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A Glimpse of the Past

BY ELIN WOODGER

IT'S A FUNNY old world this, when an email from south London, England, arrives in the inbox of TWS's membership secretary, Ian Michaud, in Vancouver, Canada, and then is bounced back over to north London, all within a day. The message from Marina Gask concerned her grandfather, who had been interned with Wodehouse at Tost: "I thought you might be interested in speaking to my mother, who is now 80. She is very keen to recount her father's memories of the internment camp and of Mr. Wodehouse."

Interested? You bet we were! Before long, Norman and I had contacted Marina's mother, Jeanne Gask, and on February 25 we tootled off to visit her. We arrived to find a table covered with photographs and scrapbooks filled with letters and memorabilia, as well as a petite, white-haired, and charming hostess keen to tell us about her father, Tom Sarginson.

That Wodehouse knew Mrs. Gask's father is not in doubt, for he gets three mentions in *Performing Flea* (in the chapter "Huy Day by Day"; his name is misspelled as Sarginsson). The third occurs when Wodehouse describes meals at Tost:

At supper two loaves of brunette bread were deposited on each of the tables and divided up among the nine men who sat there. And when I say divided, I mean divided. There was none of that casual business of saying "Help yourself, George; and pass it along." At my table Tom Sarginsson got out his slide rule and started measuring, and the rest of us watched him like hawks to see that his hand didn't slip.

Tom Sarginson, who had served in the Royal Air Corps during World War I, had been working as chief electrical engineer for an English textiles firm in Calais after the Germans invaded. He was captured, and once settled in at Tost, he wrote detailed letters home in which he described life in the camp—though Wodehouse gets only one brief mention: "In the mess room, P. J. [sic] Wodehouse and I feed together." The letters provide much illumination into what life was like for the internees in the former insane asylum that housed them, though they are perhaps more sober in tone than PGW's own lighthearted account.



*Internees at Tost: P. G. Wodehouse standing back row, far left;
Tom Sarginson seated front row, far right.
(Photo courtesy of Jeanne Gask)*

Sarginson was heavily involved in many of the camp's activities, including craftsmanship and the construction of a dam and a swimming pool. He was also a member of the Red Cross Committee and the Entertainment Committee. Mrs. Gask shared numerous photos of remarkably complex stage sets and internee actors in elaborate costumes, showing that their lives as prisoners were very different from those of military detainees. Nonetheless, their isolation from loved ones, as well as the inevitable difficulties of being crammed in with so many other men, made for a rather depressing existence. Those who coped best were men with a military or boarding-school background. (This explains why Wodehouse managed so well during the months he was interned.)

Though disheartened at being separated from his family, her father was determined not to let circumstances get him down, according to Mrs. Gask. He threw himself into camp life and also studied, receiving a Certificate of Proficiency in English from the University of Cambridge in 1942. All the same, he worried endlessly about his wife (also a British citizen) and three daughters (Jeanne was the youngest), still living in German-occupied France. Though they had more liberty than he did, food and other essential items were scarce, and in many ways life was harder for them than it was for him. His letters (written in pencil in exceptionally neat handwriting) often express his longing to help them: "I wish I could send you tea, milk, and soap," he wrote in one missive.

After four years, Sarginson was released and sent first to a camp in France, then to Sweden. He returned to England in September 1944; his wife and daughters joined him there shortly after Christmas. Having lost several years as an internee during World War II and as a prisoner of war during World War I, he had mood swings for the rest of his life. Meanwhile, his daughter Jeanne grew up with a French accent, a result of living in France for her first 12 years. Having kept and treasured the scrapbooks of his letters from Tost for a long time, she is now incorporating them with photos and other memorabilia, and hopes to find a home for them in a library or museum. She has also written a book describing her family's experiences in France while her father was interned.

Norman and I are grateful to Mrs. Gask for allowing us a fascinating glimpse into such a significant period of her father's life. As a bonus, we also got a glimpse of an equally significant period in Wodehouse's life.

This article has also been published in the June 2013 issue of Wooster Sauce.

Top-Hole English Explained: Old Eggs, Crumpets, and Piefaces

ANITA AVERY found a fascinating and apparently previously undiscovered Wodehouse article in several Australian newspapers from 1925. Each of the three has minor differences from the others. Thanks to the generous permission of the Wodehouse Estate, we'll print one below. Here's "'Top-Hole' English" from the *Western Star and Roma Advertiser* of April 15, 1925:

Mr. P. G. Wodehouse, who has made his home in the United States, and is a professional student of both English and American slang, explains in the *Evening News* some of the niceties of the English Tongue.

"The reason," he says, "why we Englishmen use the expression 'silly old ass' is that we know there is no other phrase that gives just the fine shade of meaning which we require. If it were simply a question of substituting for 'silly old ass' some other and legitimate phrase such as 'poor goop' or 'poor fish,' we would do it like a shot. But the one thing we would rather do than eat is to sink the harpoon into the *mot juste*. I go into the Drones Club of an afternoon and look round me. What do I see? In one chair there reclines a Silly Old Ass, while beside him, sucking down the mixture-as-before, is a Priceless Old Egg. Close by I perceive a couple of Genial Old Crumpets in conversation with a Jolly Old Pieface. To the untutored eye of a professor of rhetoric there would probably be absolutely no difference between these widely different species. He would be perfectly content to rank them all as Silly Old Asses. Which, of course is just where he drops his brick.

"Let me mention a few of the more outstanding obvious points which differentiate these asses, eggs, crumpets, and pie faces. As every school boy knows, the Silly Old Ass has a small chin, which recedes, and wears a monocle. His clothes, cut snugly to his figure, which is slim, consist of the conventional morning coat, sponge-bag trousers, and spats. His shoes are black, and his hat is a silk hat carefully brushed.

"What of the Priceless Egg? He is entirely different. In the first place he is burlier. He probably plays hockey for his college. He wears

suede shoes, a jazz sweater, and trousers cut like a sailor's with room enough in them for three more legs. When he walks in the street he puts on a soft hat, which looks like part of an Irish terrier. This he wears with the brim turned well down over his eyes.

"The Genial Old Crumpet, though distinct from the Silly Old Ass and the Priceless Old Egg, does bear a certain superficial resemblance to the Jolly Old Pieface, and a professor of rhetoric might be excused for mixing them up. But we who know are aware that there is an infallible means of distinguishing them. The Crumpet's cigarette-holder is seldom more than eight inches long, while that of the Pieface is always at least thirteen."

Wodehouse and the Spies

BY TODD MORNING

IN THE WINTER 2012 issue of *Plum Lines*, Tom Maguire reported on some Wodehouse references in the nonfiction book *Double Cross: The True Story of the D-Day Spies* by Ben Macintyre, published in 2012. Wodehouse was mentioned enough in that book and in *Agent Garbo: The Brilliant, Eccentric Secret Agent Who Tricked Hitler and Saved D-Day* by Stephan Talty (also published in 2012) to merit a closer look at Wodehouse's connections with World War II espionage intrigues.

I should start with a disclaimer. This article does not blow the lid off of what we know of Wodehouse's activities during the war. Wodehouse wasn't a crafty super spy who hid his activities beneath a mask of political naiveté. And I'm afraid that many of the Wodehouse references in these books raise more questions than they answer. [See editor's note at the end of the article.] I did find, though, some intriguing snippets, and more facts may eventually surface.

First, some background information: The double-cross system was the code name used by the British intelligence service MI5 during the war for their astonishingly successful counterespionage efforts. Throughout the war, the British controlled the entire German spy network in Britain, and the Germans never caught on to this. As a result, British intelligence officers were able to funnel false information to the Germans. Double-cross played a key part in the many deceptions perpetrated by the Allies leading up to the Normandy invasion. All of this was first revealed by MI5 officer J. C. Masterman in his 1972 book *The Double-Cross System in the War of 1939 to 1945*. As more information has

been declassified over the years, additional books about the double-cross system have been published, adding accounts of the human dramas, the names of the key players, and the methods used by the spymasters.

Wodehouse appears early in Macintyre's book in connection with a German spy named Johann "Johnny" Jebsen. Jebsen was recruited by German intelligence because of the time he had spent in England. Macintyre writes that Jebsen "visited Britain as a teenager and returned a committed Anglophile: he affected English manners, spoke English in preference to German." He states that Jebsen "was acquainted with the great English writer P. G. Wodehouse" and that "with his monocle and silk cravat, Jebsen now looked like an oddly Germanic version of Bertie Wooster." Talty's book also mentions that Jebsen was a friend of P. G. Wodehouse. Neither author, however, tells where and when Jebsen and Wodehouse met, how well they knew each other, or what was the nature of their relationship.

The Jebsen connection does not end there. Later in his book, Macintyre goes on to describe a complex money-skimming scheme that Jebsen devised. He states that "Jebsen spent his profits on his wife, his mistresses, himself, and his favorite novelist—for some of the ill-gotten gains ended up in the hands of P. G. Wodehouse. . . . Wodehouse and his wife Ethel eventually took up residence in occupied Paris, but since the royalties from his books were blocked, they were extremely short of funds. Jebsen gave money to his old friend."

After describing the reaction of the British public to Wodehouse's Berlin broadcasts, Macintyre writes: "It can only be imagined what Wodehouse's critics would have said had they known that the comic genius was being bankrolled by a German spy through an illegal currency scam involving the Gestapo, the Nazi security service, and a fortune in forged British banknotes."

As the war went on, Jebsen was recruited by British intelligence, becoming a highly valued double agent under the code name Artist, and supplying a trove of information about the inner workings of the Abwehr (German military intelligence). For Wodehouse fans, perhaps the most astonishing revelation in Macintyre's book is that British intelligence, at Jebsen's suggestion, considered recruiting Ethel Wodehouse as an agent. Macintyre includes a report from Charles de Salis, an agent for the British intelligence agency MI6: "P. G. Wodehouse and his wife were great friends of Artist, who helped them financially from time to time. They are at the moment in Paris. Mrs. Wodehouse is very pro-British and is inclined to be rude to anyone who dares to address her in German. She has on occasion said loudly in public places: 'If you cannot address me in

English don't speak at all. You had better learn it as you will have to speak it after the war anyway.' Artist thinks she may be a useful source as both she and her husband are in close touch with [Paul-Otto] Schmidt, Hitler's interpreter, who often talks to her of the conversations he has had to interpret between Hitler and the various foreigners who visit him. Wodehouse himself is entirely childlike and pacifist."

Macintyre goes on to write: "It is not known whether MI6 acted on this suggestion and recruited Ethel Wodehouse, but Jebson's suggestion casts a new light on their time in Paris." Malcom Muggeridge spent a considerable amount of time in his capacity as an MI6 agent with Ethel and P. G. Wodehouse after the liberation of Paris, and he makes no mention in his memoirs of Ethel having a relationship with British intelligence. Therefore, I think we can assume that Ethel was never recruited. On the other hand, Muggeridge wrote that Ethel was "a mixture of Mistress Quickly and Florence Nightingale with a touch of Lady Macbeth thrown in." He could be describing the perfect spy.

And what became of the eccentric, mysterious, and slippery Johnny Jebson? Arrested by the Gestapo in the spring of 1944, he underwent months of torture. It is presumed he was eventually killed by the Nazis. Through all his suffering, Jebson revealed no information that damaged the Allied cause. If he had, he could have blown the double-cross ruse and even undermined the D-Day deceptions. We may never know the details of the relationship between Wodehouse and Jebson, but apparently Wodehouse was a friend of this unsung hero of the war.

Editor's note: Some of the statements made by Ben Macintyre must be challenged. There is no firm knowledge of exactly what Wodehouse's relationship was with Johnny Jebson, who merits no mention in any Wodehouse biography, hence calling PGW an "old friend" of Jebson is mystifying. Of far greater concern, however, is Macintyre's assertion that Wodehouse was "bankrolled by a German spy." This is condemnation by omission. Macintyre implies that the Wodehouses only survived through Jebson's generosity. He makes no mention of the fact that the Germans allowed Wodehouse to continue receiving royalties from neutral countries, nor that Ethel sold much of her jewelry to help fund their lives in Paris during the war. Furthermore, any money they borrowed during this time was later reported to Major Cussen, whose report cleared Wodehouse of any wrongdoing. For an excellent summary of Wodehouse's wartime actions, see the paper on the U.K. Society's website: <http://www.pgwodehousesociety.org.uk/IS10.pdf>.

More on *A Life in Letters*

TOM THOMAS sent along a review of Sophie Ratcliffe's *P. G. Wodehouse: A Life in Letters*. It was written by Charles McGrath in the *New York Times Book Review* of March 10. It's quite positive and in the end McGrath states that we don't read Wodehouse for the plots but for "his larksome style, his brilliant melding of high and low vocabulary, the genius of his syntax, the timelessness of his slang." McGrath quotes Wodehouse (from a letter to Bill Townend): "Writing a book is like building a coral reef. One goes on adding tiny bits. With my stuff it is largely a matter of adding color and seeing that I don't let anything through that's at all flat." McGrath offers his thoughts on the essential difference between Wodehouse's books and letters: "The letters, good as they are, lie flat on the page. The books practically levitate."

Rowling, Wills, and Will

RICHARD NIELSEN sent three laudatory Wodehouse references. The first was from the October 14, 2012, *New York Times Book Review*, wherein J. K. Rowling speculated what an encounter with P. G. Wodehouse would be like, since he "was so shy that it might be a very awkward meeting. Judging by his letters, his main interests were Pekingese dogs and writing methodology. As I don't own a Peke I've got a feeling we'd just discuss laptops rather than explore the secrets of his genius."

Next, in a March 3 *New York Times Book Review* interview with Garry Wills (writer of *Lincoln at Gettysburg* and *Reagan's America*), Mr. Wills was asked whether he has any guilty pleasures. He replied: "Wodehouse deserves no guilt, but is a constant pleasure." (Also sent in by **Carol Kinnaird**.)

Finally, in a *Washington Post* column praising author William Zinsser (the *American Scholar* writer whose essays are collected in *The Writer Who Stayed*), George Will quoted Mr. Zinsser: "Writing is learned by imitation; we all need models." Mr. Will noted that his own two models were columnist Murray Kempton and novelist P. G. Wodehouse, and illustrated Zinsser's comment that high enjoyment is "a crucial ingredient in writing" by citing how Wodehouse was enjoying himself in the opening chapter of *Leave It to Psmith*: "At the open window of the great library of Blandings Castle, drooping like a wet sock, as was his habit when he had nothing to prop his spine against, the Earl of Emsworth, that amiable and boneheaded peer, stood gazing out over his domain."

Three Humorists Go to War: The Wodehouse Broadcasts in an Entertainment Context

BY BRIAN TAVES

IT SEEMS to me that one major aspect of the controversy surrounding Wodehouse's wartime broadcasts has been neglected, one that would place it in a larger context. Indeed, it is an aspect I should have investigated in my book, *P. G. Wodehouse and Hollywood: Screenwriting, Satires, and Adaptation*. So, following the logic of "better late than never," I offer here an addendum to those pages.

Since radio and film are both parts of the entertainment medium, it is appropriate to compare Wodehouse's broadcasts, and the reactions to his words, with the films made by two equally prominent comic artists responding to the coming of war—especially since they, too, incurred wrath comparable to that which Wodehouse endured. These two individuals are Charlie Chaplin (1889–1977) and Ernst Lubitsch (1892–1947), with the films *The Great Dictator* (1940) and *To Be or Not to Be* (1942), respectively. Each of these individuals would have been known to Wodehouse at least by reputation (although their familiarity with his writing has not been established). Wodehouse would not have seen the Chaplin and Lubitsch films, because of his internment and later inability to leave France. Nonetheless, all three men responded in the manner that seemed most natural to their instinctual talents, with humor and ridicule. While previously audiences and readers were receptive to this approach, in this instance condemnation ensued for all three.

By the late 1930s, following his departure from Hollywood after the release of *A Damsel in Distress* (1937), Wodehouse was residing in France. There were compelling financial reasons: authors residing in the United States or the United Kingdom were subject to taxation in both countries on the same royalties. As a resident of the village of Le Touquet, it seemed to the Wodehouses and other locals that they were still reasonably safe from invasion. It was a level of comfort built on the same reluctance to believe in the imminent threat that allowed the Axis to begin the war with a series of military victories.

While in Hollywood some public mockery of fascist behavior was to be found, the industry tried to avoid any mention of the issue. Studio chiefs, many of them Jewish, were reluctant to the point of timidity about treating events overseas on the screen, while the Hays Office, the "self-regulating" censorship arm led by Joseph Breen, was concerned about potential

communist propaganda. For instance, the content of the 1936 hit Robert Sherwood play *Idiot's Delight* was overhauled for the screen to satisfy the objections of Mussolini's Italy before its February 1939 release. Nonetheless, the film was banned in Spain, France, Switzerland, Estonia, and ultimately Italy.

When independent producer Walter Wanger released *Blockade* in June 1938, the decision was made to avoid "taking sides" in this account of the Spanish Civil War, but the movie was only made after the distributor United Artists had already closed its Spanish office and had seen European revenues decline drastically. Even so, Franco supporters condemned *Blockade*, and it was boycotted by Catholic organizations in the United States. Even at the moment of the collapse of France, the Hays Office, warning Hollywood of the charge of British propaganda, discouraged Samuel Goldwyn from sponsoring an American release of the English film *Pastor Hall*, a 1939 account of a World War I U-boat captain turned pacifist minister who had been sent to a German concentration camp.

The studios were even more reluctant to mention Japanese aggression in Asia, although films with a Chinese setting were relatively popular and numerous. In the first release (at the beginning of February 1938), set against the Sino-Japanese conflict, *International Settlement*, 20th Century-Fox sought to elide the "controversy"—despite depicting the bombing. Not until the release of the "B" movie *North of Shanghai* a year later was sympathy for the Chinese against the Japanese in evidence on the Hollywood screen, still the only such portrayal until Pearl Harbor.

The dangers of domestic fascism finally secured a place on the American screen with Warner Bros.' release of *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* in mid-1939, and it was predictably banned in Germany, Italy, and Spain, as well as by such neutral countries as Ireland, Switzerland, and several Latin American countries; there was even a threat of censorship in England. Such 1940 films as *The Mortal Storm*, telling how a family is torn between those supporting and opposing the Nazis, still balanced "good" and "bad" Germans, a pattern followed by *Four Sons*, *Escape*, and *I Married a Nazi*. Germany and Italy then banned American films in all areas under their control in August 1940, a move that that was not unexpected but still shocked Hollywood. Without the restraint of market pressure, Hollywood turned more

sharply antifascist. Most graphically, the June 1941 release *Man Hunt*, directed by Fritz Lang, who had fled Nazi rule, told of a big-game hunter who goes after the ultimate quarry, Hitler himself. By this time, the Army and Navy had begun to receive renewed movie glamor, and Americans joining the British cause were celebrated in *A Yank in the R.A.F.* and *International Squadron* in 1941. The World War I glories of America's preeminent hero of that conflict were reenacted simultaneously in *Sergeant York*, although as late as that summer, congressional isolationists attacked Hollywood as a hotbed of interventionist propaganda.

This chronology must be considered in examining comedic treatments of the rise of fascism. Actually, the first on the screen had been *You Nazty Spy!*, a Three Stooges short (eighteen minutes long), with Moe, Larry, and Curly parodying Hitler, Goering, and Goebbels. Their slapstick, although intentional from the title, was less direct an assault than its successors. However, with shorts lacking the critical attention or cachet of features, the Stooges were able to get their film out at the beginning of 1940. The Stooges would offer a sequel, repeating their characterization, entitled *I'll Never Heil Again*, released on July 4, 1941.

The first major comedic attack on Hitler was by Hollywood's only true independent, its best-loved comic actor-writer-director for over two decades, Charlie Chaplin. The face-off between Chaplin and Hitler was virtually inevitable, given Hitler's use of a moustache that had long been Chaplin's trademark. Hitler's elicited much derision, as in Wodehouse's 1936 short story "Buried Treasure":

The situation in Germany had come up for discussion in the bar parlor of the Anglers' Rest, and it was generally agreed that Hitler was standing at the crossroads and would soon be compelled to do something definite. His present policy, said a Whisky and Splash, was mere shilly-shallying.

"He'll have to let it grow or shave it off," said the Whisky and Splash. "He can't go on sitting on the fence like this. Either a man has a moustache or he has not. There can be no middle course."

Chaplin's identical moustache was as much a part of his makeup as his baggy trousers, worn coat, oversize shoes, bowler hat, and cane that created the "Little Tramp." This costume was in marked contrast to Hitler's regimented, stiff clothing; moreover, in real life, Chaplin was clean-shaven.

It was the appropriation of the world's most famous moustache from a comedian to a führer that compelled Chaplin to contrast them in *The Great Dictator*. Chaplin plays both a Jewish barber, dwelling in the ghetto, a descendant of the "Little Tramp," and the leader of Tomainia, sharing the moustache. This dual identity allows the barber to assume the dictator role and replace his familiar tirade with a plea for international brotherhood and peace.



Chaplin in *The Great Dictator*

The Great Dictator began production in September 1939, and shooting completed at the beginning of February 1940; it opened in New York on October 15. General release began on March 7, 1941, and enjoyed enormous box-office success. Chaplin had succeeded in deriding Hitler, belittling him and opening him to ridicule, as well as creating a universal, timeless figure in the Jewish barber.

During the movie's planning, the Hays Office had received official complaints from the German Consul and even from the British Board of Film Censors, but now the pendulum began to swing to the other extreme. Instead of having to remain guarded in mocking Hitler, undertaking such a satire became increasingly questionable amid heightening hostilities.

It was actually months before the release of *The Great Dictator* that Wodehouse was taken captive. He and his wife had been reassured by the British officers stationed nearby that there was no immediate danger, with the result that they and their neighbors did not try to leave Le Touquet until it was too late. On May 22, 1940, Wodehouse and his neighbors were trapped behind the lines of the advancing German army in France. Only two weeks earlier, Winston Churchill had become prime minister of Great Britain.

The evolving reaction to the war in England and still-neutral America, as exemplified in the reception given *The Great Dictator*, paralleled the quandary Wodehouse faced. Largely isolated from accurate, up-to-date news, he continued in the same mindset

as Chaplin. Wodehouse's lack of clarity was further clouded by his American agent promptly writing to ask him if his captivity could not be turned into fodder for a magazine piece. If the agent's judgment may seem questionable and mercenary, it is likely he, too, was operating from a mindset of the time when *The Great Dictator* was meant to be simply comic relief and delicious satire.

After two months in occupied France, Wodehouse and wife Ethel were separated for nearly a year, and as an enemy alien under the age of sixty, Wodehouse was interned, a condition that would last until June 1941. A *New York Times* article brought attention to his status, and he began to receive hundreds of letters from concerned American readers; they buoyed his spirits, but he was unable to respond. Wodehouse had a lifelong habit of answering all his fan mail himself, but regulations only allowed letters to relatives and concerning business matters.

Wodehouse was released from internment a few months prior to his sixtieth birthday, an age that marked the standard for such captives to be freed. As a way to respond to letters he had received from America during internment, he was offered the opportunity by the German Foreign Office to make five broadcasts to the United States, still neutral (though Britain was at war). The topic was to be his experiences in the camps, presented uncensored by one who had not received preferential treatment—indeed, he had lost 42 pounds. Wodehouse could not see how material of this sort, written without German interference, could benefit them, although they thought his words might assist in keeping America neutral. Also, he did not have his wife's counsel in making his decision.

Moreover, Wodehouse had clearly indicated his opinion of fascism years before. In chapter 3 of *The Code of the Woosters* (1938), Bertie Wooster is disgusted to learn that the followers of a would-be dictator, Roderick Spode, wear black shorts, since there were no shirts left by the time their association was formed. (Spode was modeled on England's actual home-grown, would-be British Fascist leader, Oswald Mosley.) In chapter 7, even mild-mannered Bertie is driven to put the Fascist leader in his place: "Just because you have succeeded in inducing a handful of half-wits to disfigure the London scene by going about in black shorts, you think you're someone. You hear them shouting, 'Heil, Spode!' and you imagine it is the Voice of the People. That is where you make your bloomer. What the Voice of the People is saying is, 'Look at that frightful ass Spode swanking about in footer bags! Did you ever in your puff see such a perfect perisher?'"

The programs themselves were recorded between June 25 and July 26, 1941 (there was no opportunity for live broadcasts), and were aired from June 28 to August 5. By the fourth, Wodehouse had a sense of the repercussions, denying that he had been coerced or bribed into making the statements. The broadcasts were controversial in the United States, and in England even before they had been heard there. The Propaganda Ministry then took over, and an unintended second transmission to the United Kingdom took place August 9–14. This defeated the entire purpose, since the whole point for the Germans had been that Wodehouse's words might help keep America neutral; in Britain they were received as word from the enemy.

What went on the air had an entirely different reception than the similar talks Wodehouse had given to fellow internees in an effort to keep up the collective spirit. He had believed he was demonstrating how the British kept up their spirits no matter the adverse circumstances. The scripts themselves are laden with sarcasm, rather sharper than usual for the author, and no listener could have any doubts as to how poorly Wodehouse and his fellow civilian internees had been treated. Even his American agent saw no moral quandary, believing the broadcasts might enhance sales, and had succeeded in placing Wodehouse's article "My War with Germany" in the July 19, 1941, issue of the *Saturday Evening Post* (which had often carried Wodehouse stories). Yet another account of his internment appeared in the October 1941 *Cosmopolitan*.

Wodehouse's release just before the broadcasts was covered by the media, but with little attention to how he actually spent his time. In summer he stayed with quietly anti-Nazi friends in the German countryside, while in the wintertime he paid for a hotel by selling some of Ethel's jewels and using royalties received through neutral countries along with a sale of film rights. Before the broadcasts, Wodehouse agreed to a scripted interview (customary at the time) that was performed over CBS and written by American correspondent Harry Flannery, who regarded Wodehouse as a dupe or worse. It gave the impression that Wodehouse was living in luxury underwritten by the Germans and that he was uncertain of a British victory. Sandwiched between news of the war, the interview was followed by the words of Elmer Davis, noting that Wodehouse was lucky not to have been in a concentration camp.

Of the five broadcasts Wodehouse wrote himself, the only portion that makes the reader flinch today is the reference to the latrines left behind by Belgian soldiers. However, this was the only passage that criticized anyone other than Germans.

Chaplin had the best timing in his humorous treatment of the war, yet even in his case the comedy appeared in the last months before Hitler and Mussolini became a direct threat to the United States. Wodehouse was writing in the same tone as Chaplin had, and just as he had done in *The Code of the Woosters*—but now it was three years later, and what could once be belittled had become a global menace.

While Wodehouse was unique in finding himself accused of treasonous behavior, another humorist found his own farce of Nazi Germany receiving a harsh response. Among the three, he was the one who had the most reason to loathe the fascist regime. Ernst Lubitsch had been brought to Hollywood by Mary Pickford after earning a reputation in his German homeland during its cinematic renaissance in the wake of World War I. Lubitsch was part of the old German culture thrust aside by the Nazis—and he was Jewish.

With *Ninotchka* (1939), Lubitsch had directed Greta Garbo as a communist official who discovers the pleasures of the supposedly decadent West. In November 1941, he began directing another film mocking ideological pretensions, subjecting fascism to a satirical treatment with *To Be or Not to Be*.

This new farce depicted a Polish troupe who, despite lacking thespian talent, both become a courageous part of the resistance and reveal the foolishness of their invaders. *To Be or Not to Be* went before the cameras prior to Pearl Harbor but was completed after and it premiered in February 1942. Jack Benny had the lead as the most vain of the players, uncertain of the love of his wife, played by Carole Lombard—who was tragically killed during a war bond tour when her airplane crashed, before the movie's release.

The Polish actor played by Benny, in disguise as “Concentration Camp Ehrhardt,” fishes for compliments from a real Nazi and is told, “What he did to Shakespeare we are doing now to Poland”—“We do the concentrating and the Poles do the camping.” The script Lubitsch wrote with Melchior Lengyel and Edwin Justus Mayer contained words as problematic as any of those Wodehouse uttered in his broadcasts. Very quickly Lubitsch had to defend himself from accusations of lack of taste—something he had never faced before despite a career of handling the most delicate sophisticated comedies with “the Lubitsch touch.”

Audiences avoided *To Be or Not to Be*: there was no room for humor at the very moment when the

Axis was achieving the most military victories.¹ No less than Wodehouse (who had already proven his antifascist credentials with *The Code of the Woosters*), Lubitsch, probably the most beloved member of Hollywood's German colony, found himself having to defend *To Be or Not to Be* against the suspicion that its director did not fully understand the gravity of events. His reply might well have been echoed by Wodehouse: “The American audiences don't laugh at those Nazis because they underestimate their menace, but because they are happy to see this new order and its ideology being ridiculed.”²

When placed in context with Chaplin and Lubitsch, Wodehouse's attempt at humor, and its poor timing, becomes vastly more understandable and forgivable. At the time he was taken captive, Hollywood had made only one anti-Nazi movie, and even *The Great Dictator* was still to be released. Remaining in the mindset of conditions at the time he was interned, mid-1940, Wodehouse was not alone in either his response to global calamity or eliciting audience outrage. Eventually a tradition of comedy mocking Nazi pretensions would develop, epitomized most widely in the long-running 1960s television series *Hogan's Heroes*; Wodehouse was then still alive and must have marveled that the topic that brought him such grief—life in a Nazi prison camp—was now a weekly situation comedy.

Lubitsch did not find himself the object of such repercussions from his Nazi satire, but his career was cut short by heart disease from 1943, until his death at age 55 in 1947. The Wodehouses were released

¹ Nonetheless, despite the response and predominance of dramatic treatments of the war, lighter treatments continued to be made. In April 1942, Abbott and Costello found Nazis along the Mexican border in *Rio Rita*, and in October 1942, Leo McCarey created *Once Upon a Honeymoon*, with Ginger Rogers married to Austrian Fascist Walter Slezak, trailed by American reporter Cary Grant. That same month, Hal Roach released *The Devil With Hitler*, in which Satan must trick Hitler into committing a good deed, lest the newcomer replace Beelzebub on the throne of Hell; a year later, the same studio and actors made *Nazty Nuisance*. By 1943, prominent slapstick comedians were playing their part in uncovering cinematic Nazis, whether The Three Stooges in *They Stoooge to Conga*, Laurel and Hardy in *Air Raid Wardens*, Bob Hope in *They Got Me Covered*, and even Bela Lugosi and the East Side Kids in *Ghosts on the Loose*.

² Ernst Lubitsch, “Mr. Lubitsch Takes the Floor for Rebuttal,” *New York Times* (March 29, 1942), X3.

by Allied authorities after the liberation of Europe. However, Wodehouse was informed that he could be prosecuted for his wartime conduct should he ever attempt to return to England. So he and his wife decided to go to the United States in 1947, where he would eventually become a citizen in 1955. In this country, he hoped his name was not always linked with the controversy over the Berlin broadcasts.

Chaplin, like Wodehouse, also found his popularity diminished. There were certainly personal causes: A 1943 love affair led Chaplin to be acquitted on Mann Act violations, but convicted in a paternity case, despite exonerating evidence of blood tests. Just as important, and more akin to the way that Wodehouse was assumed to have fascist sympathies, Chaplin was suspected of communist leanings and having followed the Soviet party line. This combination of political and personal factors led to a sudden drop in Chaplin's popularity. His next film, *Monsieur Verdoux* (1947), was a bitter, scathing comparison of a bluebeard's victims to the deaths that ensue when armies are at war. The movie was all but banned, and, finding his reentry permit revoked in 1952, Chaplin left the United States for Switzerland. Similarly, Wodehouse never returned to England because of the accusations against him.

Read any biography of Wodehouse, Chaplin, or Lubitsch, and the Berlin broadcasts, *The Great Dictator*, or *To Be or Not to Be* receive prominent mention. The suspicions as to the political sympathies of all three men have become part of the lore surrounding them. Wodehouse and Chaplin lived long enough to secure the rehabilitation accorded a figure who has outlasted his adversaries and the issues that embroiled them. Chaplin would receive a special Academy Award in 1972 and a knighthood in 1975—the same year, perhaps not coincidentally, as Wodehouse. Thus, Britain simultaneously and belatedly honored her two greatest, if sometimes controversial, humorists of the twentieth century.



“Because if ever I saw a baby that looked like something that was one jump ahead of the police,” said the Pieface, “it is this baby of Bingo’s. Definitely the criminal type. It reminds me of Edward G. Robinson.”

“Sonny Boy” (1928)

Review: Plum’s *Leave It to Jane* Lyrics Still Sparkle

BY HERB MOSKOVITZ

MUSICALS TONIGHT!, a small theater company in New York City that specializes in script-in-hand revivals of long-forgotten or neglected musicals, often dusts off a Jerome Kern–Guy Bolton–P. G. Wodehouse gem and produces a short run in a midtown Off-Broadway house. I have seen most of the Kern-Bolton-Wodehouse shows they have done, and they have all been wonderful. Their selection this season, 1917’s *Leave It to Jane*, may be the best so far.

As with all the Kern-Bolton-Wodehouse musicals of this period, the plot is a light, frothy set of conflicts and misunderstandings, where none of the characters is a real villain and the audience knows before the curtain goes up that all will end happily.

Musicals and operettas of the period mostly took place in exotic locales, and the KBW team broke this



Carter Lynch as Billy and Sarah Ziegler as Jane
(photo courtesy of Musicals Tonight!)

tradition by placing their stories in America. *Leave It to Jane* is as American as you can get. It takes place in a midwest college and is all about who will win the Thanksgiving Day football game.

There were so many characters introduced in the first act that I was afraid I would lose track of who was who and what was going on in the many subplots, but all were crystal clear. The main plot involves the president of Atwater College’s daughter wooing a star football player away from the rival college to play for Atwater. His name is Billy Bolton, and if there is any reason why the protagonist’s surname is the same as one of the creators, I haven’t figured it out. *Leave It to Jane* is based

on a 1904 play by George Ade (*The College Widow*), and although it contains many typical Wodehousian elements—impersonations, mistaken identity, sporting bets, and forgiven lovers—I don’t know what, if any, plot devices may have come from the source play.

Dorothy Parker wrote in *Vanity Fair* how the team integrated the music into the story: “Bolton and Wodehouse and Kern are my favorite indoor sport. I like the way they go about a musical comedy. . . . I like the way the action slides casually into the songs. . . . I like the deft rhyming of the song that is always sung in the last act by two comedians and a comedienne. And, oh, how I do like Jerome Kern’s music.”

Although operas and operettas of the nineteenth century seamlessly blended songs into the action (think of Gilbert and Sullivan), musical comedies of the early twentieth century had moved away from that and were placing songs into the shows in a helter-skelter manner. Bolton and Wodehouse changed that back and made sure the songs perfectly fit into the book.

Although Bolton and Wodehouse share the credits for the book and lyrics, we know that Bolton primarily wrote the book and Wodehouse primarily wrote the lyrics. Critic Gerald Boardman said that “Wodehouse is the most observant, literate, and witty lyricist of his day.” The popular songs from the show included “Leave It to Jane,” “Crickets Are Calling,” “Cleopatterer,” “The Days of Chivalry” (aka “Sir Galahad”), “Siren’s Song,” and “I’m Going to Find a Girl.”

Musical Director James Stenborg had the talented players in fine form. Each character was perfectly cast with an actor or actress possessing a great voice and looking the part. Standouts were Sarah Ziegler as Jane, Carter Lynch as Billy Bolton, Kari Grunberg as Flora, and Jackson Eather as Bub. It’s too bad they didn’t have an album made to preserve their show.

Thomas Sabella-Mills, the resident director/choreographer, kept the action flowing throughout. The stage is small at the Lion Theater, and the cast mastered the choreography perfectly.

The costumes were perfect for the period and the characters—a hard feat to achieve without a costume designer. There is never any scenery to speak of at a Musicals Tonight! production; there’s just a large painting or photograph center stage to tell the audience what the scene should be. A photo of a college hall (which looked like it was designed by Frank Furness) and a painting of a football stadium told the audience all they needed to know. Stage manager Andrew Lonsdale’s lighting design was suitably bright and sprightly.

Wodehousians owe a large debt of gratitude to Mr. Mel Miller, the founder and producer of Musicals

Tonight!, for continuing to bring revivals of Kern-Bolton-Wodehouse musicals to New York City. Mel introduced the show after the house was full, mentioned The Wodehouse Society in his introduction, and had us give ourselves a round of applause. That was pleasant, but it was the cast and crew who really deserve the applause for this jewel of a show from the master team of Kern, Bolton, and Wodehouse.

Applause must also be given to Amy Plofker and the Broadway Special folks for arranging a wonderful dinner at the West Bank Café for the Wodehousians who attended the show.



The Leave It to Jane ensemble
(photo courtesy of Musicals Tonight!)

P.S. If you would like to see a Hollywood version of two of the songs (“Leave it to Jane” and “Cleopatterer”), go to the link below to see June Allyson in a clip from *Till The Clouds Roll By*. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3KJG_puVVk0

He is rather a superstitious sort of chap, and he had begun to feel that this billowy curver wasn’t lucky for him. He remembered now that a gipsy had once warned him to beware of a fair woman, and for a moment it was touch and go whether he wouldn’t turn away . . .

“Bramley Is So Bracing” (1939)

Nuts, Maniacs, and Plum

BETH CARROLL sent along this quote from Christopher Matthew’s *Now We Are Sixty (And a Bit)*: “P. G. Wodehouse once said about writing musical comedies, ‘It’s a bit like eating salted almonds: you find you can manage just one more.’ For musical comedies, read ‘comic poems.’”

Beth also found that Raymond Sokolov, in the May 18–19 *Wall Street Journal*, was listing books for the Anglomaniac, and chose to list as number one Wodehouse’s *Joy in the Morning*.

Chapters Corner

WHAT IS YOUR chapter up to these days? We welcome you to use this column to tell the Wodehouse world about your chapter's activities. Chapter representatives, please send all info to the editor, Gary Hall (see back page). If you're not a member of a local chapter but would like to attend a meeting or become a member, please get in touch with the contact person listed.

NEW CHAPTERS! An announcement was made on April 15 to the PGWnet mailing list about a new Atlanta chapter with members from Georgia and South Carolina. Response has been enthusiastic. This event may lead to the formation of not one but two chapters: one based in Atlanta and the other in Columbia, South Carolina. Chapter names have not been chosen yet, but there are many good suggestions to choose from. Both groups are discussing meeting times and places, and would love to hear from you. Updates will be sent once there is news to share.

For anyone interested in joining the Atlanta chapter, please contact **Michael Thompson**.

For anyone interested in joining the South Carolina chapter, please contact **Jennifer Rust**.

And, for news on the budding new Denver chapter, see page 13!

Anglers' Rest

(Seattle and vicinity)
Contact: Susan Collicott
Phone:
E-mail:



Birmingham Banjolele Band

(Birmingham, Alabama, and vicinity)
Contact: Caralyn Campbell
Phone:
E-mail:



Blandings Castle Chapter

(Greater San Francisco Bay area)
Contact: Ed and Missy Ratcliffe
Phone:
E-mail:



The Broadway Special
(New York City and vicinity)
Contact: Amy Plofker
Phone:
E-mail:



ON FEBRUARY 15 at Gramercy Park, a bunch of the Specials were whooping it up at The Players, which was doing its best imitation of the Malamute Saloon. A baker's dozen of us contributed to the evening's discussion—not of a book or play or poem but something of all three. Each of us brought to the table a cherished morsel of Plum to share, for it is certainly the case that reading one's favorite aloud is the quickest way to hilarity. The result was a predictably glorious smorgasbord (accompanied by a seemingly bottomless box of Godiva chocolates that circled the table like a ride on a carousel). The meeting came to what we think of as order when Co-Prez Philip rapped the gavel—er, the slingshot which serves as our gavel—and Co-Prez Amy with Cohort Sally reprised their rendition of Miss Bassett telling Mr. Wooster the sad, sad tale of Mervyn Keene, Clubman, “with a goodish amount of throb in it.” Then we all sang out with our own choices: *Psmith in the City*, “Printer's Error,” “The Crime Wave at Blandings,” “The Story of Webster,” “Bill” (lyrics), “A Solitary Triumph,” “The Ordeal of Young Tuppy,” snippets of the school stories, a reference to luminous rabbits, and the exchange of telegrams between Aunt Dahlia and Bertie. We were quite spoiled for choice.

Giddy as we were with mirth, we did not forget to remind the assemblage that we'd be making our theatrical excursion to Musicals Tonight! (see review on pages 9–10) with subsequent conga line across naughty, bawdy, gaudy, sporty Forty-Second Street to Off-Broadway's esteemed West Bank Café for browsing and sluicing. It's becoming quite the annual tradition, though we may have to go much farther than Off-Off-Broadway for next year's jaunt: There's something called “*Jeeves in Bloom*, adapted by Margaret Raether from the stories of P. G. Wodehouse” scheduled for the Black Hills Studio Theater in Rapid City, South Dakota.

The Special then trundled down to the Players Grill to restore the tissues before venturing out into the February night “when the moon was awful clear, and the icy skyscrapers hemmed you in with a silence you most could hear.” Thank goodness we're planning to meet next on June 28, for then come perfect Wodehousian days.

Capital! Capital!

(Washington, D.C., and vicinity)

Contact: Scott Daniels



CAPITAL! CAPITAL! is pleased to announce that Scott Daniels, a longtime member of TWS and CapCap, has taken over stewardship of the chapter. Scott is keen to assume his new responsibilities, and he is eminently qualified as an unrehabilitated, lifelong Wodehouse addict. Scott is a partner in the law firm of Westerman, Hattori, Daniels, and Adrian, LLP, in downtown Washington, D.C., and is a specialist in patent reexaminations, having published extensively and lectured worldwide on the subject. He holds a B.A. from Carleton College and a J.D. from Cornell University, and was an attorney in the General Counsel's Office of the U.S. International Trade Commission. His email address is given above. Jeff (Consul, the Almost Human) Peterson steps down after some ten years as CapCap's Grand Poobah (or something like that), but remains in CapCap as one of the many who will assist Scott in his new duties.



Scott Daniels,
the new
poobah of
the Capital!
Capital!
chapter

Chapter One

(Greater Philadelphia area)

Contact: Herb Moskowitz

Phone:

E-mail:



THANKS TO the power of the press (viz. the *Philadelphia Inquirer*) and Jake Blumgart's excellent article therein on The Wodehouse Society, which ran on January 13, 2013, the Chapter One chaps definitely had a full (Wode)house contingent on January 20 with twenty-two potential new members and about twenty returning members!

After hearty welcomes and introductions all around, Acting President Herb Moskowitz (Vladimir

Brusiloff) related the history and the aims of the society, the membership requirement of Chapter One (love of Wodehouse), whether or not a nom de Plum is needed, and the care and feeding of Gussie, the newt we sponsor at the Philadelphia Zoo.

Chaps Bob Rains (Oily Carlisle) and Andrea Jacobsen (Sweetie Carlisle) have developed (with TWS President Ken Clevenger) an information brochure for use by any TWS member or chapter for recruitment.

Once drinks were served and food ordered, Bob Nissenbaum (Anthony, Lord Droitwich) led a discussion on *If I Were You*, a (sadly) lesser-known novel (based on an earlier play) featuring baby-switching, aristos going up against socialists, marrying for oof versus marrying for love, and plot dénouements made by drunken nannies. Bob read several sections from the novel with aplomb (or should it be aPlum?), showcasing the Master's witty wordplay in several exchanges between Syd the socialist barber and Tony the impoverished nobleman, plus a few swipes at the legal profession.

Bob said that the baby-switching plot was borrowed from a W. S. Gilbert "Bab Ballad" and a Gilbert and Sullivan operetta (*H.M.S. Pinafore*), to which Janet Nickerson (Zenobia "Nobby" Hopwood) suggested that Edward Rutherford had borrowed from both for the heir switch in the eighteenth-century section of his novel *London*. Norma Frank (The Bishop of Bongo Bongo, retired) chimed in with a reference to the Tichbourne claimant lawsuit for good measure.

Janet also read two mentions of Plum from Jonathan Yardley's *Washington Post* article on the republication of John D. MacDonald's Travis McGee series. A copy of Jake Blumgart's *Philadelphia Inquirer* article was also passed around. It can be seen online at http://www.philly.com/philly/opinion/20130113_Carry_on__Wodehousians_.html.

CHAPTER ONE met at Cavanaugh's Headhouse Tavern on March 10 with 35 Chaps in attendance. There were quite a number of new members. This was because of the aforementioned *Philadelphia Inquirer* glowing article about the group a few months back.

Our chair, Herb Moskowitz, asked everyone to introduce themselves with their own name and their nom de Plum, and, as the subject of the day was Webster the cat, to say something about any pets they may have. We were quite surprised that the overwhelming majority had cats, a few had dogs, and hardly anyone had no pets at all.

David McDonough is reading Sophie Ratcliffe's new book, *P. G. Wodehouse: A Life in Letters*, and gave a favorable report of it.

We then had a drawing for three door-prize books. David donated his copy of *A Life in Letters*, and Dotty Hoffman donated two Jeeves books.

Bob Rains and Andrea Jacobsen had mailed in many copies of their plum-colored brochure about The Wodehouse Society. These were distributed for dissemination at local libraries and other suitable places of interest.

John Baesch had sent in various newspaper clippings. Some were about the new Ratcliffe book, some were about the new BBC television miniseries about Blandings Castle starring Timothy Spall, and about a dozen miscellaneous clippings were Plum-related in one fashion or another.

After the browsing and sluicing, Norma Frank gave an excellent review of two Mulliner stories, "The Story of Webster" and "Cats Will Be Cats," to great enthusiasm and acclaim. This was most certainly aided by the fact there were so many cat lovers in the audience.

The next meeting was to be held on . . . Well, keep reading!

ANOTHER FULL (Wode)house met in the upper room at Cavanaugh's on May 19. The meeting began with a review of *Leave It to Jane* by President Herb Moskovitz, as well as Bob Nissenbaum and Norma Frank, who also passed around a slide show of photos of the production with the show's soundtrack playing in the background. *Leave It to Jane* was a musical by Plum, Guy Bolton, and Jerome Kern that a New York company (Musicals Tonight!) revived in April on Theater Row.

The next item on the agenda was the election of our chapter president. Nominations and seconds flew by, with only one person being nominated. Almost before he knew it, amidst cries of "Four More Years," Herb had won a second term.

With that out of the way, Herb then passed the hat for the Mandarin newt Gussie at the Philadelphia Zoo. For years, Chapter One has collected funds to feed our newt. Happily, Gussie will be kept in the style to which he is accustomed for another year.

After some discussion on the delights of joining The Wodehouse Society, the upcoming convention in Chicago, and the merits of signing on with PGWnet, Bob Rains presented a lecture with a slide show on "Plum as Poet." Bob explained that a collection of Plum's poems was never published in his lifetime, and that the *The Parrot and Other Poems*, published posthumously, may contain verse not by Plum. At least so says Tony Ring.

As Plum wrote pieces for many publications that are no longer in print, and wrote many under pseudonyms,

it is difficult to correctly identify his full poetic output but it is certainly fun to try.

Bob also discussed Plum's many allusions to other poets, his admiration of W. S. Gilbert, and Plum as an inspiration to other writers, ending with "She's My Girl," a hilarious song by Tom Lehrer that is a parody of "Bill." Bob's final words of wisdom to us were, "Brush up, not just your Shakespeare, but other poets as well, and you'll appreciate P. G. even more than you do already."

The next meeting is to be held on July 14, 2013 (pending approval by the management of Cavanaugh's).

The Chicago Accident Syndicate (Chicago and thereabouts)

Contact: Daniel & Tina Garrison
Phone:
E-mail:



The Clients of Adrian Mulliner (For enthusiasts of both PGW and Sherlock Holmes)

Contact: Elaine Coppola
Phone:
E-mail:



THERE WILL BE a Senior Bloodstain at the 2013 Chicago convention. It will probably be on Friday afternoon, with the date, time, and place to be announced when finalized. Included as part of the program will be sharing of our favorite quotes.

The Denver of the Secret Nine (Denver and vicinity)

Contact: Jennifer Petkus
E-mail:

IT TURNS OUT my suspicion that there is an interest for P. G. Wodehouse in our square state is well-founded, as was shown by the number of responses to the Facebook ad for our first meeting. At one point I worried that our venue, Pints Pub in downtown Denver, would be overwhelmed if all the confirmed and maybes arrived. Instead, we had a manageable and sociable ten members with the promise of more.

Five members came by way of Doctor Watson's Neglected Patients (the Denver Sherlock Holmes scion society), and five members were attracted by the Facebook ad. Two members were new to Wodehouse, and one can just imagine what joys await them.

We discussed "Jeeves Takes Charge" and ate lunch, and I gave a brief outline of the major categories of

Wodehouse: the Blandings gang, the multitude of Mulliners, the Drones Club, the golf stories, etc. We closed with a quiz that combined elements from the story and also some more general-knowledge questions.

For now, we've decided to keep our group loosely organized and to meet the second Sunday of every other month. The next meeting will be at Pints Pub at 12:30 PM on July 14. We'll discuss *The Code of the Woosters*.

Find us on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/TheDenverOfTheSecretNine> or at <http://thedenverofthesecretnine.wordpress.com>.



The inaugural gathering of the Denver of the Secret Nine

The Drone Rangers
(Houston and vicinity)
Contact: Carey Tynan
Phone:
E-mail:



The Flying Pigs
(Cincinnati area and elsewhere)
Contact: Susan Brokaw
Phone:
E-mail:



Friends of the Fifth Earl of Ickenham
(Buffalo, New York, and vicinity)
Contact: Laura Loehr
Phone:
E-mail:



The Mottled Oyster Club / Jellied Eels
(San Antonio and South Texas)
Contact: Lynette Poss
Phone:
E-mail:



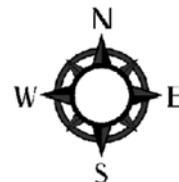
WE WOULD like to welcome new member Craig Hardwick to our rollicking gang. After reading enough of Plum to get him primed for more, Craig is enthusiastically following through by joining us in our monthly discussions of the Wodehouse oeuvre. We are delighted to have him.

Our Oldest Member (and TWS's also?) recently celebrated his 99th birthday on April 11. We are hoping to make a grand event of his upcoming 100th next year. Edwin Robert Adams has a remarkable collection of PGW first editions and an amazing knowledge of Wodehouse's novels, stories, and characters. And just like the original Oldest Member, Bob is only too eager to share a story or two with his listener, whether his subject be a recently reread novel or a book he has just acquired. Long may he recount!

The New England Wodehouse Thingummy Society (NEWTS)
(Boston and New England)
Contact: David Landman
Phone:
E-mail:



The Northwodes
(St. Paul, Minneapolis, and vicinity)
Contact: Kristine Fowler
Phone:
E-mail:



The Pale Parabolites
(Toronto and vicinity)
Contact: George Vanderburgh
E-mail:

The Perfecto-Zizzbaum Motion Picture Corporation
(Los Angeles and vicinity)
Contact: Karen Shotting
Phone:
E-mail:



JOY AND JOLLITY continue to reign at PZMPCo's meetings along with the feast of reason and flow of soul that is so often the inevitable concomitant of our scholarly reviews of the Master's works.

Our recent spirited discussions have run the gamut from ersatz jewelry (fake diamonds, or white jargon, in *A Gentleman of Leisure/The Intrusion of Jimmy*; dud pearls in *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit* and "The Gem Collector") to bad poetry ("Caliban at Sunset" by Percy Gorringer) to pretentious novels and pretentious female authors (*Spindrift* by Florence Craye). One question

raised was whether Florence may have been based, to some degree, on Ayn Rand. [Editor's note: Since Ayn Rand was seven years old and living in Russia when Florence Craye first appeared in 1912, we think the hypothesis unlikely!] We then studied cultured pearls to determine whether we could detect the inner core that Jeeves tells us separates the sheep from the goats in the pearl kingdom. We concluded that either (1) Jeeves and Roderick Spode had a special knack for this sort of thing, (2) J. and R.S. had better eyesight and/or a brighter light under which to examine the dud pearls than we did, or (3) Aunt Dahlia's and Ma Trotter's pearls were much cruder specimens of the jeweler's art, because none of us could detect the telltale nucleus.

Our April reading of *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit* was selected in honor of our meeting taking place on the day before Income Tax Day. We decided that a visit to Brinkley Court was appropriate, as it is the home of Thomas Portarlington Travers, whose aversion to the income tax and super-tax is almost as legendary as his silver collection and digestive woes. ("Didn't he pay his income tax this year?" "You bet he did. I should have thought you would have heard his screams in London.")

In May we were to have a change of venue and date. Because the second Sunday of May is Mother's Day, we planned to meet the third Sunday (May 19), and the meeting place was to be at Karen's house. *Uncle Dynamite* was to be the topic, and rumor had it that the browsing and sluicing would include dynamite rolls and our signature cocktail, Zizzbaums—the secret ingredient of which may (or may not) be trinitrotoluol.

We were to meet again on June 9; our scheduled reading was the traditional "The Rise of Minna Nordstrom" (in which the Colossal-Exquisite, the Perfecto-Fishbein, and the Zizzbaum-Celluloid are merged to form our namesake Perfecto-Zizzbaum Corporation through the Napoleonic efforts of the immortal Jacob Z. Schnellenhamer). If I have my facts correct, this is our thirteenth anniversary. (Although there has been a Los Angeles Chapter from TWS's earliest days—formed by William Welmers and Jeremy Thompson in 1981—which lasted until 1993, when its members worked with the Blandings Castle Chapter in San Francisco to host that year's convention. It went dormant for many years until its current incarnation.)

We meet the second Sunday of each month at 12:30 PM. You will generally find us at Book Alley, 1252 East Colorado Blvd, Pasadena, CA, <http://www.bookalley.com/shop/bookalley/index.html>. Please contact Karen Shotting or join our Yahoo! or Facebook Group at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/PZMPCo/> and <https://www.facebook.com/groups/373160529399825/>, respectively,

(either can be found by searching for "PZMPCo") for more information on upcoming readings and occasional changes of schedule and venue.

The Pickering Motor Company

(Detroit and vicinity)

Contact: Elliott Milstein

Phone:

E-mail:



THE PICKERINGS gathered on February 22 at David and Luann Warren's house for a convivial meeting. The book was *Ice in the Bedroom*. Members were also asked to read two Freddie Widgeon stories of their choice so they would be fully familiar with the main character before coming to the novel. Elliott said two would do. Dicron read all of them.

David and Luann's daughter Emily prepared a delicious Hungarian goulash. The inspiration for this came from chapter 19 of *Ice in the Bedroom*, where Wodehouse says that this is a dish to be avoided. Emily's goulash was delicious. If Wodehouse had been there to taste it, he would have changed his mind.

Luann said she vaguely remembered reading *Ice in the Bedroom* earlier and then remembered that she had, only at the time it was called *Sam the Sudden*. Are they really the same book? A spirited discussion on this topic ensued. We then discussed Leila Yorke and compared her to other female bilge novelists who appear in Wodehouse. La Yorke is unique in that she is the only female bilge novelist who admits that her novels are bilge. Rosie M. Banks would never say that about her books.

David Warren was fascinated by Freddie's desire to go to Kenya to grow coffee. *Ice in the Bedroom* was published in 1961, a time when the political situation in Kenya was rather violent and unstable. Another example of Wodehouse simply ignoring politics, or some subtle comment on Freddie's character?

Luann had compiled a quiz on the assigned reading. It was fiendishly difficult, but we passed. We hoped she would create another for our meeting on April 28, 2013, for which the book of choice was *Company for Henry*, aka *The Purloined Paperweight*.

April 28 dawned cold and rainy, but it did not lower the spirits of the Pickerings as they gathered at Dicron and Sue Mahakian's house for a lovely brunch. Although only a few had read *Company for Henry*, we were all impressed that Sue had almost completed the book and, even more, that she planned to finish it in due course. While we did discuss the characters, the plot, and the mots justes, most of the discussion centered on the rare

edition that Mike Smith had procured: the Paperweight Press edition. Although this edition does appear in McIlvaine, Elliott was completely unaware of it and, after carefully pocketing the book, waxed eloquent on the joys of finding new items for his collection.

The interesting thing about the Paperweight Press is that it is a printing house dedicated entirely to printing books about paperweights, and *The Purloined Paperweight* was, as far as we can determine, the only piece of fiction they have published. We are much indebted to the book's publisher, Lawrence H. Selman, for his introduction, wherein he explains that J. Wendell Stickney could not have collected seventeenth-century French paperweights because the French only began making paperweights in the eighteenth century.

LuAnn once again tried to weasel out of being Pickering President for Life, but we would have none of it. The Pickerings worship her with a doglike devotion. Her calm leadership, her regular reminders, and her lovely agendae will keep her in power even after she hands in her dinner pail, long may we await that day.

We planned to meet again on June 14 at the Smiths' house. The book is *Blandings Castle and Elsewhere*, but one only need read one of the short stories to be allowed admittance.

The Pittsburgh Millionaires Club
(Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania)



E-mail:

The Portland Greater Wodehouse Society (PGWs)
(Portland, Oregon and vicinity)

Contact: Carol James

Phone:

E-mail:



The Right Honourable Knights of Sir Philip Sidney
(Amsterdam, The Netherlands)

Contact: Jelle Otten

Phone:

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ON FEBRUARY 16, the Right Honourable Knights were straining at the leash to meet each other again in Mulliner's Wijnlokaal in downtown Amsterdam for an expectedly hilarious Wodehousian gathering. The meeting started with a toast to our great Master on the 38th anniversary of his entering into Eternal Blandings.

Our president, Peter Nieuwenhuizen, informed us that he had received a greeting card, sent by Her Royal Highness Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall, which was accompanied by a picture of Prince Charles and the Duchess, and by an expression of thanks for sending to HRH several Dutch translations of Wodehouse books. It is a matter of course that all the Knights were impressed by these gestures of appreciation by such a high-ranking person. Herman van Riel announced the issue of a third postage stamp with a portrait of Wodehouse on it. We're very happy that the Dutch PostNL is willing to honor Plum on its stamps.



Season's Greetings from the Duchess of Cornwall!

John Kroes read his favorite excerpt from the works of Wodehouse. His choice was a chapter from *Stiff Upper Lip, Jeeves*. The reading was followed by a pleasant and instructive discussion about the new BBC TV series *Blandings*. Not everyone was charmed by that show. Some felt that it was not cricket that the Empress of Blandings was pink, but Vikas Sonak pointed out that the series could attract a new group of readers to the books of Wodehouse. A committee under the chairmanship of Robert Reinders Folmer will investigate the subject.

As well as the annual cock-and-bull stories contest, there was another special contest. The assignment was to write a Dutch translation of the lyric "Bill."

The best cock-and-bull story was told by Peter Nieuwenhuizen. He contended that the famous mug filled with water that Sir Philip Sidney refused to take while saying the words "Thy need is much greater than mine" eventually became a monstrance, which was kept in the Roman Catholic museum Catharijne Convent in Utrecht, The Netherlands. This monstrance, valued

at US\$380, was recently stolen. Peter continued his winning tale with humorous fabrications of the impact that the loss of the monstrance had on those in charge.

The special translation contest was won by Jelle Caro. He translated “Bill” into a song of praise to our next king, William-Alexander, and queen, Máxima. The most hilarious translation was that by translate.google.com; check it out! Hors concours Leonard Beuger and his daughter, famous actress Elisa Beuger, performed “Bill” in Dutch, in their own way.



Elisa and Leonard Beuger performing “Bill”

The next meeting of the Hon. Knights was to occur on June 8 in Mulliner’s Wijnlokaal, Lijnbaansgracht 266-267, Amsterdam. Weather permitting, we planned some outdoor Wodehousian sports on the wharf of Lijnbaansgracht, which is one of the canals in downtown Amsterdam. Our autumn meeting will be on October 12, at 1 PM.

The Size 14 Hat Club
(Halifax, Nova Scotia)
Contact: Jill Robinson
E-mail:



Lucian Endicott

LONGTIME TWS MEMBER Lucian Endicott passed away on May 3, according to his son Hamlin. Lucian lived in Colorado Springs. He loved PGWnet and was an active participant in that e-mail forum.

A Few Quick Ones

In the October 30, 2012, *Sunday Times* (London), Roland White summarized his interview with the creator of the Wallace and Gromit cartoon characters in the article “A Bid for Creature Comforts.” He noted that someone once remarked: “Wallace and Gromit have more than a touch of Jeeves and Wooster. One of them knows he’s in charge; the other just thinks he is.”

“How to Beat Baggage Charges: Bring Jeeves” was the title of the article in the November 3, 2012, *Daily Telegraph*. With examples that demonstrated the exorbitant cost of checking your bags from London to distant destinations, David Millward (Transport Editor) showed how it is often better to bring your personal human valet along, allowing him or her to check that other bag at first-bag rates.

The August 6, 2012, *New York Times* printed an article about the passing of author Alexander Cockburn. Of note is columnist Geoffrey Wheatcroft’s comment that “Cockburn could deftly quote Marx and Wodehouse in the same sentence.” We assume he meant Karl Marx, though we can envision other alternatives.

In an article from the October 3, 2012, *Country Life* entitled “Where Wooster Went Clubbing,” Roderick Easdale (author of *The Novel Life of P. G. Wodehouse*) mentions Wodehouse’s membership in the Constitutional Club and how Wodehouse used the real-life clubs Buck’s and the Bachelors in his works, and ends with an anecdote from the real Pelican Club on which Mustard Pott’s Clothes Stakes (*Uncle Fred in the Springtime*) is based.

The real event involved a fellow named Joe Scott, who made book on what would be the first hat to come through the door of the American Bar of the Criterion after 7 PM on a certain day. Odds included a “top hat at 11–10, a bowler at 6–4, and 9–4 on an opera hat.” In the end, a Sikh waiter, who “had almost certainly been bribed by Scott,” entered wearing a turban. Scott leapt to his feet and declared, “Twenty-eight and a half quid in the book and not a penny laid on it!”

Columnist Andrew Brown compared Raymond Chandler’s similes to “that other Dulwich old boy, P. G. Wodehouse,” when he quoted from Chandler’s *Farewell, My Lovely* in the July 19, 2012, *Daily Telegraph*: “[Moose Malloy] looked about as inconspicuous as a tarantula on a slice of angel food.”

An American's Take on *Blandings*

BY BRIAN TAVES

NEVER BEFORE has a Wodehouse screen adaptation been so thoroughly excoriated as the episodes of the television series *Blandings*, broadcast in the U.K. on BBC One from January 13 to February 17, 2013. The reaction seemed to me especially surprising given the relative quiescence with which the last Wodehouse outing was received, the 2005 movie *Piccadilly Jim*. Admittedly, this may have been because so few people actually saw *Piccadilly Jim*; it sank into oblivion after a few festival showings, before direct-to-video and cable premiere.

Piccadilly Jim was released just at the moment when I was finishing my book *P. G. Wodehouse and Hollywood: Screenwriting, Satires, and Adaptation*, compelling me to end the volume by wondering about the future of adapting the author to the screen. In the wake of the well-produced and skillfully cast television adaptations of *Jeeves and Wooster* and *Heavy Weather*, *Piccadilly Jim* was a misfire because it was placed in the hands of a director who sought to subvert Wodehouse norms in favor of a modernist sensibility. (The opening shot is of an automobile up a tree, followed by the hero in bed with three floozies.)

I suggested in my book that a successful return to Wodehouse on screen would be through television, with its option of varied running times—typically a half-hour or hour time slot—while a movie must be at least an hour and a half in duration. The half-hour has, in the past, proven ideal for retelling Wodehouse short stories in such series as *Wodehouse Playhouse*. Moreover, television may target a narrower, older audience than a movie, which aims at a wide swath of theatergoers, most of whom are young. On that basis alone, *Blandings* seemed to offer potential, telling short stories in a half-hour television form, and returning to the general period of time in which Wodehouse stories were set.

Previously, the *Blandings* stories have been adapted not only for the British movie and television screen, but also in Sweden, Germany, and India, and this was the eleventh such adaptation or series. Issues of running time are essential to establishing a series and allowing it to continue. A 1995 BBC telefilm of *Heavy Weather* clocked in at 95 minutes and was clearly made on a much bigger budget than *Blandings*, with a cast headlined by Peter O'Toole as Emsworth and Richard

Briers as his brother Galahad. I suspect that, as much as further telefilms set at *Blandings* Castle and using the *Heavy Weather* cast were intended, having such a stellar cast made it simply too expensive to continue, barring truly stupendous ratings. By the same token, in formulating *Jeeves and Wooster* in a fifty-minute time slot, often multiple short stories were combined, or a single novel was condensed to a single episode.

Shortly after its British premiere, *Blandings* became available on YouTube, long before any American broadcast and just in advance of the British DVD release. I will admit that, given the reviews and Facebook posts I'd read, I went in with low expectations. Plus, *Piccadilly Jim* had plumbed a depth from which the only direction was up. I also came to *Blandings* with a film studies training, and I'd traveled to archives in England and America to see every extant Wodehouse film or television show for my book. Whatever the reason, or combination thereof, my reaction was against the grain: I thoroughly enjoyed *Blandings*.

If the goal of a comedy is to make the viewer laugh out loud, then *Blandings*, under Paul Seed's direction, succeeded in a way that no Wodehouse television has since the 1970s and *Wodehouse Playhouse*. That is not to slight *Jeeves and Wooster* in any way, but that program had a subtler, quieter tone based on wit; it left me smiling, or chuckling. In having to shift the source's first-person narration to the third person, *Jeeves and Wooster* also inherently lost a share of the original's delight.

Given the likely financial limitations and the thirty-minute running time per episode, *Blandings* has used those constraints to its benefit. The first five episodes were from short stories or novelettes ("Pig-Hoo-o-o-ey," "The Go-Getter," "Company for Gertrude," "The Crime Wave at Blandings," "Lord Emsworth and the Girl Friend"), and only the last episode, "Problems with Drink," drew not on a short work but a plot strand from the novel *Galahad at Blandings*. The result was the least cohesive or amusing episode, suggesting that *Blandings* episodes may be considerably less successful when not based on a short story, and the majority of these have already been dramatized in the series thus far.

Although scriptwriter Guy Andrews's description of the *Blandings* home as "dysfunction junction" on the internet movie database (imdb.com) drew criticism, I find no flaw. *Blandings* certainly utilizes more slapstick than *Jeeves and Wooster*, becoming sometimes coarser. *Blandings* could well have opted to set itself in a more modern time or to follow the lead of *Piccadilly Jim* in mixing "then and now" motifs in an attempt at something hip or experimental. Instead, *Blandings*

has preserved the vaguely period flavor of the stories without attempting a specific moment, capturing an eternal never-never land before the encroachment of modernity. The creators of *Blandings* approximate the original and follow the Wodehouse creation by recognizing that its world is at heart a fairy tale peopled by eccentrics beyond even those that Jeeves encountered. By contrast, for all its quality filmmaking, *Heavy Weather* was more in a musical-comedy vein, failing to capture the imaginary aspect of *Blandings*, and such scenes as the lovers' tiffs veered straight into drama. Also by contrast, *Leave It to Me*, the 1932 movie version of the play from the novel *Leave It to Psmith*, indulges in Marx Brothers-style zaniness.

The cast of *Blandings* is sterling, especially Timothy Spall as Emsworth. He is trying to evade the world, to perform the "Wodehouse glide" (by which the author was known to stealthily vanish from his wife's social gatherings). Fortunately, at the same time, while he is attempting to avoid what is clearly a lifetime of being ordered about by his sister, he does not perch precariously on the fine line between absent-mindedness and feeble-mindedness that marked Peter O'Toole's otherwise masterful portrayal in *Heavy Weather*. Spall skillfully suggests a complex man, slightly vague and daffy, yet also wearing a mask, eluding the annoying parts of the world, while O'Toole etched an Emsworth who was thoroughly balmy. Only the 1956 British television show "Lord Emsworth and the Little Friend," with John Miller as Emsworth, allows a point of comparison and captures the combination of somewhat contradictory traits that Spall embodies. Other portrayals are lost today, most notably Ralph Richardson's in a 1967 *Blandings* series for *The World of Wodehouse* (wiped in an egregious BBC display of short-term thinking).

In *Blandings*, Jack Farthing's Freddie Threepwood endears himself as a perfect example of the most useless manifestation of the upper class. Impeccably foolish and impractical, he commences every episode smashing an automobile into a tree, in what becomes a standard, repeated joke of the same type as the opening of Fibber McGee's closet on radio. So, too, Freddie's slicked-down hair, rising at certain moments of embarrassment (thanks to wires, no doubt), becomes a trademark. Yet there is also warmth: No less than Bertie Wooster, Freddie (present more in the shows than the stories) is always ready to lend what help he can, as negligible as it may be. Enriching the characterizations of both Freddie and Emsworth is a vivid father-son relationship that a lesser production might have neglected. Both men have a gentleness and a sweetness (especially with the fairer

sex) quite distinct from Connie's manners. This trait was especially evident in the charming interaction with the schoolchildren out from London in the episode "Lord Emsworth and the Girl Friend," captured just as successfully as in "Lord Emsworth and the Little Friend," the single BBC half-hour show. Indeed, whether in this episode or in Emsworth's clear preference for worn-out clothes, there is a quiet awareness of the issues of class that are found in so many Wodehouse stories, and usually overlooked by an adaptation.

Almost as masterful as Spall is Jennifer Saunders as Lady Constance, Emsworth's domineering sister and the bane of his existence as well as Freddie's. She threatens, in another humorous motif, to withdraw to her room—for Emsworth and Freddie, a consummation devoutly to be wished. She is rather harsher than Judy Parfitt in *Heavy Weather* or Joan Sanderson in "Lord Emsworth and the Little Friend," but Saunders is no less valid in her approach.

Mark Williams as Beach the butler was amusingly opinionated and unlike expectations. The pigmen (and pigwomen) and such adversaries as Sir Gregory Parsloe-Parsloe (Robert Bathurst) were no less a delight. Only Baxter seemed in a different key to me, arriving leather-clad on a motorcycle and with a slightly effeminate mannerism.

Some of the critiques have stemmed from divergences—Emsworth is described as tall and thin by Wodehouse. Certainly this fit O'Toole, while Spall is the physical opposite. However, I would suggest that such a resemblance is less important than the actor's ability to inhabit the role. In his gestures, gait, and movements, Spall's Emsworth perfectly inhabits the timidity and nature of Wodehouse's creation. Inevitably, any visualization and personification can never be quite what was in our mind's eye or as the author described. Actors are cast largely because of a "name" for the credits, to attract an audience. Hopefully, they also have an aptitude for the role; physicality is always a secondary concern.

By the same token, on porcine nuances I side with the filmmakers. For the Empress, a pig was found of extraordinary ugliness, a porcine version of a pug dog—supremely adorable and photogenic. Moreover, the screen deals in shorthand and symbols, so naturally the Empress must be pink while Parsloe's competitor is black—no less than a western has the heroes in white hats and the villains in black hats.

Criticisms of *Blandings* need to take into account that an adaptation, especially as part of a series, is not a filming of a story or "getting it right." An adaptation uses its source as a springboard for the creation of a

new work, in another medium, which may have various degrees of fidelity to the original. Hopefully, it will do so in a manner close to or in the spirit of the source. In this, *Blandings* is an achievement, and by the same token *Piccadilly Jim* was an abject failure, so distant from the novel as to be all but unrecognizable.

I do believe *Blandings* comes as close to Wodehouse as we can reasonably expect today. Television versions of literature have to reach beyond admirers of the source to a wide audience who partake of comedy and enjoy performers in certain roles. While *Piccadilly Jim* was such a critical and commercial disaster that it threatened to keep the author off the screen for years, *Blandings* has brought Wodehouse back to television, in the pattern of *Wodehouse Playhouse* and *Jeeves and Wooster*—no small achievement. And in diverging from *Leave It to Me*, “Lord Emsworth and the Little Friend,” and *Heavy Weather*, *Blandings* has created its own, fresh interpretation while equaling the standard of its predecessors.

Letter from England

BY ELIN WOODGER

SPRING HAS finally shown its face over here and, though weeks late, has been good for the soul, especially after a long, cold, and gloomy winter. Unfortunately, it was made more gloomy by the passing of Richard Briers, the U.K. Society’s beloved president.

For those unfamiliar with Richard, he was an extraordinarily talented and popular actor, one of England’s national treasures. He was perhaps best known for playing Tom Good in the comedy series *The Good Life* (aired in the U.S. as *Good Neighbors*), but his repertoire encompassed a wide variety of parts on stage and screen. As noted in the last issue of *Plum Lines*, he had portrayed several Wodehousean characters on film, radio, and television, perhaps most notably Galahad Threepwood (to Peter O’Toole’s Clarence) in the 1995 BBC TV movie *Heavy Weather*. He subsequently appeared as Gally on the cover of the paperback edition of *The Reminiscences of the Hon. Galahad Threepwood* (edited by some bloke called N. T. P. Murphy).

I had the pleasure of meeting Richard on a number of occasions, and I was always taken by his warmth, charm, and sense of humor. A man of many funny stories himself, he was a huge admirer of Wodehouse and a wonderful president for the Society, always ready to do whatever was asked of him. (See Hilary Bruce’s tribute at <http://tinyurl.com/kgtdld8>.) His generosity

extended to the American society as well. For the 2007 Providence convention, he signed a copy of the *Reminiscences*, which was raffled off. When Norman decided to donate a copy to the upcoming convention in Chicago, I called Richard to ask if he would once again sign the book. “Absolutely delighted!” he replied. We chatted, and he made a passing reference to his recently diagnosed emphysema. Whether he had any idea how close to the end he was, I don’t know. Certainly, like the rest of the country, I was stunned when I heard the news that he had died on February 17. The very next day, the signed book arrived back in the post, with a lovely note from Richard enclosed. The fact that one of his last acts had been to so graciously comply with my request tempted me to keep the book. But it will be in Chicago in October, to be auctioned off to raise money for our Convention Fund. Thank you, Richard.

The sadness of losing Richard was somewhat alleviated by a rather special visit that Norman and I made late in February to a woman whose father had been interned with Wodehouse at Tost. This is reported on page 1.

On March 26, the television station BBC4 aired *Wodehouse in Exile*, a dramatization of the Berlin broadcasts starring Tim Pigott-Smith as P. G. Wodehouse and Zoë Wanamaker as Ethel. The program was very well done indeed, presenting a balanced view of the events preceding the broadcasts and the subsequent reaction to them, as well as Major Cussen’s investigation. It posited that a fellow internee, released at the same time as Wodehouse and one of those who persuaded him to do the talks, was actually a German double agent, and it was for this reason that Cussen’s report, which cleared PGW of any wrongdoing, was suppressed for so many years. This was an excellent drama, well written (by Nigel Williams) and acted, and if it makes it to the U.S. and Canada, I recommend you watch it.

Finally, as you know, Norman has been conducting Wodehouse Walks for many years—33, in fact. Since the U.K. Society was founded in 1997, except for a brief period of rest, he has done three official walks a year, all for free. He has now decided, with my heartfelt approval, that the time has come for him to step down for good; therefore, his final official walks will be on July 13 and September 14. (Book now if you’re going to be in London then.) This doesn’t mean he won’t continue to do the occasional one-off walks for visiting Wodehouseans; he’s a soft touch, is my Norman. But after 2013, they will be few and far between. Well, the man has just turned 80 this year, after all—it’s about time he slowed down, what?

The Tie That Binds: Class Distinction and Erosion Thereof

BY JILL COOPER-ROBINSON

Here's Part 2 of Jill's study of the Threepwood/Wooster family connections. Part 1, in the Spring 2013 Plum Lines, described obvious and potential binding ties. Here, Jill examines how these relationships were affected by societal changes in the first half of the twentieth century.

TOUCHING ON Gally, here's where things get interesting. All else in this snake pit of genetics pales before the possibility that Galahad, bachelor brother to twelve truly troublesome siblings (including the dead ones), is actually the father of Sue Brown, singer/dancer and all-around sweet girl. This is the same Sue Brown who is soon to be the wife of Gally's nephew Ronnie Fish.²⁵ Unlike Bertie, who merely likes the notion of women, Galahad himself is a true romantic, the survivor of many affairs, who tragically has never married because his only true love was Dolly Henderson, a serio in the 1890s. The relationship resulted in his exile to South Africa in 1898.

Dolly was married off to Jack Cotterleigh, but let's hypothesize that she was with Gally's child, who grows up to be Sue Brown. It certainly would explain a lot about Galahad's seriously protective attitude toward Sue B. It also explains Clarence's kind and generous tolerance for Sue, when young, single females normally terrify him and he heads for his Whiffle. But he loves and needs Galahad and is unquestionably familiar with the old tragedy, so he rises above his fears to be kind to her and even stands up to Connie on Sue's behalf. This liaison between Ronnie and Sue comes as a happy denouement for Gally. In thinly veiled references, Wodehouse leads us to believe that Gally himself suspects the truth.

Having met Sue as a prospective family member, he takes an interest in her that could be called fatherly. He then makes the supreme sacrifice for this possible daughter's happiness: he sacrifices the book deal to publish his memoirs, those memoirs being his ultimate trump card over Connie.

From the point of view of family lineage, Sue Brown could be marrying her own first cousin. That's not generally recommended and especially risky here given the already murky gene pool from which both have sprung. On the other hand, Gally reminds us there was always some question of Ronnie's legitimacy. J. H. C. Morris, in *Thank You, Wodehouse*, thinks not, but blood will tell.

This topic of showgirls (like Dolly) provides a nice segue out of blue blood and into blue collar and the mixing of the same precipitated by World War I.

At the same time, the loss of the Empire, a generation, and landed money helped bring about the collapse of serious class distinctions (so well demonstrated by the television show *Downton Abbey*). To really get some indication of the displacement of accepted roles and status at the time, I can do no better than recommend that we go straight to our primary source. In Wodehouse's "Indian Summer of an Uncle," Jeeves and Bertie are trading thoughts about the intention of Bertie's uncle George—Lord Yaxley—to marry Rhoda Platt. Bertie observes:

"I gather she is not of the noblesse?"

"No sir," says Jeeves, "She is a waitress at his lordship's club."

"My God, the proletariat!"

"The lower middle classes, sir."

However, at the end of the story, when Jeeves has fixed it so that George will not marry Rhoda Platt but in fact will marry a Mrs. Wilberforce, Jeeves and Bertie have another exchange:

"But Jeeves, she is, as you remarked not long ago, definitely of the people."

He looked at me in a reproachful sort of way.

"Sturdy lower middle class stock, sir."

There you have it, two words: *reproachful* denoting Jeeves's already adjusted attitude, and *sturdy* surely stating a positive trait. And all this spin to cover the social earthquake that was wiping out one thousand years of custom. Jeeves with his mighty intellect was evolving first. See *The Return of Jeeves* for further proof: In that story, he has expanded his domestic ability to manipulate the outside and much riskier world of the Silver Ring Bookie (in a household by the way, related to Hugo Carmody—nephew by marriage to Emsworth and thus yet another Threepwood/Wooster tie). Jeeves has sent Bertie off to blue-collar boot camp against the day when each will have to take care of himself.

In "Indian Summer of an Uncle," Bertie remains not quite convinced regarding Lord Yaxley's new wife: "I'm not sure [that I] can see eye to eye with you." But he will get used to it because the conjoining of these two blues, blood and collar, is the norm from now on.

So, too, will be the novelty of work that is beyond editing weeklies for Stinker Pyke (Lord Tilbury) or

doing a stint as secretary to Lord Emsworth. Prudence Garland, for instance, daughter of Lady Dora (née Threepwood), marries Bill Lister, product of a sporting journalist and a sideshow strong woman. Furthermore, Jeeves's niece Mabel is affianced to Biffy Biffen, one of Bertie's best friends, about whom Bertie says, "Compared to Biffy I am one of the great thinkers of all times." Not surprisingly, Biffy doesn't work, but I'll bet Mabel was used to it and could if she had to. Clarence's niece by his deceased sister Jane marries Jimmy Belford, and though we're not entirely sure of his profession, at least he's a fine hog caller.²⁶

It can't have been so bad when American money was the occasion for class crossing. After all, most Americans who came to England had to be rich, and as has been observed elsewhere, one can never be too rich. This is a sentiment with which Connie herself would not argue, and to prove it she marries in succession not one but two American tycoons. Thus, for Emsworth's backup heir—Freddie—to marry a Donaldson, even should Donaldson père be NQOCD²⁷ due to selling dog biscuits, well, all that money sort of smoothes out the rough edges. One simply grits one's teeth and thinks of England.

It is quite another thing when these Americans with their casual regard for class complicate things in a way even big money cannot fix. It is just too bad that in-law Aggie Donaldson has to be a "sort of cousin" to Angus McAllister, Lord Emsworth's head gardener.²⁸

Even worse is the revelation that Gregory Parsloe-Parsloe is to marry Maudie Stubbs.²⁹ There is little solace for Connie in the fact Clarence himself has escaped marrying Maudie. His letter of proposal was never delivered and thus was never seen and thus was too late to have been accepted. It is worse because Maudie Stubbs is her butler Beach's niece. This would seem to be a dilemma even beyond repair by the skill of Claude Pott, that one-man Ways and Means Committee. When Fred or Gally are out of their league in the deep and foreign waters of serious blue collar, they call in Claude "Mustard" Pott. His daughter, Polly, is engaged to Alaric "Ricky" Gilpin,³⁰ and, since this engagement is never cancelled, presumably Polly does eventually marry this other Duke of Dunstable nephew.

In addition to his other talents, Claude Pott is an accomplished fleece artist. Just ask Lord Bosham. Happily there is some justice here. The only man ever to best Pott was the Duke himself, and no man ever deserved a Pott like that other money-grubbing turkey, the Duke. If Pott marries into the Dunstable line then by default he is now kissin' cousins with all his old street buddies (Galahad, Ickenham, et al). Enough said.

Let us pause for a moment and consider some of the irritating consequences of all this crossbreeding, whatever hybrid vigor it may eventually impart to the progeny. A hostess who has spent a lifetime obeying and endorsing the rules of social intercourse knows that the laws dictate that occasionally Lord Emsworth, accompanied by his lifetime penance and chatelaine sister, must eventually dine with this newly extended family and also now and again their neighbors the Parsloes. Or at least she must have them to tea. Constance can't turn them away should any of them make the grave faux pas of "dropping in." Anxious as she has always been to remain friendly with the Duke of Dunstable, how could she now turn her back on Dunstable's new in-law, Mustard Pott? Does this mean the combative McAllister and Maudie the barmaid must be admitted to the drawing room, or can she get away with merely receiving them in the morning room? For heaven's sake, who will serve if Beach must be a guest, now that his niece is Parsloe's wife? And think about the reprobate friends of Gally like Plug Basham, who can now claim legitimate ties to Connie Threepwood! Problems arise.

I admit this book of revelations is not exhaustive. How might Ukridge have a place—possibly through his terrifying Aunt Julia? It is worth noting here that Oakshott, butler to Bertie's Uncle Willoughby, could possibly be the same Oakshott who later butties for Aunt Julia. Close but, I think, no cigar.

What about all those Mulliners? I find only one association: Lady Wickham, Roberta's mother, who is cousin to Mr. Mulliner. And the closest I can come to including Esmond Haddock is the well-known fact that Jeeves's uncle Silversmith is their butler. That's not good enough. Nor is it good enough that Catsmeat Potter-Pirbright's sister Cora is married to Esmond Haddock or that Dame Daphne Winkworth once wanted to marry Clarence.

What about Bingo? Is he somehow related to the cast via his Uncle Mortimer, or only connected via the theft by Bingo's wife Rosie of Dahlia's chef Anatole? And what are the goods on Ickenham's redoubtable wife Jane? I am relieved if they all have dodged the Roderick Spode bullet, but I would like to know for sure. And so on.

I contend there are few contradictions in Wodehouse. Furthermore I contend that perfection of structure is there, like perfection of execution, if one only searches hard enough. Possibly the teeth of my comb weren't quite fine enough. Happily, then, I pass the torch to the next investigative reporter and to those who would join this debate.

References

- ²⁵Many, including *Summer Lightning, Heavy Weather*
²⁶“Pig-Hoo-o-o-o-ey!”
²⁷“Not Quite Our Class, Dear” from Nancy Mitford’s
1955 essay “The English Aristocracy”
²⁸“The Custody of the Pumpkin”
²⁹*Pigs Have Wings*
³⁰*Uncle Fred in the Springtime*

Neil Midkiff responds: *While I’ve greatly enjoyed most of Jill’s explorations into the family trees of the Wodehouse characters, I think she overreaches by suggesting that Wodehouse would have wanted us to think of Galahad as Sue Brown’s father. She fails to mention that Gally specifically denies it to Lady Julia in chapter 10 of Heavy Weather, and that even Lady Constance—no apologist for her brother—doesn’t believe it to be true (chapter 6). Galahad tells us that he was in South Africa when Dolly married Jack Cotterleigh, and certainly the Victorians knew how to count up to nine months, so if he adduces this as proof, then that settles the matter for me. Besides, I find Gally’s behavior far more touching once we learn that he is a sentimental “what-might-have-been” father figure to Sue. It reminds me of Wodehouse’s own paternal love for Leonora despite not being her biological father. From this perspective, it’s clear to me why the Galahad-Sue relationship is so strongly and memorably portrayed.*



A Response from Paul Abrinko

DR. PAUL ABRINKO’S article in the 2012 Winter issue of *Plum Lines* (“The Psychology of the Individual Child”) stimulated some comments from Nick Townend that were published in the 2013 Spring issue. Here is Paul’s reply to Nick:

I am very pleased that my article has generated so much thought and comment from Mr. Townend. While I don’t have space to address every objection he has raised, I want first to emphasize that my ideas are pure speculation, written from the perspective of a child psychiatrist after having thought about how

childhood experiences such as Plum’s might have affected him and influenced the way he wrote about children. Second, even though Wodehouse, being the great writer that he was, was able to characterize children in different ways for different literary effects, it does not necessarily follow that because he did so his literary depictions of children can only be construed as devices for comic relief, completely devoid of psychological significance and free from the influences of his own childhood.

My fondest wish is for my ideas to help all who love Plum’s writing as much as I to develop an even deeper appreciation for his work and understand some of the underpinnings of its brilliance.

Terry Kitchen Cooks Up Another Convention Gig!

THOSE OF YOU who have attended TWS conventions over the last couple of millennia know that one of the special treats is a performance at a neighborhood club or coffee shop by Terry Kitchen (aka Max Pokrivchak). Terry is a TWS member, NEWTS chapter member, and highly respected folk-music composer and musician. These performances are typically held on the Thursday night leading into the convention weekend. Terry has recorded several CDs of his thoughtful and humorous original music. You can find out all the details and order CDs through his website at www.terrykitchen.com.

This year, our luck continues! While some of the great Chicago folk venues (The Uncommon Ground, the Old Town School of Folk Music, etc.) are too distant from the convention site at the Union League Club of Chicago, Terry’s looking at the Loose Leaf Lounge (a tea room, www.looseleaflounge.com) that might be proximate enough to work.

Details are not final, and the venue may change. Final details will be provided in the September issue of *Plum Lines*. But if you’re still making your travel plans, make sure to arrive early enough to stop by.

One unpredictable element of Terry’s convention shows is that yours truly, the Apprentice Oldest Member, sometimes plays a couple of tunes during Terry’s show. In case this does occur, we will have sufficient bouncers available to prevent any rushing of the stage by large numbers of girls, teenage through octogenarian.

Convention Entertainment

THE CHICAGO Accident Syndicate tells us that there will be some very special entertainment after the Saturday evening banquet at the upcoming Chicago convention of The Wodehouse Society. It will begin with a few Wodehousian songs from Maria Jette, who was the toast of both St. Paul and Dearborn. Maria and pianist Dan Chouinard have produced a second Wodehouse CD, devoted to the Kern/Princess Theatre repertoire, which will be available for purchase during the weekend.

We'll then have the costume awards, silent auctions, etc. Finally, because one of our speakers is an expert on jazz, we can expect some terrific dance music of the times. It will take on a distinctly British flavor, just as Plum would have heard it. Whether you listen or dance, it should be a very enjoyable conclusion to the evening.

For the twentieth time I wished that old Tuppy, a man of sterling qualities in every other respect, had had a slightly bigger head. . . . I don't know if you've ever noticed that Tuppy's head goes up to sort of a point. Mine, on the other hand, is shaped more like a mangel-wurzel, and this made the whole thing rather complex and unpleasant.

"A Bit of Luck for Mabel" (1940)

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We appreciate your articles, research, Quick Ones, My First Time tales, and other observations. Send them to Gary Hall via e-mail or snail mail at the addresses above. Deadlines are February 1, May 1, August 1, November 1. If you have something that might miss the deadline, let me know and we'll work something out.

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