, though he was never interested in banking as a career. He wrote part-time while working in the bank, eventually proving successful enough to take up writing as a full-time profession. He was a journalist with The Globe (a defunct English newspaper) for some years before moving to New York, where he worked for a time as theatre critic of The New Yorker, collaborated with Guy Bolton and Jerome Kern on several musical comedies, and began publishing short stories and novels. In the 1930s, he had two brief stints as a screenwriter in Hollywood, where he claimed he was greatly over-paid. Many of his novels were also serialised in magazines such as The Saturday Evening Post and The Strand, which also paid well.

Wodehouse married Ethel Wayman in 1914, gaining a stepdaughter, Leonora. He had no biological children, perhaps owing to having contracted mumps as a young man.

**Life in France**

Although Wodehouse and his novels are considered quintessentially English, from 1914 onward he shared his time between England and the United States. In 1934, he took up residence in France, to avoid double taxation on his earnings by the tax authorities in Britain and the US. He was also profoundly uninterested in politics and world affairs. When World War II broke out in 1939 he remained at his seaside home in Le Touquet, France, instead of returning to England, apparently failing to recognise the seriousness of the conflict. He was subsequently taken prisoner by the Germans in 1940 and interned by them for a year, first in Belgium, then at Tost (now Toszek) in Upper Silesia (now in Poland). He is recorded as saying, "If this is Upper Silesia, one wonders what Lower Silesia must be like..."

While at Tost, he entertained his fellow prisoners with witty dialogues. After being released from internment, a few months short of his 60th birthday, he used these dialogues as a basis for a series of radio broadcasts made of his own free will, but many assumed that they were made under German persuasion. Wartime England was in no mood for light-hearted banter, however, and the broadcasts led to many accusations of collaboration with the Nazis and even treason. Some libraries banned his books. Foremost among his critics was A. A. Milne, author of the Winnie the Pooh books; Wodehouse got some revenge by creating a ridiculous character named Timothy Bobbin, who starred in parodies of some of Milne's children's poetry. Among Wodehouse's defenders were Evelyn Waugh and George Orwell.[3] An investigation by the British security service MI5 concluded that Wodehouse was naive and foolish but not a traitor.[4]

The criticism led Wodehouse and his wife to move permanently to New York. Apart from Leonora, who died during Wodehouse's internment in Germany, they had no children. He became an American citizen in 1955 and never returned to his homeland, spending the remainder of his life in Remsenburg, Long Island.

**Later life**

He was made a Knight Commander of the Order of the British Empire (KBE) shortly before his death at the age of 93. It is widely believed that the honour was not given earlier because of lingering resentment about the German broadcasts. In a BBC interview he said that he had no ambitions left now that he had been knighted and there was a waxwork of him in Madame Tussaud's Wax Museum. His doctor advised him not to travel to London to be knighted, and his wife later received the award on his behalf from the British consul. [5]

In 2000, the Bollinger Everyman Wodehouse Prize was established and named in honour of PG Wodehouse and awards an annual prize for the finest example in the UK of comic writing.