

Rising Stars

A PUBLICATION OF The Daily Star

e-mail: rising@bdonline.com

THURSDAY, MAY 4, 2000, PRICE-TK.3



Writers of YESTERYEARS

By AR and El Krypto

P. G. Wodehouse

It is really hard to find good books among the plethora of cheap 'best-sellers' now flooding the market, but there are still excellent novels available—and no, I'm not talking about those boring classics your teachers forced you to read, claiming they were "good for you". If you still haven't read any of P. G. Wodehouse's terrific novels, you've been looking at life through foggy glasses.

Born in 1881, P. G. Wodehouse has enthralled many generations of readers: his books are timeless, embodying light entertainment as well as ingenuity, and definitely staying far beyond any shades of boredom. Unlike the cheap best-sellers which usually comprise of elaborate, complex plots, sketchily drawn characters and boring, monotonous language, P. G. Wodehouse books charm readers with their inventive style of language and realistic characters. At the same time they prove to be unpredictable and humorous, each having a delicate, entwining but understated plot.

It is rather hard to explain the charm of P. G. Wodehouse to the uninitiated, but his descriptions ('He was moody, sombre, full of doubts and misgivings: Shakespeare drew Hamlet from him...') and his similes ('a fatuous smile illuminated his face, giving him the appearance of a beaming sheep') are as enchanting as his plausible, real-life characters, such as the gallant and helpful old Uncle Fred, the intelligent and dignified butler Jeeves, and the adorable young Bertram Wooster. Whereas other books can easily be described by dint of their plot structure, characters and settings, most Wodehouse books have no single all-encompassing aspect.

Many Wodehouse books are interrelated, thanks to the same characters appearing time and again in different novels, such as his 'Jeeves and Wooster' series, and his 'Blandings Castle' series. Once you get the hang of his novels, settings and characters, re-encounters with the same characters are charming— even if you're reading Wodehouse for the first time, never fear. Each character is well drawn-out in every

book. However, if this is the first time you'll read anything by Wodehouse, I'd advise you to start with the 'Uncle Fred' omnibus: it contains three exceptionally good stories, each about the genial gentleman's attempts to help nephews, nieces, or friends out of the 'crisis's of their lives, and the stories serve as a nice introduction to the nuclear members of the Wodehouse 'family'. 'Sam the Sudden' is also a good book to begin with, and most of its characters do not reappear in any other books, although the setting, Valley Fields, is familiar to most Wodehouse addicts. 'A Damsel in Distress' is also a book in which most characters are unrelated to those in other Wodehouse books.

P. G. Wodehouse has created a virtual kingdom of his own, and the readers of his books may visit this charming place, a world that is a little sunnier, brighter and happier than our real one. Perhaps Wodehouse may be criticised for conscientiously avoiding sorrow, but that is why the world of P. G. Wodehouse stories is a special one—it is a world where we may be exceedingly carefree and happy, at least for a while.



John Steinbeck

John Steinbeck—for me, the very name would conjure up images of strict schoolteachers, leather bound volumes and musty, library-type smells (although, of course, the only smells in the British Council library are that of air conditioned air, and various deodorants mingling together.) That was why I had stayed off reading Steinbeck's books for so long, but when I finally forced myself to read 'The Grapes of Wrath', I didn't stop until I had read every single novel of his that I could get hold of.

SEE PAGE 3



HOLLYWOOD

By Naved I. Mahmud

Imagine that you are an avid movie aficionado, but that you have never heard of the movie *American Beauty*, nor have you ever seen the actors/actresses in the movie before. Now you are given the script of the movie to read, but you are not told which year the movie has been made. You are now asked, was this movie made in 1969, or 1999? You will immediately answer why, 1999 of course. Being the movie enthusiast that you are, you will know that any movie made in 1969 cannot have such offensive language, and such an abhorrent story line, and still be called "one of the best movies of the year".

Hollywood needs help. *American Beauty* is the portrayal of two dysfunctional families—one in which the father falls in love with his daughter's best friend, and the mother is adulterous; the other in which the mother is insane, and the father is homosexual, and lectures his son on the merits of remaining heterosexual. I did not meet a single "normal" character in the entire film. Expletives are used indiscriminately throughout. And yet it is "one of the best movies of the year". Hollywood really does need help.

Are movies made in the '30s, '40s, '50s, '60s, '70s those that can be seen on TNT/TCM any less entertaining than what we see today? Many find them much more enjoyable. The stories are funnier/more thrilling/more scary than today's ones. In those days the directors/script writers could portray a character's intensity/anger/frustration without using expletives in every other sentence. They could delineate the brutality of a murder without showing the details of how the victim's limbs have been mutilated using a chainsaw. They could show how passionately a man and a woman love each other without depicting the finer points of their bedroom activity. Directors, actors, and playwrights were more skillful. They produced movies which the whole family could watch together. These days only a couple of movies come out every year which a parent would let his/her young children watch.

Advocates of the movie industry will say, we give the public what they want. Is it really what they want? Violence, expletives, and sex? Has anyone ever bothered to ask the public what they want? They will also say, this is real life, we have to portray it this way. That is balderdash. As severely limited as my knowledge of the USA is, I still know that not every other family is dysfunctional, not everyone smokes and takes drugs, and murder and violence isn't as common as the movie-makers would like to think it is.

Even movies made in the late '80s and early '90s were not as objectionable as they are today. I'm sure that if the *Indiana Jones* Trilogy was made today, it would not be nearly as popular, since the language would be a bit more vulgar, the violence would be a bit more gruesome, and the emphasis would be on Indy's love affairs rather than his quick, dry wit. I would much rather watch *Casablanca* over again, rather than take a risk with a movie made this year or the year before, or anytime in the '90s. How perfectly is the love-that-could-never-be between Rick and Elsa portrayed, how delightful are the characters of Sam and Sasha, how exquisite is the music, and how exotic is the setting of *Casablanca*! Why can't such good, clean films be made today? Oh sure, there are a few that are being produced even today, but I wanted some that do not involve small, white talking mice, or are not animated films by Disney. This world is not full of only murderers, divorced, single and insane parents, perverts, drug-addicts and generally psychotic, deranged and demented individuals who have nothing better to do than video tape their neighbours' every action. There are plenty of normal people and normal families, who have fun in normal ways, and who have perfectly engaging adventures that can be made into movies. Examples, *Father of the Bride*, a great movie about what happens when a family's only daughter wants to get married, or *The Philadelphia Story*, a hilarious tale, with some delightful characters. Why can't more movies like these be made? Nowadays only Disney seems to have an interest in adapting classic stories such as *Aladdin* or *Hercules* into animated films. Why can't classics like these be made into non-animated films? There are plenty of great books that would make lovely movies—movies with warm stories and enticing characters. Hollywood is on the wrong track. It needs to move back into the correct one before it loses whatever self-esteem, respect and admiration it still garners from the public.