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Wodehouse and the Girl Friends

BY NORMAN MURPHY

At the October convention, Norman educated us about Plum's friendships with females. Since we were assured earlier that day by Dr. Chris Dueker that Wodehouse was properly healthy as a young man, it was good to hear of Plum's platonic and romantic relationships.

YOU WILL NOTICE that I say Wodehouse and the Girl Friends, not Wodehouse and the Girlfriends, because there are two categories. There were girls he was friends with—girl friends—and there were girls with whom he wanted to be more than friends—girlfriends.

Let's remember how boys like Wodehouse were brought up. We have all heard of Victorian values, which reached their apogee around the time Wodehouse was born. Sex was something you simply didn't talk about. Remember also that Wodehouse saw very little of his parents during his childhood. He never developed a normal relationship with his mother, he had no sisters, and his happiest times were at Dulwich, which reinforced the male-female separation.

Until he left Dulwich, Wodehouse's knowledge of girls was limited to the daughters of the aunts and uncles with whom he spent his school holidays. Our understanding of his social life becomes clearer in May 1902, when, while still working at the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank, he began writing a commonplace book that he called *Phrases & Notes*. Two of the three notebooks are full of one-line jokes, ideas for stories, and notes of conversations he had heard. These range from the remarks of an Italian prince at a smart dinner party to noting how a little Cockney girl talks to her sister.

We all know "Lord Emsworth and the Girl Friend," but how many of us have read the five Joan Romney stories, which came out in magazines from 1905 to 1909 and are narrated by a seventeen-year-old girl? Now, that is quite an achievement by a young man with no sisters of his own. Wodehouse did not write those from his imagination, and it needs little effort to trace them back to Joan, Effie, and Teenie Bowes-Lyon, the three daughters of Mrs. Bowes-Lyon of Ovington Square, Kensington, London. Mrs. Bowes-Lyon was the sister of Mrs. Corbett of Stableford Hall, Shropshire, the big house in the valley behind The Old House, Stableford, where the Wodehouses lived until 1902. That is where Wodehouse first met the Bowes-Lyon girls around 1899, when Joan was eleven, Effie was ten, and



Music hall artiste Daisy Wood was the youngest sister of Marie Lloyd, the Queen of the Music Halls. Was she also one of Wodehouse's girlfriends and the model for Dolly Henderson?

Teenie was eight years old. And the first story of the seventeen-year-old Joan Romney came out in 1905, when Joan Bowes-Lyon was indeed seventeen years old.

Wodehouse began at the bank in London in 1900 and saw the Bowes-Lyon girls constantly over the next several years, joining them for Sunday lunch or tea in the nursery and recording dozens of their frank and artless remarks. In one note, Effie, then age thirteen, solemnly advises him: "Marry a plain girl, because they are always the nicest. In her experience, pretty girls are never nice."

Another note reads: "Effie says she would marry a rich man, however much of a beast he was, simply to get a horse."

The youngest, Teenie, reveals her ambition when she says, "I've got £25 in the bank. When I come of age, I'm going to buy a hat!"

Wodehouse also notes how the girls are growing up when he reports that the eldest girl, Joan, "has bought a pair of opera glasses so she can watch out for the Guards officer coming out from his house across the square every morning." I believe he came to regard them as the sisters he never had and that is why his first book, *The Pothunters* (1902), is dedicated to them.

The Bowes-Lyonses were probably the girls Wodehouse knew best, but he also noted conversations with his cousins, the Thompson girls, and with the Deane sisters. The Thompson cousins were the sisters of Malcolm Thompson, who was at Winchester College and told Wodehouse of the tall, languid schoolboy Rupert D'Oyly Carte, on whom Wodehouse based Rupert Psmith.

Wodehouse learned how sisters keep younger brothers in their place when Malcolm Thompson came home from school wearing his first stick-up collar. Boys then wore the turned-down Eton collar until they were sixteen or so and were then allowed to wear the adult stick-up collar. It was the male equivalent of girls putting their hair up at seventeen—a cherished sign of becoming an adult. When Malcolm came home proudly wearing his 3½-inch high collar, elder sister Gertrude was ready for him. She said simply: "Hullo, little man, can you see over the top?"

Flaxie Frizzle, a friend of the Thompsons, gave Wodehouse some sound advice: "If you have an ideal girl in your mind's eye, never describe or mention her to any girl you may be friends with, as the latter will never be the same to you after it: The ideal always comes between you and her."

Then there were the beautiful daughters of Wodehouse's uncle, Major Hugh Deane. Wodehouse got on well with the three girls—Violet, Dorothy, and

Marjory—and noted their views on men and marriage. He records Violet saying: "I can't think why men want to marry. Here is Bob, for instance, perfectly comfortable, no ties of any sort, able to go anywhere, and then he wants to burden himself with *me*, and with a house and servants—or no servants, which is worse."



The Deane sisters

Wodehouse adds: "But she thinks men ought to marry before they get too used to living by themselves and always wanting their armchair in a certain place and the electric light turned on at a certain time."

Another lady, Miss Passiter, told Wodehouse bluntly that men in the Colonial Indian Civil Service "are so lonely that they come home with the unconcealed intention of marrying whoever will have them."

These were surprisingly frank remarks for young ladies to make at that time. They are blunt, straightforward comments that reflect a harsh reality. In those days, for young women of Wodehouse's social class, marriage was as much a matter of financial security as it was of love or affection.

Wodehouse, though a freelance journalist scraping a living, was from a highly respected family. His aunts in London therefore made sure he fulfilled his social obligations—which meant paying formal calls on them and their friends in top hat, frock coat, and spats. Though he found the calls boring, they widened his social circle. In the early 1900s, young ladies of the upper class did not go to work, so a "young lady" who did something other than look for a husband was unusual.

Wodehouse was therefore impressed when he met Miss Sholto Douglas—a relation of the Marquess of Queensberry, no less—who was “giving up Society to become a singer,” and a Miss Congreve, who worked in a tea shop because she enjoyed seeing how other people lived.

And of course he also had his aunt Emmeline, the youngest of his many Deane aunts and a professional artist living in London, whom he knew well enough to call by her family nickname of “Nym.”



One of Wodehouse’s aunts, artist Emmeline Deane

He liked her, and recorded conversations with her and with her friend and companion, another artist, Emily Childers (1866–1922).



Self-portrait of artist Emily Childers

Wodehouse also noted a conversation with a lady I think he respected—Jessie Pope (1868–1941). She was a well-known poet and writer, once nominated as our “foremost woman humorist,” who provided verses for *Punch* for many years.

I must mention here Wodehouse’s youngest girl friend: Biddu O’Sullivan. November 1904 saw the

publication of *William Tell Told Again*, dedicated “To Biddu O’Sullivan.” It took some time to find her, but I can tell you now that Biddu, born 1900, was the only daughter of Denis O’Sullivan, a successful Irish-American actor who came to London and sang in musical comedy.



Jessie Pope

Wodehouse got on well with Biddu. She was only three when their conversation turned to ice cream: “I like ice cream. It is as cold as the sky. I wonder what the sky feeds on. And the moon.” Wodehouse suggested they don’t feed on anything. “Oh, some moons do,” said Biddu with authority.

Another comment of Biddu’s is a clear reflection of her having an older brother (Curtis) and how she had learned to look out for herself. Wodehouse reports that Biddu was eating a bun at a party when a kind old gentleman came up to her and said, “Well, Biddu, what are you doing?” She replied simply: “Go away. It’s mine.”

The many comments Wodehouse recorded—from young Biddu, the Bowes-Lyon girls, and his Aunt Nym—indicate to me that he realized if he wanted to write about girls, he had to learn how they thought and spoke. And I think this stayed with him for much of his life.

When Maureen O’Sullivan, the Jane to Johnny Weissmuller’s Tarzan, first came to Hollywood, Ethel Wodehouse took her under her wing. Maureen later wrote how much she enjoyed going for long, long walks with Wodehouse, talking about everything under the sun. And she was delighted when he dedicated *Hot Water* to her.



Maureen O'Sullivan

And now for the Wodehouse girlfriends, the ladies for whom he felt emotions deeper and warmer than that of ordinary friendship.

I have to begin with that most difficult of subjects: Wodehouse's sex life. Robert McCrum wrote that "Wodehouse seems to have been recognized as a man for whom sex was simply not important." He went on: "There are two possible explanations for this, both speculative. The first lies in nature, the second in nurture. Even as a mature man, Wodehouse was emotionally backward." McCrum reckons this derived partly from his lonely childhood and partly from his natural character, then stresses that the climate of the 1890s discouraged this aspect of life anyway. Personally, I think this last point is the important one.

As a striking example, I have never forgotten the anecdote I heard from Dick Osborne many years ago, and I repeat it now because it is in McCrum's book. Bill Townend, Wodehouse's oldest friend, made sea voyages on tramp steamers and picked lemons for a living in California. He saw life at the rough end—but when he married in 1915, he and his wife were perfectly happy not to consummate their marriage. When Townend mentioned to his doctor that they did not sleep together, the doctor gave him a sex instruction manual. Townend returned later to say they had found the entire business perfectly disgusting and had resumed their former contented, celibate habits.

I must add here that I do not think Wodehouse's low libido was caused by the attack of mumps when he was nineteen. My father and brother, both doctors, told me that mumps at that age can sometimes make you sterile. Only very, very rarely does it make you impotent.



Ella King-Hall

Having got that out of the way, the first lady to whom we know Wodehouse was attracted was Ella King-Hall, sister of Baldwin King-Hall of Emsworth House School, whom he first met in late 1903. She was an accomplished musician, some sixteen years older than Wodehouse, but he held her in high regard, and they collaborated on the short-lived musical sketch "The Bandit's Daughter" in 1907. It was probably just a matter of mutual respect. Ella married Herbert Westbrook, the original of Ukridge, in 1912, and Wodehouse made her his agent in the U.K. until she retired in 1935.

The next lady we know Wodehouse was attracted to was the actress Alice Dovey (1884–1969), who played second lead in *The Pink Lady*, a New York hit of 1911. We know Wodehouse met her again when *The Pink Lady* came to London in 1912, but his letters make it clear she did not want the acquaintanceship to ripen. Her daughter later confirmed that he had asked her to marry him and was rejected, but Wodehouse clearly remembered Miss Dovey fondly. Years later, in *Summer Moonshine*, Sir Buckstone Abbott is delighted that he had married Alice Bulpitt of *The Pink Lady* company thirty years before.

Alice Dovey went on to marry the playwright John Hazzard, but Wodehouse was still sending her copies of his books in 1955, and her address is to be seen in his



Alice Dovey

last address book, the one on his desk when he died. McCrum reckons Dovey could be the girl on whom Wodehouse based Peggy Norton, the heroine of that unusual short story "In Alcalá." I think he is right because it was written the year Wodehouse met Miss Dovey.

Six months after Alice rejected Wodehouse, he wrote a letter on November 22, 1912, saying that Daisy Wood was back in London and he was going to ask her to dinner. When I looked her up, I couldn't believe my luck. If this is the right Daisy Wood, she was a well-known music hall artiste, the youngest sister of Marie Lloyd, the Queen of the Music Halls. Daisy was very different from her sister. She was petite and dainty, had charm and an excellent voice, and was a delightful dancer. She toured America in 1909, and maybe that is where Wodehouse met her. We hear no more about her in Wodehouse's life—but I would point out that she fits exactly the description we are given of Dolly Henderson, the girl Gally Threepwood loved and lost.

Then there is the mysterious Mrs Lillian Armstrong, a widow with whose daughter, Bubbles, Wodehouse corresponded till the end of his life. Apparently he met her around 1909, but all I have been able to find out

is that Bubbles once said her mother had also turned down Wodehouse's proposal to marry her.

McCrum writes that, around 1912–14, Wodehouse found bachelor life was beginning to pall. He met Ethel—and that was it. Their living arrangements may seem strange to us today—separate bedrooms, sometimes even separate suites in hotels—but they were happy with it. And Wodehouse's loving notes to Ethel over the years show how contented he was and how lucky he thought he was to have married her.

I conclude with the final mystery—well, not a mystery so much as a surprising anecdote, which, from memory, originated from Guy Bolton. McCrum mentions it, as does Lee Davis in his excellent *Bolton and Wodehouse and Kern*, although Davis stresses that it could be apocryphal. Well, I am proud to say that I can settle the matter by telling you something I have never revealed in public before.

During Wodehouse's Princess Theatre period, the company tried out shows on tour before opening in New York. During one of those tours, Wodehouse allegedly had an affair with a chorus girl. When they returned to New York, so the story goes, Ethel Wodehouse, who was there to meet them, took one look at Wodehouse and said: "Plum, you've been having an affair." And Wodehouse, according to Bolton, made the worst possible reply: "Who told you?"

Some 59 years later, in 1976, I spent an evening with Guy and Virginia Bolton at their London flat, and within two minutes of Guy opening the door, it was clear that he could charm the birds off the trees. Lee Davis summed him up perfectly: "To the end of his life, Guy would be a peerless raconteur, holding forth with glee and glibness and only passing references to reality. What mattered least was accuracy, what mattered most was a good story."

At a rare break in Guy's anecdotes, I asked him about the story of Wodehouse's affair with a girl on tour. He told me the anecdote again, stressing Wodehouse's naïveté in saying "Who told you?" I still didn't really believe him so I said something like: "Extraordinary! That's so unlike Wodehouse."

Upon which Virginia Bolton interrupted.

"Oh, yes," she said. "It happened all right. Ethel often told me it was the only time Plum had been unfaithful to her."

So, yes, I believe it did happen—and I admire McCrum for finding the name of the girl involved: Fleur Marsden.

But, do you know what? If that affair was more than a few comforting hugs and the odd kiss, I would be very, very surprised.

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.

Anglers' Rest
(Seattle and vicinity)
Contact: Susan Collicott



Birmingham Banjolele Band
(Birmingham, Alabama, and vicinity)
Contact: Caralyn McDaniel



Blandings Castle Chapter
(Greater San Francisco Bay area)
Contact: Ed and Missy Ratcliffe



The Broadway Special
(New York City and vicinity)
Contact: Amy Plofker



AT LAST REPORT the Special had defied the depredations of an icy January night to attend Julliard's presentation of *The Land Where the Good Songs Go*. We promptly went into hibernation and even groundhogs could not convince us that winter would end sometime in March. Our February 16 meeting was threatened as the wind blew and cracked its cheeks, while glaciers appeared on inaccessible sidewalks. Happily, the annual SongFest was blithe and bonny.

With Ron at the piano and Luca in the kitchen, we trilled and tasted and then trundled home in the frosty air, realizing there were just a dozen February days left to soldier through. But then came March, with mud and misery, a month in which the promise of spring was breached on a daily basis. Equinox, you say? Nox so fast—March manifestly seemed 41 days long in 2014.

We yearned for April to arrive with his shoures soote, whan smale fowles maken melodye, whan longen folk to goon on pilgrimages! And so on April 12 the Broadway Special merrily joined a line of pilgrims at Manhattan's Town Hall to applaud Maria Jette and Dan Chouinard as American Public Radio's *A Prairie Home Companion* welcomed their Wodehousian espièglerie and musical finesse. Miss Postlethwaite chatted with a young family whose father was tickled to learn of TWS and the Special; the moppets were encouraged to cheer loudly when the names Maria and Dan were announced, and seemed inclined to do so.

No doubt you were to be found that evening adjusting the antenna on your radio set, humming along with "Bright Lights" or "Moon Song," but the Special was dismayed to see Maria make her entrance rolling a walker and suspending one delicate foot above the stage. Of course, her glorious voice was unaffected and her banter with Garrison Keillor betrayed no indication of distress. At show's end we repaired to a neighborhood boite, rallying round Maria and Dan, who joined us for dinner, and learned she had had a disagreement with a staircase and was only recently released from extended bed rest. However, the Special can attest that she was at full throttle, having spied her settled in with leg fully extended and delicate foot resting atop the back of the banquette! We felt that Bobbie Wickham would have greatly admired that pose.

Next up is a meeting on Friday, June 13, at The Players, Gramercy Park. Stay tuned for the report!

Capital! Capital!
(Washington, D.C., and vicinity)
Contact: Scott Daniels



Chapter One
(Greater Philadelphia area)
Contact: Herb Moskowitz



SOCIETY VP Bob Rains (Oily Carlisle) got right down to business selling the last jars of plum jam (but no copper mine or oil well shares). He also announced that the Oyster Mill Playhouse of Camp Hill, Pennsylvania, would be staging *Jeeves in Bloom* from June 6 through June 22. Some local Plummies planned to sponsor the show and give a “talkback” after the June 22 matinee. The theater company was requesting Wodehousean memorabilia to have on display throughout the run, so we did, of course, provide a photo of our newt Gussie, who resides at the Philadelphia Zoo. Meanwhile, the hat was passed to ensure that Gussie will be kept in comfort for this year.

After lunch, chapter president Herb Moskovitz (Vladimir Brusiloff) presented an excellent slide show and talk on the print, stage, and screen versions of *A Damsel in Distress*, serialized and published in 1919. A silent film version was made later that year and, according to Tony Ring, a shortened version with French intertitles is extant but unavailable for viewing. A stage version debuted in 1928 in collaboration with Ian Hay. With the coming of sound films, playwrights such as Plum were in demand in Hollywood. Irving Thalberg was instrumental in hiring Plum at MGM, as his favorite novel was *Leave It to Psmith*.

The 1937 RKO film of *A Damsel in Distress* was Plum’s first major screen credit and the first time he adapted one of his novels for the flicks. With music and lyrics by George and Ira Gershwin (including several of their classic songs, such as “A Foggy Day in London Town” and “Nice Work If You Can Get It”), master hooper Fred Astaire, and the comic duo of George Burns and Gracie Allen, the film should have raked in the oof. Unfortunately, it would prove to be a one-off, as the film was not a success. It was the first film that Fred Astaire made without Ginger Rogers, and Joan Fontaine was unknown and not a dancer. In fact, her one number with Astaire was filmed in a wood, so the director could hide her behind trees. Members mused on which actresses of the time should have played the female lead, suggesting Jessie Matthews and Ida Lupino, stressing that it wasn’t Miss Fontaine’s fault that she was given rather large shoes to fill.

However, choreographer Hermes Pan, who specialized in dance routines using obstacles, won an Academy Award for “Stiff Upper Lip,” with Astaire, Burns, and Allen dancing through a funhouse and hall of mirrors. Burns and Allen also taught Astaire another routine, “Put Me Through the Test,” an old vaudeville number using whisk-brooms, which prompted Burns to write in his memoirs, “Gracie and I ended up teaching Astaire how to dance.”

The next meeting was to be held in June at Cavanaugh’s Head House Tavern, where the theme was to be a showing of the *Wodehouse Playhouse* performance of “The Smile That Wins.”

Chicago Accident Syndicate
(Chicago and thereabouts)



The Clients of Adrian Mulliner
(For enthusiasts of both PGW
and Sherlock Holmes)
Contact: Elaine Coppola



THE CLIENTS of Adrian Mulliner are delighted to announce that they have been recognized as a scion society of the Baker Street Irregulars, which is the literary society dedicated to the study of Sherlock Holmes, Dr. Watson, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and the Victorian world.



The latest honor bestowed on The Clients of Adrian Mulliner

The Denver of the Secret Nine
(Denver and vicinity)
Contact: Jennifer Petkus

THE DEN(VER) of the Secret Nine met covertly on March 9 to discuss *Joy in the Morning* and was to have met again on May 11 to discuss *The Luck of the*

Bodkins. Our meetings are routinely held the second Sunday of alternating months (January, March, May, July, September, November) at 12:30 PM at Pints Pub (221 West 13th Avenue) in downtown Denver. At our March 9 meeting, members adjourned silently and swiftly to original member Mike's hidden lair to watch two episodes of *Wodehouse Playhouse* and two episodes of the first season of the new *Blandings* series. The members present enjoyed the new *Blandings* series and promise quick justice on any who say otherwise.

The Drone Rangers
(Houston and vicinity)
Contact: Carey Tynan



The Flying Pigs
(Cincinnati area and elsewhere)
Contact: Susan Brokaw



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

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



OUR GROUP of jolly revelers got together for the annual passing of the pig last December. Janet Lilius began the tradition when she presented the Christmas ornament to the group a few years ago. Since then, we have taken turns displaying the decoration in our homes before keeping the pig safe for eleven months until the next season rolls around. The challenge, of course, is in remembering where one has stashed the lovely lady when it's time to bring her out again. Liz Davenport was able to do so, fortunately, so the Empress continues her rounds. She has been entrusted to Craig Hardwick for the rest of this year.

Harking back to November, we Oysters gathered at the home of one of our gang to celebrate Guy Fawkes Night. This year we challenged our membership with discovering the Wodehouse character who had been secretly assigned to each player. By the use of “yes”

or “no” questions, one had to discern the character's identity.

After the chanting of the poem (“Remember, remember, the fifth of November”), we roasted a G.F. effigy on the barbecue and then had a couple of guests (my niece Suanne and her friend Julie) explain to us how they celebrated the occasion when they grew up in England. Randy Anderson also contributed by telling us of the traditions he had heard about from NPR—or was it the BBC? Some radio program, at any rate, which was reputable and no doubt had its facts straight.

We would like to thank Barnes and Noble, somewhat belatedly, for allowing us to congregate in one of their stores for our meetings. If you know of a Wodehouse fan in our area, please tell them about our group.

The New England Wodehouse Thingummy Society (NEWTS)
(Boston and New England)
Contact: John Fahey



CONSPIRACY! In the spring *Plum Lines*, past president David Landman reported on the coup that ousted him and placed John Fahey (aka moi) in the hot seat. The prior report was biased. Mr. Landman was not a victim but was in fact one of the conspirators. With this report I am lifting the veil. Despite my objections, I was shoved into office and instructed to call the Landmans to break the news. The following conversation ensued:

David: Hello?

John: David, it's John. I have good news and bad news. First, the good news. There's been a coup and you've been ousted from the presidency.

David: Oh my, that's marvelous news indeed.

John: And now for the bad news.

David: You?

John: Yes.

David: Please ask the assembled to tell me the address where I should send the flowers.

Does that sound like a victim? I rest my case.

For the remainder of the afternoon, while the masses reveled like they've never reveled before, the female members of the NEWTS approached me singly, one after another, to inform me in what ways I was failing in my duties as president. I left with a new appreciation of what Macbeth must have gone through.

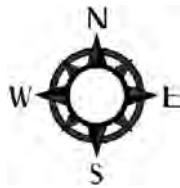
At our next Nottle (held, appropriately, chez Fahey in Medford, Massachusetts), what was being touted as an inauguration was anything but, what with a sham election and other political intrigue. While a crown was absent, this was in all other respects a coronation. The ascendant wore a ceremonial robe—a tasteful dark-brown plaid with a blue stripe that perfectly accented his blue chambray shirt. The ceremony was prepared by senior muckymuck Jean Tillson, and our resident clergyman, Wendell Verrill, presided with his usual savoir faire.

Upon taking office, my first official act was the obligatory taking of the group picture. This has long been an ordeal at Nottles, and the assembled were looking forward to a pleasant experience under the new regime. Little did they know. Achieving a new low, and using two large, impressive cameras, Elise Fahey, Jean, and I proceeded to find endless ways to fail at taking a picture. Out of desperation, an iPhone was pulled out and put to work with success. The ordeal drove everyone back to the table for further browsing and sluicing.

On a sadder note we bade farewell to John Kareores, who was departing for a new life in Miami. He will remain a NEWT, and we expect him to make occasional appearances at future Nottles.

The Northwodes

(St. Paul, Minneapolis, and vicinity)
Contact: Kristine Fowler



The Orange Plums

(Orange County, California)
Contact: Lia Hansen

THE MOST interesting thing that has happened with our group lately is that Karen Shotting and Doug Kendrick came to one of our February meetings and brought regalia with them.

Karen, currently TWS president, was proudly wearing a wonderful medallion that Norman Murphy gave to the society in 1999. Norman had presented it to then-president Elin Woodger (later his wife), who passed it on to the next president, Susan Cohen, and the medallion has been worn by TWS presidents ever since. Karen also brought a tea bell that Norman gave to the society in 1995. The bell is from the 1924 British Empire Exhibition held in Wembley, which figured in the short story “The Rummy Affair of Old Biffy.”

Sir Roderick Glossop was mightily impressed by the collection of curiosities and interesting items “gathered from the four corners of the Empire.” Bertie was less than impressed. We were impressed to see this little silver tea bell, a memento of that same exhibition.

Our group has started a fun tradition of our own. At our first meeting, back in August, one of our members—we’ll call him Jeff—brought along a “silver” cow creamer. She (the creamer) has since shown up at every meeting, and in December she came decked out in holiday finery. In February she had little red tinsel hearts wrapped around her neck, and in March she came to our meeting filled with Lucky Charms. And so on. I suppose we will have to name her soon, as she appears to be ours, and a very loyal member of The Orange Plums.

The Pale Parabolites

(Toronto and vicinity)
Contact: George Vanderburgh



OUR GROUP MEETS irregularly around lunches at Massey College, a graduate school at the University of Toronto. Although meal service winds down in the summer, the Puffy Lounge or the Upper Library are available by appointment for meetings with Wodehousians visiting from out of town.

Recently, during an idle shopping moment at a Crocs store in a Virginia mall, I came across a pair of flashing Jibbitz. This is, of course, jewelry that inserts into the holes of my Crocs shoes. I was delighted with “Tinker Bell” and “Mickey Mouse.” I think we should form a committee to develop Jibbitz for Mulliner, Jeeves, Wooster, Psmith, and Aunt Agatha.

Speaking of Bertie’s aunt, here are the words I propose for a new Wodehouse barroom drinking song sung to the words of “We Always Remember Aunt Clara” by Gayle Lange Puhl (score available on request).

We Always Mention Aunt Agatha

CHORUS (sung after each verse):
We always mention Aunt Agatha.
Her picture hangs high on the wall.
Because, if we didn’t, she’d notice
And mention it loudly to all.

Agatha’s always been firm and robust.
Her will has a will of its own.
She eats broken bottles at every breakfast
And lunches on Englishmen’s bones.

She knows all the ways a man should reform.
She says Bertie sleeps far too late.
She drags him from bed as he gasps and moans
To walk her dog down to the gate.

She's rugged, determined, speaks without fear,
A woman of high-powered grit.
She gives her opinion in tones loud and clear
To mold him in ways she thinks fit.

She says he should marry and that, when it's
done,
The wedlock will stiffen his spine.
But Bertie knows marriage will end all the fun
And constantly schemes to decline.

So raise up a glass to Aunt Agatha
And aunts everywhere under roof.
Line them all up and take time to compare
But watch for the old cloven hoof.

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



AT OUR MARCH meeting, the Noddors of PZMPCo eschewed corporate formality and embraced the Edwardian schoolboy spirit by sluicing good old ginger beer and browsing on biscuits and scones. *Mike and Psmith* was the reading and thoroughly enjoyed by all.

On April 13, we tried *Something Fresh* and *Something New*, the first Blandings Castle novel(s), noting some of the differences between the U.S. (*New*) and U.K. (*Fresh*) editions, with the red-paint-spattered shoe scene providing much scratching and shaking of heads—particularly because we had just read *Mike at Wrykyn*, which contained a similar scene. (These publishing johnnies have a lot to answer for—particularly those Ballantine blokes who published the text of *Something Fresh* under the title *Something New*.)

In honor of Mother's Day, *The Coming of Bill*, aka *Their Mutual Child*, was chosen for our May meeting. This story is one of the few novels where a mother is a main character.

Our chums in Orange County have been keeping us informed about their meetings, and as of this writing there was a movement afoot for a trip to Fullerton in May to join the Orange Plums for the discussion of *Jeeves and the Wedding Bells*. The first thing to do, of course, is to ascertain that such a place as Fullerton really exists.

One has heard of it, of course, but has its existence ever been proved? Having accomplished that, we must then try to find out how to get to it. We are guessing, at a venture, that it will necessitate a sea voyage. On the other hand, our Orange County members, Jim and Rowan, seem to find no difficulty in rolling up to the monthly PZMPCo meetings. Therefore—you follow me?—it must be in Southern California. In that case, we will take a train and go out into the unknown, hand in hand, trusting to luck.

In June, Psmith is back by popular demand, in *Psmith, Journalist*. *Cosy Moments* will not be muzzled!

We generally meet the second Sunday of each month at 12:30 PM. Join us at Book Alley, 1252 East Colorado Blvd, Pasadena, California. Join our Yahoo! or Facebook Group at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/PZMPCo/> and <https://www.facebook.com/groups/373160529399825/> for more information on upcoming readings, schedule, and venue.

The Pickering Motor Company
(Detroit and vicinity)
Contact: Elliott Milstein



THE PICKERINGS gathered at the Milsteins' on February 9, 2014. The book for the meeting was *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit*. We had an interesting discussion about whether or not the aristocracy would talk in front of the servants, as Bertie did with Jeeves and Lord Emsworth did with Beach. Aunt Agatha, in common with much of the aristocracy, did not approve of the practice, but it seems to happen often on *Downton Abbey* and *Upstairs, Downstairs*. Were the servants considered invisible or unimportant?

The Pickerings gathered at Sue and Dicron Mahakian's house on April 6. Sue's lemon bars were a hit with the attendees. The book for the meeting was *A Few Quick Ones*. We discussed the short story "The Fat of the Land," which involves betting and intrigue around a fat uncles contest at the Drones Club. Freddie Widgeon and Oofy Prosser are the central characters. We compared the story to "The Great Sermon Handicap." Both stories center on attempts to influence the outcome of a betting contest. It was a theme Wodehouse used in a number of stories. "Oofy" is an old slang term for rich. Silly me, I always thought he was called Oofy because he was an oaf. You can learn a lot from Wodehouse.

This led to a discussion of the British practice of leaving the fortune to the eldest son and leaving the younger sons with very little, if anything. It seems that

many of the Drones are younger sons who will try gambling and fixing bets, anything to avoid getting a job. A recurring theme in many of Wodehouse's stories is impecunious upper-class young men who try to fix their finances by gambling. They stoop to things like trying to fix an event they have a wager on—and they usually lose their money.

The Pittsburgh Millionaires Club (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania)



THE PITTSBURGH MILLIONAIRES convened in March to read “Unpleasantness at Bludleigh Court.” Competition was fierce as to which lucky Millionaire would get to read the classic work “Good Gnus,” and so many crusty rolls were thrown that we finally agreed to read it aloud all together. (“And one more gnu, so fair and frail, has handed in its dinner-pail!”)

The Millionaires planned to meet again in May, after the Ides of April. Not that we Millionaires worry about that!

The Portland Greater Wodehouse Society (PGWs) (Portland, Oregon and vicinity) Contact: Carol James



The Right Honourable Knights of Sir Philip Sidney (Amsterdam, The Netherlands) Contact: Jelle Otten

THE HONOURABLE KNIGHTS of Sir Philip Sidney are meeting on June 7 at Mulliner's Wijnlokaal, Lijnbaansgracht 266-267, Amsterdam, at 1 PM. Our next meeting will be October 11, same time and place.

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



“Any man that goes into Oil is going into a good thing. Oil's all right. You don't see John D. Rockefeller running round asking for hand-outs from his friends, do you?”

Money for Nothing (1928)

Letter from England

BY ELIN WOODGER

SCARCELY A YEAR goes by when there aren't Wodehouseans from other parts of the world who come to London, and Norman and I try to see them if we can. Some just come for a one-time holiday, but others fall into the category I think of as “the regulars.”

For example, there is Elliott Milstein, whose business occasionally brings him to London. We nearly always manage a dinner with him when he is here, most recently in March. Following the meal, he and a colleague toddled off to see *Perfect Nonsense*. Since he had written such a glowing review of the show for the last *Plum Lines*, I was curious to know if he would enjoy it as much the second time around. He did, though with minor reservations regarding how loudly the actors shouted their lines.

Another regular is Kris Fowler, who comes over to England periodically to pursue another passion of hers: bell-ringing. Kris arrived in late March and also went to see *Perfect Nonsense*, of course; she subsequently texted me a thumb's-up review. I would have gone to see it with her, but I already had a ticket booked courtesy of Jean Tillson, who had impulsively decided to come over for the show before Matthew Macfadyen and Stephen Mangan left the cast. To my delight, I found I enjoyed it even more than the first time I had seen it. It perhaps helped that we went to an evening performance, there was champagne being sold (and liberally consumed by Jean and me), and the highly charged audience was appreciating everything at full volume (louder than the actors, I thought).

This led me to muse on adaptations of Wodehouse and my disdain for most of them. I enjoyed certain episodes of *Wodehouse Playhouse*, but I must be one of the few people in TWS who didn't care for *Jeeves and Wooster* (despite adoring both Stephen Fry and Hugh Laurie). Some of the earlier episodes are okay, but I can't forgive what they did in later ones, where PGW's plots were mangled beyond recognition and his original dialogue jettisoned entirely. Yet those writers didn't sin nearly as much as the adaptors of the recent *Blandings* series, which I have found to be execrable.

People like Elliott, Brian Taves, and Tony Ring are a lot more forgiving than I am. They rightly point out the difficulties of adapting the written word—particularly Wodehouse's ingenious words—to film or stage, and they talk knowledgeably of audiences, changing styles, making necessary concessions, etc. All well and good, but why do other writers nonetheless try to out-Wodehouse Wodehouse when they adapt his work?

Why not let *his* funny lines work their magic instead of writing new ones that they apparently feel would be funnier to today's audiences (and aren't, at least to me)?

Thankfully, David and Robert Goodale did well by Plum in writing *Perfect Nonsense*. Though they have taken quite a few liberties with the plot of *The Code of the Woosters* and have turned it into a farce, I enjoyed the show, chiefly because it is faithful to the book's spirit and has many original Wodehouse lines. It's possible that the medium has something to do with it. Comedy onstage is broader, more exaggerated, because it has to play to those in the seats, some of whom are situated well back from the action. And let's face it, many of Wodehouse's plots lend themselves to farce quite easily.

Film and television, however, are more intimate and therefore call for more subtlety. In my opinion, Wodehouse's original narration and dialogue would work very nicely onscreen—if only the adaptors would trust in the source material. Instead they change it out of all recognition and, in the case of *Blandings*, attempt to turn it into farce when the original gentle humor would work just as well, if not better.

I'll probably never win this argument, but as long as they keep adapting Wodehouse, I'll keep watching. As for *Perfect Nonsense*, Macfadyen and Mangan have been replaced by Mark Heap and Robert Webb as Jeeves and Bertie, respectively. I have a sister coming to visit in June, and we plan to go see the new cast. Here's hoping they are as good as their predecessors!

Speaking of Wodehouse onstage, a very special event in April highlighted an often-overlooked aspect of PGW's writing: his verses. Seeking to bring poetry to wider sections of the masses, the organization Poet in the City stages regular events that feature certain poets or aspects of poetry. On April 14 it was Wodehouse's turn in the spotlight. The evening was cosponsored by the UK Society and chiefly organized by the inestimable Tony Ring. Sophie Ratcliffe (editor of *A Life in Letters*), Simon Brett (well-known British writer and actor), and Tony himself provided commentary on the poems and songs, which were presented by actor Christopher Naylor; singer-actress Lucy Tregear; and Wodehouse's great-grandchildren Hal, Lara, and David Cazalet.

The family involvement helped to make it a highly enjoyable evening. There was a nice mix of poems, most of them from early in PGW's career, which demonstrated not just our hero's mastery of words and facility for rhymes, but also his incisive wit when it came to current events. Lara and Christopher did a fine job of reading most of the verses, while David read "Printer's Error" with an intensity that showed he is his siblings' equal in the emoting department.

Hal and Lucy sang some delightful Wodehouse lyrics, including my own personal favorite, "If Ever I Lost You." Hal brought the house down with his take of "Anything Goes," and just when we thought it couldn't get any better, Lara came forward to deliver an encore: "Bill," of course. Beside me, Norman became highly emotional, as he always does whenever Lara sings "Bill."

It was a wonderful evening, and after seeing his great-grandchildren perform, I can't help but think that Wodehouse would have been very, very proud.



Katherine Lewis

IT IS WITH profound sadness that the Chicago Accident Syndicate must convey news of the passing of our longtime president and one of the chapter's founding members, Ms. Katherine Lewis. Kathy had only just stepped down from her post as chapter president at the group's February gathering for browsing, sluicing, and readings from the Master, and it was lamented that we'd no longer be getting the beautifully handwritten invitations to our meetings that were one of Kathy's trademarks. Her generosity and enthusiasm were remarkable—for each and every chapter gathering, Kathy brought gift bags of amusing PGW-related items, tea, trinkets, and books.

As devoted a fan of the Master and all things Wodehouse as Kathy was (oftentimes more obscurely than others of us could fathom), her first and abiding passion was for the jazz of Ellington, Basie, Biederbecke, and Norvo. She literally spared no expense in her efforts to meld Wodehouse and jazz, and those in attendance at the Chicago TWS convention last October can attest to her commitment to both. "The Empress Strikes Back" would almost certainly never have come to Chicago without Kathy's determination and devotion. She will be missed, but not forgotten.

Kathy worked at the Newberry Library for many years, and she subsequently became a dedicated volunteer. Any gifts in Kathy's memory may be made to the library at www.newberry.org or by mail to Newberry Library, 60 W Walton St, Chicago, IL 60610. Kathy never missed an opportunity to search their book sales for Wodehouse titles as well as for other works relating to PGW himself or to his characters and their worlds. (If you do send a contribution in Kathy's memory, you may mention that you knew her through The Wodehouse Society.)

A Tale of Two Knights: Sir Philip Sidney and Sir Pelham Grenville Wodehouse

BY PETER NIEUWENHUIZEN

Peter Nieuwenhuizen, president of the Dutch Wodehouse Society, gave a most original and delightful talk at the October convention of The Wodehouse Society. We think you'll enjoy his study of the evolution of the heroic Sir Philip Sidney's famous battlefield quotation.

A LONG TIME ago, in 1586, Sir Walter Raleigh sailed to the east coast of America to start a settlement in North Carolina. He did this for Queen Elizabeth I of England. The United States was not yet a twinkle in anyone's eye.

In the same year in The Netherlands, my ancestors had to deal with the Spanish conquerors. During this strife, a noble British knight, Sir Philip Sidney, fought alongside the Dutch soldiers and died at the age of 31 from wounds suffered in a battle. Poet, husband, and nobleman, athletic and courageous, he dedicated his life abroad to his queen, country, and church.

Much later, another knight, Sir P. G. Wodehouse, was touched by this small piece of history and wrote about it in his novels—not once, not twice, but twenty times. So it must be important, but why? Let us explore this little historic jewel.

Philip Sidney was born in 1554, in the reign of Mary Tudor. He was named after Mary's husband, the Spanish king Philip II.

Philip Sidney grew up at Penhurst Place, a magnificent estate in Kent. He was well-educated, becoming a pupil at the Shrewsbury School at the age of ten. As a boy of twelve, at the side of his uncle Robert Dudley, the Earl of Leicester, he witnessed the festive procession of Queen Elizabeth in Oxford. At the age of fourteen he started studying at Oxford, and four years later he made a grand tour on the continent and visited Paris, where he met Lodewijk (Louis) of Nassau, the brother of the Dutch governor, and, later, William of Orange, the founder of The Netherlands. Philip Sidney went on to visit Germany, Austria, Hungary, Italy, Poland, and Antwerp before he returned to England. He had traveled for three years and returned wiser, a man of the world.

In England he stayed at the court of Elizabeth and studied music and poetry, wrote sonnets, learned to fight, took part in tournaments, and developed into a noble knight, a gentleman *pur sang*, as our French friends would say.



John Decritz the Younger's portrait of Sir Philip Sidney, c.1620 (oil on panel)

After those two years at court, though only 23 years old, he became a diplomat for England. He first served in Germany and later in The Netherlands, where he witnessed the baptism of Elizabeth, the eleventh child of William of Orange.

Back in England he went to live at his sister's place near Salisbury, where he started to write his famous poetry. He wrote *Astrophel and Stella*, *The Defence of Poesy*, and *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*.

By now you're probably wondering what was going on in The Netherlands and why Philip Sidney was involved. Well, the Dutch were overwhelmed by the Spanish in a war that would last for eighty years. William of Orange was shot dead by Balthasar Gerards in 1584 in Delft. Obviously, the Dutch needed help and appealed to England. Queen Elizabeth sent 5,000 soldiers under the command of Philip's uncle, Robert Dudley. In return, Elizabeth got some Dutch cities as security, including Den Briel and Flushing (Vlissingen). Philip Sidney became the governor of Flushing and sailed to The Netherlands. In Flushing, he found his soldiers to be underpaid, ill-armed, hungry, and sick.

It was not a good start for an ambitious 31-year-old governor.

Maurits of Orange, the son of the murdered William of Orange, welcomed Sidney and his uncle. They made a grand entrance in cities like Delft, The Hague, Amsterdam, and Utrecht.

The Duke of Parma, Alexander Farnese, launched an offensive in 1586 and conquered several cities. It was imperative that Maurits, Dudley, and Sidney take action. They conquered the city of Axel and went on to Zutphen, a strategic city on the river IJssel that was occupied by the Spanish.

With five hundred soldiers and fifty noblemen (the latter of whom were anxious to witness a real battle—from a distance, of course), they started the Battle of Zutphen on October 2, 1586. At dawn they realized that the Spanish far outnumbered them, and they retreated.

But alas, near the hamlet of Warnsveld, a few miles away, Sir Philip Sidney was mortally wounded. He took a Spanish musketball to his thigh and tumbled to the ground in great pain. One of his servants present at the battlefield—a Jeeves *avant la lettre*—hurried toward him with a cup or chalice of water. But instead of drinking this water, this life elixir, he handed it to a dying soldier on a stretcher, saying: “Thy necessity is yet greater than mine.” He didn’t recover, and three weeks later he died. His body was transported back to England, and he was buried in St. Paul’s Cathedral.

From this event the legend was born. Sir Philip Sidney became revered as a great warrior, although he had mostly fought at court tournaments. On the artistic side, his sister Mary, the Countess of Pembroke, had his sonnets and other work published, and he gained a successful posthumous literary career. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, statues were erected in his memory. One still stands in England at his old school in Shrewsbury, and another can be found in Zutphen in a park named after him.

Somewhere along the line, that other writer and later a knight, Sir P. G. Wodehouse, heard this beautiful story about Sir Philip Sidney. According to Norman Murphy’s *Wodehouse Handbook*, one of Plum’s cousins attended the Shrewsbury school where a statue of Sidney stood on the playground, and Shrewsbury was the model for Wrykyn in *The White Feather*.

Wodehouse was so impressed by this legend, this noble deed of Sir Philip Sidney, that he used variations of the famous phrase “Thy necessity is yet greater than mine” in various forms twenty times in his novels and stories.

The very first reference that we have found is a peculiar one. For the June 1915 *Strand* magazine,

Wodehouse wrote the story “Black for Luck,” in which a black cat is a central character. Both James Renshaw Boyd and Elizabeth Herrold considered the stray cat as their own, and it was a good luck charm for both of them. Elizabeth finally gave up the cat for the sake of James, the playwright: “In any case, it would be like Sir Philip Sidney and the wounded soldier—‘your need is greater than mine.’ Think of all the people who are dependent on your play being a success!”

A cat replaced the cup of water. Oddly, when this story was published in *The Man with Two Left Feet* in 1917, the sentence was altered to: “Never mind about me.” Alas, no reference to Sir Philip and his heroic deed.

In 1920, Wodehouse used the Sidney legend again in the novel *Jill the Reckless* (U.K.), aka *The Little Warrior* (U.S.). Freddie Rooke is going to meet his friend Algy Martyn in the Drones Club, but, not being a member, he can’t receive a snifter:

There he sat, surrounded by happy, laughing young men, each grasping a glass of the good old mixture-as-before, absolutely unable to connect. Some of them, casual acquaintances, had nodded to him, waved, and gone on lowering the juice—a spectacle which made Freddie feel much as the wounded soldier would have felt if Sir Philip Sidney, instead of offering him the cup of water, had placed it to his own lips and drained it with a careless “Cheerio!”

This is a wonderful reference but in fact the opposite of what happened on the battleground. Wodehouse used the reverse to emphasize the fierce desire for something and not getting it.

Later in the canon, the soldier of legend transforms into “a stretcher case,” but the supply of a drink remains. In *Ring for Jeeves*, Jeeves comes to the rescue:

Jill collapsed into a chair. . . . Jeeves was a kindly man, and not only a kindly man but a man who could open a bottle of champagne as quick as a flash. It was in something of the spirit of the Sir Philip Sidney who gave the water to the stretcher case that he now whisked the cork from the bottle he was carrying. Jill’s need, he felt, was greater than Bill’s.

“Permit me, miss.”

Jill drank gratefully.

A year later, Jeeves did it again. In *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit*, Aunt Dahlia is talking to her nephew



“Death of Sir Philip Sidney at the Battle of Zutphen”
from John Cassell’s Illustrated History of England

Bertie. Dahlia longs for a cocktail and, of course, some advice from Jeeves. At the start of this excerpt, Bertie gives Dahlia hope:

“He should be with us at any moment now. He stepped out to get me a tankard of the old familiar juice.”

Her eyes gleamed with a strange light.

“Bags I first go at it!”

I patted her hand.

“Of course,” I said, “of course. You may take that as read. You don’t find Bertram Wooster hogging the drink supply when a suffering aunt is at his side with her tongue hanging out. Your need is greater than mine, as whoever-it-was said to the stretcher case. Ah!”

Jeeves had come in bearing the elixir, not a split second before we were ready for it. I took the beaker from him and offered it to the aged relative with a courteous gesture. With a brief “Mud in your eye” she drank deeply.

Over time, Wodehouse changed the water not just to other beverages but also to objects or actions. The third chronological reference to the legend was in 1921, and here the drink was transformed into a kiss. Wodehouse wrote in *Indiscretions of Archie*:

He kissed her fondly.

“By Jove!” he exclaimed. “You really are, you know! This is the biggest thing since jolly old Sir Philip What’s-his-name gave the drink of water to the poor blighter whose need was greater than his, if you recall the incident. I had to sweat it up at school, I remember. Sir Philip, poor old bean, had a most ghastly thirst on, and he was just going to have one on the house,

so to speak, when . . . but it’s all in the history-books. This is the sort of thing Boy Scouts do!”

And only two years later, the cup of water became an umbrella. In *Leave It to Psmith*, Psmith borrows Walderwick’s umbrella without permission for the rescue of Eve Halliday in the rain. Psmith then praises Walderwick for his sacrifice: “You are now entitled to rank with Sir Philip Sidney and Sir Walter Raleigh!”

After a cat, cocktail, kiss, and umbrella, Wodehouse took the reference even further: the noble act becomes money. In 1925’s *Sam the Sudden*, Sam Shotter rents a cottage in Valley Fields and “borrows” the rent money, without permission, from his friend Braddock. He slips a note in Braddock’s wallet:

DEAR BRADDER: You will doubtless be surprised to learn that I have borrowed your money. I will return it in God’s good time. Meanwhile, as Sir Philip Sidney said to the wounded soldier, my need is greater than yours.

Trusting this finds you in the pink.

Yrs. Obedtly,

S. SHOTTER.

Wodehouse completely reverses the myth: it is the opposite of what Sir Philip Sidney said. This adds more comic effect for the readers who know the real legend.

After this joke, Wodehouse does not refer to the legend for seven years. In 1932, it surfaces again in *Hot Water*. Packy Franklyn tries to impress his fiancée Lady Beatrice Bracken by cutting the hair of Senator Opal: “To go and hack at this old buster’s thatch would be to perform a kindly and altruistic act, very much the same sort of thing for which Sir Philip Sidney and the Boy Scouts are so highly thought of.”

The smuggling of a pearl necklace by Reggie Tennyson is a relief for motion-picture magnate Ivor Llewellyn, in return for a movie contract. In 1935’s *The Luck of the Bodkins*, Mr. Llewellyn is grateful:

There was nothing in the look which Mr. Llewellyn was directing at Reggie now to awaken the critical spirit in the latter. It was entirely free from that pop-eyed dislike which the young man had found so offensive in the early stages of this conference. It was, indeed, very much the sort of look the wounded soldier must have directed at Sir Philip Sidney.

In 1936 in *Laughing Gas*, Joey Cooley, inhabited by the narrator’s spirit and personality, says:

“Prunes! . . . Hi! Give me a lick!” I cried, in a voice vibrant with emotion.

He passed it over without hesitation. If he had been Sir Philip Sidney with the wounded soldier, he couldn't have been nippier.

The issue of morals is also seen through the lens of the Sidney legend. As we all know, Bertie Wooster is a fine lad, but sometimes morally unsound. In *The Mating Season*, Bertie remembers the lessons of his youth:

When I was a piefaced lad of some twelve summers, doing my stretch at Malvern House, Bramley-on-Sea, the private school conducted by the Rev. Aubrey Upjohn, I remember hearing the Rev. Aubrey give the late Sir Philip Sidney a big build-up because, when wounded at the battle of somewhere and offered a quick one by a companion in arms, he told the chap who was setting them up to leave him out of that round and slip his spot to a nearby stretcher-case, whose need was greater than his. This spirit of selfless sacrifice, said the Rev. Aubrey, was what he would like to see in you boys—particularly you, Wooster, and how many times have I told you not to gape at me in that half-witted way? Close your mouth, boy, and sit up.

So, for objects and actions, drinks and water, and a moral compass, the Sir Philip legend is useful for almost everything.

When Gussie in *Right Ho, Jeeves* refuses to distribute prizes, he says that “the square, generous thing to do was to step aside and let you take it on, so I did so. I felt that your need was greater than mine.”

But now we stumble upon a problem. The reference to Sir Philip Sidney has disappeared, as have the cup of water and the wounded soldier aka the stretcher case. Wodehouse does this several times, as if to say that by now everybody is familiar with the legend in his works over the past years. Examples of this abridged version of the legend follow:

Laughing Gas: “The goldfish were looking up expectantly, obviously hoping for their cut, but my need [for a breakfast leftover] was greater than theirs.” (Another reversal of the legend.)

Uncle Fred in the Springtime: Lord Ickenham says to Pongo, in reference to money for Polly Pott for the onion soup bar, “All I can say by way of apology is that her need is greater than yours.”

Quick Service: Joss Weatherby, the artist, after having his money embezzled, says that “the lawyer who

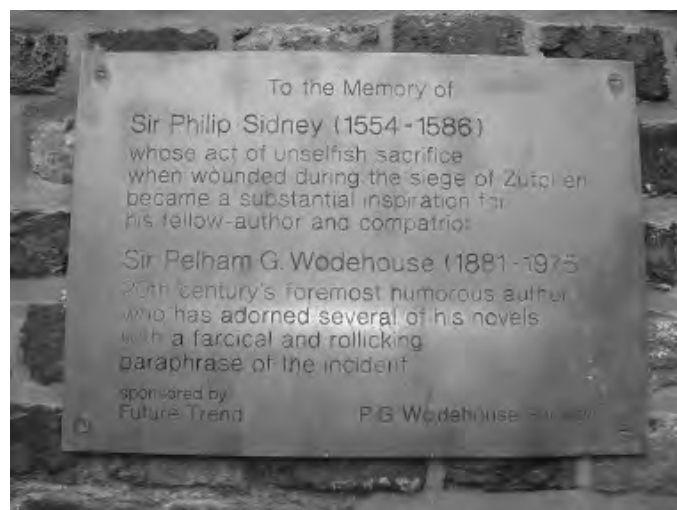


The statue of Sir Philip Sidney that stands on the lovely grounds of Sidney Park in Zutphen, The Netherlands

had charge of it [was] getting the feeling one day that his need was greater than mine.”

Barmy in Wonderland: referring to a frog in the hotel bathroom: “but that your need was greater than his. I thought it showed a nice spirit in the lad.”

Sir Philip is still remembered by the Dutch. A beautiful statue stands in Sidney Park in Zutphen and bears this inscription in Dutch: “Nobleman, Poet, Statesman, Fighter for our Freedom. Sir Philip gave his life for The Netherlands.” In Warnsveld, where Sidney was shot, there is a small marker with the famous words engraved: “Thy necessity is yet greater than mine.” And at the Gunpowder Tower in Zutphen there is this plaque, installed by the Dutch P. G. Wodehouse Society:



This is our way to show respect for two great knights and literary heroes, Sir Philip Sidney and Sir Pelham Grenville Wodehouse.

The Challenges of Brotherly Love: A Sermon by the Reverend Francis Heppenstall

CONDENSED BY DANIEL LOVE GLAZER

THE IDEAL OF brotherly love, as set forth in the sacred scriptures, implies ineluctably the existence of brothers. The Bible, that inexhaustible storehouse of inspiration and instruction, provides us with numerous examples of brothers. In this exposition, I propose to examine a number of these examples, in search of the true meaning of brotherly love.

The first pair of brothers in the Bible is Cain and Abel, and their story, alas, is not a happy one. Cain is the firstborn of Adam and Eve, and Abel is his younger brother. The milk of human kindness does not seem to flow through either one. So fierce is their mutual antagonism that Cain murders Abel, an inauspicious start for the ideal of brotherly love.

The next notable pair of brothers we encounter in that book are the twins Esau and Jacob, sons of Isaac and Rebekah. Jacob is honored as one of the patriarchs of Israel, but it could be fairly said that he is as crooked as a pretzel. Esau is the firstborn. In that time, much as today, the older son was scheduled to inherit the bulk of his father's estate. But one day Esau comes in from the field ravenously hungry. Jacob has prepared an appetizing meal of lentils and bread. Esau is so hungry that, in return for this food, he trades his birthright to Jacob. One imagines Esau saying: "I regret that I have only one stomach to devote to eating this meal." Jacob then tricks his father, Isaac, who has gone blind, into making him the principal heir. Jacob puts on Esau's goatskin clothes to disguise himself as his older brother, and thereby gets his father's blessing.

This brazen impersonation of Esau reminds me of the many impersonations perpetrated by Galahad Threepwood, as related in his *Reminiscences*. (The first version of these memoirs was unfortunately destroyed, but Mr. Threepwood wrote a second edition which he gave to his friend Frederick, Lord Ickenham, who kindly shared the manuscript with me.)

Time, the great healer, enables Esau and Jacob to eventually reconcile, but even so, their story can hardly be cited as an exemplar of brotherly love.

The next important biblical story of brothers involves Joseph and the other sons of the patriarch Jacob. Joseph is his father's favorite, and he makes his superiority clear to his brothers. The green-eyed monster gets to work among the brothers, and they plot to kill their arrogant brother in his coat of many colors.

In the end, the brothers don't kill Joseph, but sell him as a slave to the Ishmaelites, who bring him to Egypt. The brothers tell Jacob that his favorite son, Joseph, is dead. But he is not dead, and many years later, Joseph rises to high position under the Egyptian pharaoh. When Joseph's brothers come to Egypt, pleading for alms in the throes of a famine, they encounter Joseph, and once again there is a happy reconciliation. Still, here is yet another instance in which brotherly love has a tough time manifesting itself.

Let us now turn to the New Testament. Consider the parable of the Prodigal Son. You will remember that in this story the younger of two brothers goes to their father and asks in advance for his share of the inheritance that will be his upon his father's death. The father accedes to this request, and the boy takes his wealth to a far-off land. There he shows himself to be somewhat on the tabasco side. He fritters away his inheritance in riotous living. (His story reminds us of the tales of the infamous Drones Club in London, whose members often wasted what wealth they had.) When a famine comes, this son finds himself in dire straits. The only work he can find is a job feeding pigs on a farm. We are not told whether these pigs are of the Black Berkshire breed, famous for their ravenous appetites, but, in any case, pig-feeding was likely not a pleasant chore.

The boy finally comes to his senses. He decides to go home and plead with his father to accept him as a servant, since he is no longer worthy to be a son. When he does return home, his father greets him with great joy. He orders the fatted calf killed and throws a big party for his son's friends. With the party in full swing, the older son returns from a hard day's work in the field. He asks why the merriment, and a servant tells him that his brother has returned and his father is throwing a party in his honor. The older boy takes offense at this news and complains to his father. The father replies, "You could have had a party with your friends anytime you wanted. But your brother was lost to me, and now he is found!"

The parable, as related to us, does not report whether there was subsequent reconciliation between the two brothers, but my guess is that the older brother remained, if not disgruntled, at least far from gruntled.

Perhaps for true expressions of brotherly love, we need to search elsewhere than our dear Bible. There are,

of course, the heartwarming stories of the family life of the early Assyrians, but let me cite a more contemporary case: the love between Clarence Threepwood, ninth Earl of Emsworth, and his brother Galahad, as related in Galahad's *Reminiscences*. Despite being the younger brother who, in the British tradition, gets the short end of the family inheritance, Galahad demonstrates consistent and courageous loyalty to Clarence. To cite a few of Galahad's courageous deeds on behalf of his brother: He rescues Clarence from a neighbor's coal cellar; he steals the pig Pride of Matchingham from Sir Gregory Parsloe, Clarence's archrival in the Fat Pigs competition at the Shropshire Agricultural Show; and he often defies Clarence's imperious sisters on his behalf, once calling Clarence's sister Connie a "snob and a mischief maker," and speaking to her like a Dutch uncle. And when Clarence experiences a trying moment, Galahad provides a much-needed spot of brandy in his coffee.

So inspired, dearly beloved, let us still hold fast to the ideal of the brotherhood of man!

It is now time to take up our collection. The collection today is dedicated to the fund to purchase a new church organ. Frankly, our organ is in a heck of a bad way. For years it has been going around with the equivalent of holes in its socks, doing the "brother-can-you-spare-a-dime" stuff, and now it is about due to hand in its dinner pail. As a man of the cloth, I am not a betting man, but if I were, I would bet my shirt on the organ going down the drain and staying there. Will the ushers please collect our tithes and offerings?



Not So Wasted After All

JOHAN BAESCH and Evelyn Herzog found a little gem in an old review in the *New York Times* (July 8, 2012). The review was not kind to Mark Haddon's *The Red House*, but the final paragraph praised the Wodehouse Blandings books, saying you can't beat them "for deep-core contentment and unbridled comic zip." Before reaching that conclusion, reviewer Tom Shone quoted from Wodehouse's parody of "The Waste Land":

Desolation, Doom, Dyspepsia, and Despair.
I am a bat that wheels through the Air of Fate;
I am a worm that wriggles in a swamp of
Disillusionment;
I am a despairing toad;
I have got dyspepsia.

A Few Quick Ones

In the December 26, 2013, *Times* (London), Ellie Dominguez discussed the use of the word "sorry" during incidents where the person using the word is not really sorry for anything but uses it as a quick pseudo-apology. Backed by some evidence indicating that women apologize much more often than men, she concluded that over-apologizing reduces the authority of women. While tempted to just say "Sorry!" and move on, we must also note that Ms. Dominguez considered the sage advice of Wodehouse on the matter: "It is a good rule in life never to apologize. The right sort of people do not want apologies, and the wrong sort take a mean advantage of them."

In the September 5, 2013, *Daily Telegraph*, columnist Robert Colville contended that, if writers like Sebastian Faulks (who recently completed his take on Wodehouse with *Jeeves and the Wedding Bells*) must write their imitations, then they should "take the old ingredients—the familiar characters and plots—and turn them into something new." With last year's new James Bond book from William Boyd, and an upcoming version of Hercule Poirot from author Sophie Hannah, Colville says that these writers must "echo rather than mimic" else you end up with pastiche. He advocates Anthony Horowitz's first Holmes attempt as a good example, where Horowitz incorporated themes and crimes that would have been taboo in Conan Doyle's day. And he applauds efforts like Seth Grahame-Smith's "go-for-broke chutzpah with *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*," which added "all new scenes of bone-crunching zombie action." Perhaps the next paean to Wodehouse can include space aliens or vampires?

Sinclair McKay, in the August 24, 2013, *Daily Telegraph*, said that Dame Barbara Cartland's "fictional landscape was oddly similar to that of P. G. Wodehouse: the upper classes untouched by the postwar settlement." Cartland's 750 or so novels of romantic escapism, however, were "for ladies only." McKay wrote the article as yet another 160 unpublished Cartland novels were being prepared for release. Given that largesse, could there still be an undiscovered PGW story or two out there?

His knowledge of impostors told him that they seldom act from purely altruistic motives. Examine an impostor's act of kindness, and you see something with a string attached to it.

Uncle Fred in the Springtime (1939)

Romantic Plots in Wodehouse: The Greek Comedy Formula

BY DAN GARRISON

In his convention talk, Dan Garrison found the parallels between Wodehouse's complex plots and ancient Greek comedies. We're happy that he found time to share his knowledge of the classics and give us this lesson.

THROUGH MOST of his career, Wodehouse played with both romantic (e.g. "The Man Upstairs") and anti-romantic plots (e.g. "A Bit of Luck for Mabel"). The Bertie and Jeeves stories and novels can generally be counted anti-romantic. For example, Jeeves saves Bertie from the threat of marriage with Madeline Bassett, Bobbie Wickham, or other ghastly menaces.

The Blandings Castle novels contain some of the more complex romantic plots, where Galahad Threepwood and Uncle Fred Twistleton employ their wits and famous brinkmanship to enable lovers to marry.

When Wodehouse started writing novels with complex romantic plots, he used a formula that was common on the London and New York stage. But he was also familiar with the same formula from his study of Roman comedies at Dulwich College. He was two years in the sixth form, where the assigned readings prominently included comedy: not so much Greek Old Comedy, which was considered too salacious, but the so-called New Comedy in Latin adaptations by Plautus and Terence. These plays regularly featured love plots that end in marriage or some other lasting arrangement.

In these plays, love plots generally come in pairs, with contrasting relationships. One girl might turn out to be the daughter of an established citizen who had been kidnapped by pirates early in life and was raised as a courtesan. The other might have no such history, but is looking for a lasting relationship outside the control of a pimp, who blocks any affair from which he cannot profit. Their young male lovers are also contrasted in various ways. Their parents are met with surprises and discoveries, and the plays are laden with paradox.

As often occurs in comedy, the author deals in types rather than new characters constructed from scratch. Wodehouse was famous for such typecasting; in this he was working in an ancient tradition that ran from Greek comedy to the theater of his time. These types changed with the times: The pimp in New Comedy, who controlled his girls and blocked attempts to liberate them, disappeared from modern comedy, but his role as blocking figure endures. For example, we have Lord Emsworth's sisters who oppose certain unions and

insist on socially and financially profitable matches for girls under their control.

New Comedy plot formulae included:

¶ A blocking figure who opposes a romantic liaison, sometimes because a girl is not socially eligible.

¶ A facilitator (often a resourceful slave) who devises tricks to enable a romance to be permanently consummated. This cunning slave sometimes finds himself caught in a series of deceptions that are incompatible with each other. (Think of Uncle Fred or Galahad.)

¶ A sum of money needed to release a girl from the control of a pimp.

¶ Recognition scenes in which a previously ineligible girl is discovered to be the long-lost daughter of a prominent citizen.

¶ Revelations of good character in young men formerly seen as outside the pale of social acceptability, mature values, or readiness for lasting relationships.

Most of these survived into Wodehouse novels in one variant or another. Other common plot devices, such as a rape or a pregnancy, did not as a rule make their way into modern stage adaptations; they were also outside the scope of Wodehouse plots, which avoided the more direct expressions of sex.

These New Comedy plots, because they involved two young men and two young women with whom they become matched, can be called quadratic, or four-cornered. To add interest, Greek and Roman authors sometimes played with ethical contrasts—for example, between old, authoritarian methods of child-rearing with arranged marriages and new, liberal parenting styles with love matches. When these contrasts were brought to the stage in the fourth century B.C. and later, Mediterranean society was becoming more middle-class, urbanized, and liberal, with greater emphasis on better instincts in the evolution of personal character, distaste for slavery, and egalitarian concepts of human nature.

Two samples of Latin comedy will suffice to illustrate the ancient formula.

Plautus's *Mostellaria*, or *The Haunted House* (ca. 200 B.C.), was the model for Ben Jonson's masterpiece *The Alchemist* (1610). Plautus's own model was the *Phasma*, a lost Greek play by Philemon. Both women courted by the young men Philolaches and Callidamates are

courtesans. The plot hinges on a perilous series of deceptions crafted by the cunning slave Tranio to cover up the wild life Philolaches has led during the three years his father has been out of town on business. The play contrasts Philolaches's love (he has freed Philematium from slavery) with Callidamates's simple hedonism. But in the end, it is the feckless young Callidamates who plays the intercessor and persuades Theopropides to forgive his son Philolaches and his slave Tranio.

In *The Brothers* (160 B.C.), Terence's Latin adaptation of the *Adelphoi* of Menander, the playwright serves up an extended contrast of cultures. Two elderly brothers, Micio and Demea, are raising Demea's two sons, Aeschinus and Ctesipho. Micio, the younger (and more liberal) of the two old men, has raised Aeschinus. The strict, authoritarian Demea has raised Ctesipho. Aeschinus forms a liaison with a girl named Pamphila, who becomes pregnant and has a baby. His brother Ctesipho has an affair with a courtesan named Bacchis, who is controlled by the pimp Sannio.

It is learned that the liberal brother Micio's adopted son Aeschinus has been misbehaving, carrying off a girl he has taken a fancy to. Demea, the conservative, rustic father, cites this wild living as evidence of spoiled character. But for Micio, that behavior is simply "boys will be boys," and it is tolerated because there is money involved. Now, he has learned, the wild-living Aeschinus wants to marry the girl he has abducted.

In the next act, we see the high-living Aeschinus taking the initiative against Sannio, the pimp who owns his brother Ctesipho's girl Bacchis. Micio's slave Syrus persuades Sannio to cut his losses and make his escape to Cyprus. The less enterprising young brother Ctesipho is grateful to the enterprising Aeschinus for doing all the dirty work to get control of Bacchis.

In the third act, Aeschinus's girl Pamphila is in labor with his baby. Pamphila's guardian Sostrata has a ring of Aeschinus's as proof he is the father. The clever slave Syrus fabricates a story to appease the angry father Demea. Sostrata's relative Hegio tells about Aeschinus's rape of Pamphila, and about his immediate remorse.

In the final act, the cunning slave Syrus promises to handle the rustic father Demea and cover up for Ctesipho, who has shown so little initiative. Demea is sent off on a wild goose chase. Micio reproaches Aeschinus for not admitting his indiscretions, but consents to Aeschinus' marriage to Pamphila. He will admit Ctesipho's girl Bacchis to live in his household together with Aeschinus and Pamphila.

Demea's revenge on his liberal brother Micio is to have the wall between Micio and Sostrata's houses torn down; Micio must marry Sostrata, give her relative

Hegio life interest in a piece of land, and grant Syrus and his wife their freedom and some money to start them off. Micio is thus forced to be more liberal and generous than he ever expected to be. "I'm cutting his throat with his own knife!" says Demea.

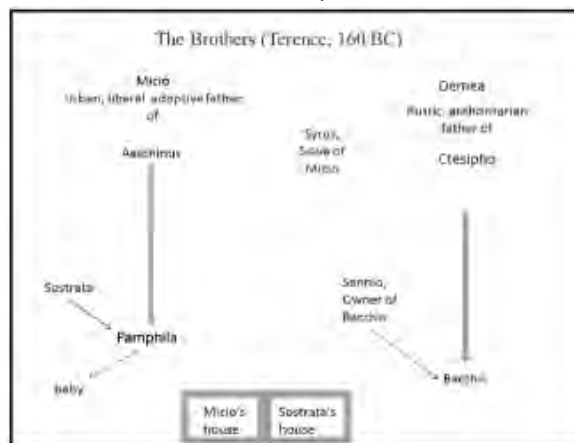


Diagram of the plot of Terence's *The Brothers*

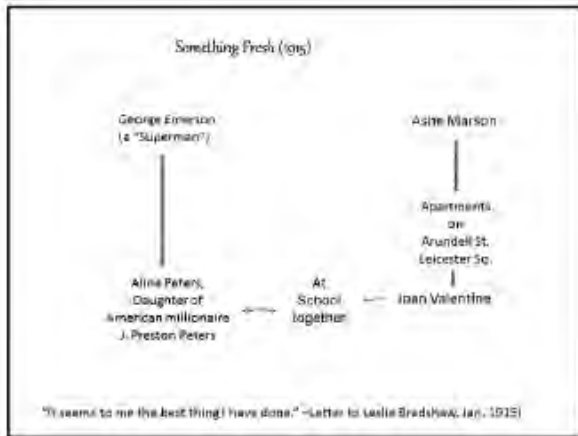
It is easy to see how these character types evolved into the personalities of the Blandings novels. The cunning slave becomes Galahad Threepwood or Lord Ickenham, whose instinct for brinkmanship in deception provides comic zest and speeds romantic success. The pimp transforms into one of Lord Emsworth's sisters, who blocks marriages that do not promise social profit. The rustic vs. urban brothers appear as Lord Emsworth vs. Galahad Threepwood, respectively. The slave girl with whom the young man falls in love is reincarnated as the chorus girl.

The slave girl's archetype is Dolly Henderson, the cause of Galahad being sent off to South Africa some years before the Blandings novels. Now dead, she is the mother of Sue Brown in *Fish Preferred / Summer Lightning* (1929) and *Heavy Weather* (1933). In Wodehouse's hands, this character becomes more interesting than she ever was in the ancient comedies.

The pattern from ancient comedy appears with the first Blandings novel, *Something Fresh / Something New* (1915), with enough of the classic features to make it look like a knockoff. First, the two love stories are clearly contrasted. On one side, a high-ranking officer in the Hong Kong Police, George Emerson, is in love with a millionaire's daughter, Aline Peters. On the other, Ashe Marson, who holds "a sort of degree from Oxford," is a hack writer for the Mammoth Publishing Company. His love interest, Joan Valentine, was the daughter of a rich father who died suddenly, leaving her nothing. A former chorus girl, she is also a hack writer for Mammoth, where she writes short stories for *Home Gossip*. Both have apartments in the same building.

A second important feature is that the contrasted romantic pairs are somehow linked. Joan was at school with Aline, where they were close friends.

That isn't the only plot in *Something Fresh*, and not even the best one. It is only a kind of framework. There's also Lord Emsworth's absent-minded theft of J. Preston Peters's scarab and the attempts to steal it back. There are the impersonations, which were to become thematic for the Blandings novels: Ashe Marson poses as J. Preston Peters's valet, and Joan pretends to be Aline Peters's maid Simpson.



Something Fresh

It was fourteen years before Wodehouse wrote another Blandings novel, and when he did he added several classical flourishes to the quadratic plot. *Fish Preferred / Summer Lightning* gives us another pair of male suitors pursuing two women. Hugo Carmody wants to marry Millicent Threepwood, and Ronnie Fish loves the incomparable Sue Brown, daughter of the late Dolly Henderson. This plot is not only quadratic but chiasmic, because the male lovers are like the girls on the other side of the equation. Hugo and Sue are outsiders who have no fortunes; Ronnie and Millicent are aristocrats with money.

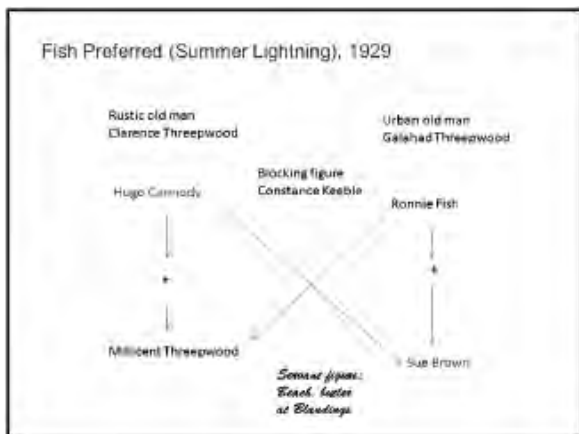


Diagram of the plot from *Fish Preferred*

Moreover, Hugo and Ronnie are linked by their partnership in a recently failed venture in a night club called the Hot Spot. By way of contrast, Clarence Threepwood corresponds to the classical rustic old man while his brother Galahad is the urban old man, linked to Sue Brown via her late mother Dolly Henderson. The blocking figure, who opposes the union of the "quite ineligible" Hugo Carmody with Millicent Threepwood, is the Blandings chatelaine Lady Constance.

In this novel, Wodehouse begins to work physical descriptions into his plot patterns, true to his growing tendency to see his stories in terms of a stage play. Millicent is tall while Sue, by contrast, is described as a "tiny thing." When Lady Constance proposes that Ronnie should marry Millicent, the tall Millicent objects that if she walked down the aisle with Ronnie she would appear to be taking a little brother for a walk. So we have one romance of tall lovers and one of short lovers.

The servant figure who acts as intermediary is Beach, the butler at Blandings. Though Beach is anything but a cunning slave, he plays a role in this story that fits the tradition of a servile fixer who doesn't want to offend.

In *Heavy Weather* (1933), Ronnie Fish's pursuit of Sue Brown continues, showing that romances in Wodehouse do not have to end immediately in marriage. The story takes us as far as a betrothal in this novel; they are man and wife in *The Luck of the Bodkins* (1935). In *Heavy Weather*, two Threepwood sisters are trying to block the romance: Lady Constance Keeble and Ronnie's mother Julia Fish.

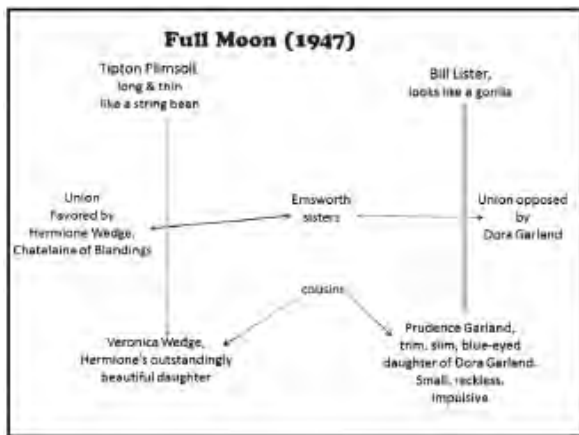
Ronnie and Sue, the small lovers, are contrasted with tall, slender, lissom Monty Bodkin and his beloved Gertrude Butterwick, a beefy girl with large feet who plays hockey. As their body types might suggest, this mismatch does not end in marriage. Gertrude's father imposes the condition that Monty must hold down a job for a full year, a requirement he cannot satisfy.

To link the two pairs, we learn that Monty Bodkin was once engaged to Sue Brown. In continuity with *Fish Preferred*, Hugo Carmody (Monty's one-time partner in the failed Hot Spot) is now employed as Lord Emsworth's secretary.

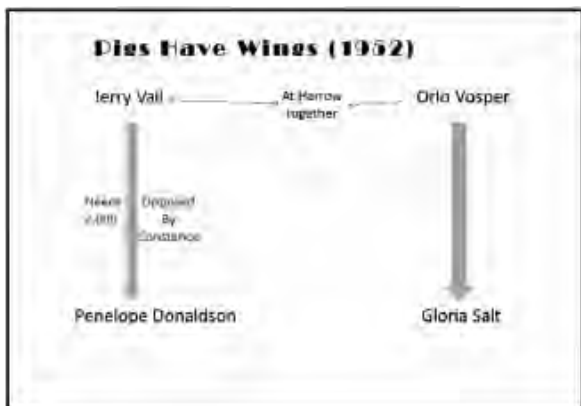
Uncle Fred in the Springtime (1939) brings in Frederick Twistleton, 5th Earl of Ickenham, as the manipulator in place of Galahad Threepwood; the two are functional equivalents. The two romantic young men are contrasted by their bodily build: Horace Pendlebury-Davenport is tall and narrow, "but lacking the width of shoulder and ruggedness of limb which make height impressive." His opposite number is Ricky Gilpin, who is described as "beefy." The tall, narrow

Horace is matched with Uncle Fred's niece: Pongo's sister, Valerie Twistleton, who is a tall match for him. The beefy Ricky Gilpin is less perfectly matched with little Polly Pott, daughter of stout detective Claude Pott.

In *Full Moon* (1947), the tall, thin Tipton Plimsoll contrasts with Bill Lister, who looks like a gorilla. The women they love are more alike. The outstandingly beautiful but mentally comical Veronica Wedge is the cousin of Prudence Garland, who is slim and blue-eyed but reckless and impulsive. Veronica's acceptance of Tipton Plimsoll is favored by her mother, Hermione Wedge, chatelaine of Blandings, but Prudence Garland's attraction to Bill Lister is opposed by her mother, Dora Garland. (Dora and Hermione are two of Lord Emsworth's sisters.) The play of parallels and contrasts is fully in the ancient tradition of New Comedy.



Pigs Have Wings (1952) seems at first to have lost interest in the double plot. But the ancient pattern emerges with Orlo Vosper's romance with Gloria Salt, paralleling Jerry Vail's romance with Penelope Donaldson (opposed by Connie, who hopes Orlo will marry Penny). Jerry needs money (£2000) to open a health-cure establishment before he can marry Penny. This will be supplied by Lord Emsworth in gratitude for Jerry's presumed role in restoring the Empress.



As usual, Wodehouse pays attention to the look of his romantic characters. Penelope Donaldson and

Gloria Salt are well matched in appearance: the former is described as “a small, slender girl with fair hair who looked as if she might have been a wood nymph.” Gloria is a tennis athlete, “tall and slim and the last word in languorous elegance,” with a “dark beauty that makes her look like a serpent of the old Nile.”

Orlo “looks like a screen star. . . . a tall, superbly built young man whose dark, Byronic beauty made him look like something that had eluded the vigilance of the front office and escaped from the Metro-Goldwyn lot.” Jerry Vail plays a weak second, mildly described as “rather nice-looking” when compared to most authors.

If asked what Blandings title uses a word coined by John Foster Dulles, your answer should be *The Brinkmanship of Galahad Threepwood*, later published in the U.K. as *Galahad at Blandings* (1965). Originally defined by the cold war Secretary of State as “the ability to get to the verge without getting into the war,” brinkmanship can also be described as the taking of unacceptable risks. The earliest brinkmanship antedates the atomic age and could easily define the cunning slave's craft in ancient New Comedy no less than Gally's instinct for deceptions that are almost certain to be discovered, e.g., by a Blandings chatelaine.

The two primary suitors, Tipton Plimsoll and Wilfred Allsop, are physically contrasted, the former tall and thin and the latter short and thin. They are introduced in the first paragraph, sharing a cell in one of New York's popular police stations. The tall, thin Tipton is still the accepted suitor of the gorgeous but mentally challenged Veronica Wedge, as previously seen in *Full Moon*. We soon learn that Wilfred is Veronica's cousin—in accordance with the tendency to link members of one couple to the other. His link to Blandings Castle consists in his infatuation with the Empress's pig girl Monica Simmons.

This is a physical mismatch: Wilfred is pint-size and fragile, rather like the poet Shelley in appearance, while Monica looks like an all-in wrestler or a Norse goddess, depending on one's point of view. “She's so majestic, and I'm such a little squirt,” he laments.

Tipton and Wilfred are contrasted in wealth, the former having inherited a large fortune from a rich uncle invested in Tipton's Stores, while the latter is a penniless musician whose aunt has found him a position teaching music in a girls' school run by Daphne Winkworth.

There is a third romantic couple in this novel—something that might have troubled the ancient comedians. This pair is also a physical mismatch. Sandy Callender, employed as Lord Emsworth's secretary, is an agreeable sight: “Her figure was trim, her nose and mouth above criticism and her hair that attractive red

that Titian used to admire so much.” She is quarreling with her betrothed, Samuel Galahad Bagshott. He is large, chunky, and battle-worn: a fondness for boxing has left his nose a little out of the straight and one of his ears twisted. Sam has a connection with Tipton Plimsoll, having placed a bet at the Drones that he would be the next member to get married.

The triple-romance picture is additionally complicated by what may as well be called an anti-romance: Schoolmistress Dame Daphne Winkworth is determined to renew Clarence’s interest in her as a mate. This is, of course, a nonstarter for more reasons than the historian would care to enumerate.

Wodehouse returned to the two-romance formula for *A Pelican at Blandings* (1969). Arguably, the pivotal figure is the obnoxious Alaric, Duke of Dunstable. His vices are too many to enumerate, but we can gauge his depravity from Lady Constance’s sisterly affection for him and the loathing shared by Clarence and Galahad. In the present novel he is a double-blocking figure and is again opposed by Galahad, whose adoption of the enabling role played by the clever slave in Greco-Roman comedy is already well-known. A notable anomaly here is that it breaks the rule that a romantic figure marries *en premières noces*, as Wilbur Trout has been married three times previously.

John Halliday, a godson of Galahad, is a trim, fit, athletic-looking young barrister, just now engaged to Alaric’s niece Linda Gilpin. The pair is well-matched, she being slender and blue-eyed, with chestnut hair. But a rift has arisen because John discredited her testimony in the action of *Clutterbuck v. Frisby*. This rift is healed, but Linda reveals she is a ward of the court who cannot marry without the consent of whoever is *in loco parentis*—none other than Linda’s uncle Alaric.

Alaric, whom Galahad describes as a human walrus, becomes interested in Vanessa Polk because he imagines her as fantastically wealthy, mistaking her for the daughter of the financial emperor J. B. Polk when she is in fact the daughter of a former valet, P. P. Polk. Vanessa’s actual suitor is the millionaire Wilbur Trout, and this pair become the subject of the second romance.

On the final page of *A Pelican at Blandings*, when all obstacles to the two romances have been cleared away, Galahad remarks that it makes him feel “as if I were sitting in at the end of a play, one of those charming delicate things the French do so well.” He might have said the Romans.

When Wodehouse died in 1974, he left *Sunset at Blandings* incomplete, a fragment of 183 pages of notes and drafts in addition to sixteen of the twenty-two chapters planned and written. It is an instructive

fragment: no fewer than four romances are sketched in and only one fully developed, complete with a blocking figure played by Clarence’s sister Florence. If we may be guided by the earlier Blandings novels, we may guess that only one of the three sketched in would survive the editorial harrow.

For one who never attended university, Wodehouse is seen from his countless literary tags to have forgotten little of what he read. As is evident from the examples presented here, he also remembered plot structures, which he encountered both in his early study of the classics and in the theater of his time. Carrying on, and adding to, the traditional plot structures from the ancient works, Wodehouse created new classics of the twentieth century.

Girls were passing now in shoals. They meant nothing to Ronnie Fish. He eyed them sourly, marvelling why the papers talked about “beauty choruses.” And then, at last, there appeared one at the sight of whom his heart, parting from its moorings, began to behave like a jumping bean.

Fish Preferred (1929)

Our Oldest Member?

BY LYNETTE POSS

AHEM. I WOULD like to humbly and modestly call attention to a recent momentous event: the 100th birthday, on April 11, 2014, of the Oldest Member (as far as we know) of The Wodehouse Society. My father, Edwin R. (Bob) Adams, found himself in a celebratory mood at the festive event which commemorated his birth. Family and friends came out to a local seafood restaurant where one could order an oyster or two, unmottled if that’s how you prefer them. The highlight was when we gathered around the cake with candles burning, in order to sing the copyrighted song which tradition suggests for the occasion.

In addition to being a founding member of our chapter, The Mottled Oyster (/Jellied Eel), Bob has made it his lifetime hobby to locate and order Wodehouse books. He has amassed an impressive collection of over 300 PGW works. A majority of his volumes are first editions, and one favorite is a copy of *The Cat-nappers* that comes from Plum’s personal library and was autographed by Elizabeth Taylor. My brother Clark and I have even shared in the bounty when a second edition becomes available to us. (We in the MO/JE chapter pride ourselves in collecting second editions, don’t you know.) So happy birthday, GrandBob, aka The Oldest Member, and many more!

Psmith in Pseattle: 2015

PSSST. Psmith in Pseattle, the eighteenth convention of The Wodehouse Society, is coming October 29–November 1, 2015. The wheeze will be at the Fairmont Olympic Hotel in downtown Pseattle. The folks at Anglers’ Rest have big plans, but it’s early yet, so watch this pspace for more news. You can join the Facebook group “TWS 2015 Seattle” for info as it develops. If you’re on that series of tubes known as the interweb, you can find info at <http://tws2015seattle.org>. It’s too early to register for rooms, but have a look at the convention hotel’s website at <http://www.fairmont.com/seattle/>.

Not as Elementary as It Seems

IN OUR SPRING *Plum Lines*, the Chapter One report stated that the Sherlock Holmes quote “Elementary, my dear Watson” was first used not by Arthur Conan Doyle, but by PGW in an installment of *Psmith, Journalist* in the January 1910 issue of *The Captain*. Peter Blau responded (through Capital! Capital! scribe Scott Daniels) and produced a reference from the Richmond, Virginia, *Times Dispatch* of Aug. 24, 1909, that proves that the phrase was used in print earlier. Norman Murphy thought there might have been such a reference in William Gillette’s 1899 reworking of Conan Doyle’s Holmes play. However, Neil Midkiff found the Gillette plays online (at <http://www.diogenes-club.com/plays.htm>). The 1899 script of the play *Sherlock Holmes* has only one “elementary” reference in Act 2: “HOLMES: Ho! (*sneer*) Elementary! The child’s play of deduction!” So, for now, credit for finding the earliest full ref of the “my dear Watson” version goes to Peter!

Contents

- 1 Wodehouse and the Girl Friends
- 6 Chapters Corner
- 11 Letter from England
- 12 Katherine Lewis
- 13 A Tale of Two Knights: Sir Philip Sidney and Sir Pelham Grenville Wodehouse
- 17 The Challenges of Brotherly Love:
A Sermon by the Reverend Francis Heppenstall
- 18 Not So Wasted After All
- 18 A Few Quick Ones
- 19 Romantic Plots in Wodehouse:
The Greek Comedy Formula
- 23 Our Oldest Member?
- 24 Psmith in Pseattle: 2015
- 24 Not as Elementary as It Seems

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We appreciate your articles, research, Quick Ones, tales of My First Time, 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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