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On the Modern Wodehouse Reader: The Psychology of the Individual

BY JENN SCHEPPERS

It's all a question of what Jeeves calls
the psychology of the individual.

Joy in the Morning

FIRST, MY THANKS to The Wodehouse Society and our Pseattle hosts for inviting me to speak. I feel incredibly honored and humbled to be in the company of Wodehouse experts. I'm speaking to you as a fellow enthusiast who has been reading and collecting Wodehouse for over twenty years—hardly noteworthy in this company, but something which made me a relative expert in Australia, where I lived for forty years. Few Australians have heard of Wodehouse. Hopefully this is changing now, with the Everyman editions making his books widely available, but I can count on less than one hand the number of readers of Wodehouse I met while living there. The first fellow Australian enthusiast I ever met was Tim Richards—yesterday, here in Seattle.

The search for kindred souls influenced my decision to move to England three years ago, and it has been a pleasure to finally meet other Wodehouseans in person. Most people in Britain know P. G. Wodehouse by name and reputation, even if they're unfamiliar with his work. Unfortunately, what they think they know about Wodehouse is sometimes misguided.

On the subject of the modern Wodehouse reader, I have some experience as an administrator of the Fans of P. G. Wodehouse Facebook group, and writer of a Wodehouse blog called *Plumtopia*. I know some of you



*Jenn Scheppers (aka Honoria Glossop aka Mrs. Plum)
at the Psmith in Pseattle convention*

are more immersed in this world than others, so I'd like to provide an overview of where you might find the modern Wodehouse reader online.

Like Bertie Wooster's London, the internet provides us with a plethora of clubs to be joined according to the tastes and psychology of the individual. PGWnet and the Blandings Yahoo! group are our most distinguished clubs, with quality interiors and first-class dining. Members can recline and quietly soak up the atmosphere among experts and serious enthusiasts. It's a privilege and delight to be accepted as a member.

Twitter is the least discriminating forum. Membership is freely available to anyone with a keyboard and an opinion and, as comments on the subject of Wodehouse are not restricted to experts and enthusiasts, misguided ideas about Wodehouse often appear. Contradict these at your peril. In terms of

member behavior, Twitter is where you're most likely to be laid out cold like a side of roast beef.

Facebook is the Dover Street of the online club world, with multiple Wodehouse groups and pages. The Fans of P. G. Wodehouse group, the largest and most active Wodehouse group that I'm aware of, has over 10,000 members. I'm one of a gang of administrators, overseen by a chap called Rajkumar Brian Rajamanie. If you're a member, you will know me as Honoria Glossop.

The content in this group varies in tone and quality, from new research by expert members such as John Dawson to Wodehouse quotations, personal anecdotes from members, questions, opinions, and Wodehouse-related links. New Wodehouse readers often seek advice on what to read, making this noteworthy as a place where new readers and enthusiasts meet. It's not one of your more peaceful clubs or a place of quiet repose. Indeed, the ever-present hum of conversation is apt to become boisterous, but for an online group of its size and diversity it is remarkably civilized. It is also an invaluable source of information on the modern Wodehouse reader.

Another useful internet site is Goodreads, which is rather addictive: you can keep track of your reading, with book reviews and discussion. It's a great place to discover what new and casual readers think about Wodehouse, and there's a Wodehouse discussion group.

Wordpress is one of many blogging communities (Blogspot is another) where people write about life, literature, and, occasionally, Wodehouse. I mention Wordpress because it's the site I use for my blog, *Plumtopia*, which now has over 650 followers. It isn't a significant following by blogging standards, but far exceeds any expectations I had when I started writing, mostly to myself, five years ago. I also keep an eye on what other bloggers are writing about Wodehouse, and share their work where I can. Of particular note, I must mention a gentleman called Ashok Bhatia, based in India, who writes regularly and enthusiastically about Wodehouse.

My original idea behind *Plumtopia* was not to blog about P. G. Wodehouse. Rather, it began with a sense of dissatisfaction with modern life and the wistful search for something better—not a particular place, or time, or political system, but something that I couldn't put a name to. So I called it *Plumtopia*—a world inspired by P. G. Wodehouse. This was because, although I live in the 21st century and am vaguely capable of speaking about the modern Wodehouse reader, I don't feel connected with the modern world at all. I couldn't, for example, identify Kim Kardashian in a police lineup or whistle any of her tunes. And I have found this to be a feeling

that many others share, including Wodehouse himself through a character in *Joy in the Morning*: "He then said something about modern enlightened thought which I cannot repeat."

Although Wodehouse appeals to us first and foremost on his own merit, it seems that many of his readers yearn for a different world. Many of us are nostalgic for the past. We are not all nostalgic for the *same* past, but we share a sense that once upon a time life was more innocent, public life less sordid, and the rules of politeness and grammar were understood and applied. Many of us are nostalgic about place, but we are not nostalgic for the same place, although our ranks include many Anglophiles who enjoy *Downton Abbey* and take an interest in the royal family. Some yearn for opulence and fantasize about living in one of the great houses, dining on Anatole's cooking. Others, like Comrade Bingo's Heralds of the Red Dawn, are yearning for the revolution. It's all a question of the psychology of the individual.

We have a natural desire for escapism, it is said. How should we defend ourselves against the charge that Wodehouse is escapist fiction? My response is to reject the assumption that escapism is a bad thing. Life is stern and life is earnest. For some, reading Wodehouse is the icing on the cake of a happy life, but for many he is a lifeline in a troubled world. Wodehouse provides us, in just a few pages, what the emerging field of positive psychology has yet to crack. Evelyn Waugh put it best:

Mr. Wodehouse's idyllic world can never stale.
He will continue to release future generations
from captivity that may be more irksome than
our own. He has made a world for us to live in
and delight in.

So, who is this bally modern Wodehouse reader I keep mentioning? A full demographic analysis is not possible within the scope of this talk, but some general points can be made—and, importantly, a few myths dispelled—by reviewing the membership of the Fans of P. G. Wodehouse Facebook group. We're incredibly diverse. We even have a panda. His name is Frank.

The first point that's clear from the group is that Wodehouse continues to appeal to readers young and old. We have a healthy age distribution of members from students to retirees, and many members recount discovering Wodehouse at a young age. One of my favorite stories of discovery comes from *Wooster Sauce*, told by Helena Ruff, who was just fifteen when she wrote a piece reminiscing about her discovery of Wodehouse as a five-year-old.

The group also provides clear evidence that Wodehouse is read and loved by both men and women. Wodehouse's appeal to women shouldn't come as a surprise to us, but an idea persists that Wodehouse's attitude to women and his female characters are outdated and won't appeal to modern readers. We can reject these charges. I want to reinforce the ideas Elin Woodger Murphy put forward in her Psmith in Pseattle talk, "P. G. Wodehouse, Feminist," and confirm that Wodehouse has a large and very enthusiastic female following online. [We'll publish Elin's talk in the September issue, so stay subscribed!—Ed.]

We are a geographically and culturally diverse group. The Fans of P. G. Wodehouse group has members from around the world. Statistics for my blog *Plumtopia* (courtesy of Wordpress) indicate it has been read in 108 countries this year, with most readers based in the USA, the U.K., and India. This falls a long way short of representing all Wodehouse fans, but is indicative of the spread of Wodehouse readers around the globe.

Wodehouse's readers, like his characters, come from different social and economic spheres of life. Some are eye-poppingly oofy. Most of us are more limited in our resources. Our ranks include teachers, nurses, bankers, students, supermarket workers, gardeners, and invalids. Happily, the online world enables us to connect with the wider Wodehouse-loving community, including readers who may not have the ability or desire to attend conventions—or to even join a society.

My grandmother told me never to discuss religion, sex, or politics with strangers and I've always taken that to be sound advice, but I do want to break that rule briefly in order to recognize the diversity of Wodehouse readers on these points. Wodehouse is beloved by people of various faiths and those with no faith at all. He is also beloved by gay and lesbian readers—a healthy sign that Wodehouse is a writer with the capacity to appeal to the modern audience, who have a broad range of literature to choose from and will certainly reject authors who present outdated ideas that restrict individual freedom.

On matters of politics, Wodehouse has been championed (in the U.K., at least) by politicians and commentators on both the left and right, and this diversity of opinion is reflected among Wodehouse's fans online. In the Fans of P. G. Wodehouse Facebook group, people of not just diverse but opposing political views gather en masse and manage to get along. I'm not being entirely flippant when I suggest the world might be a better place if its troubles were entrusted

to Wodehouse enthusiasts. It's the sort of ideal I am thinking about when I use the term "Plumtopia."

Some of these points I have made will seem obvious to you. Indeed, I hope they are obvious, because my aim is to debunk a particular stereotype of the modern Wodehouse reader that exists in the U.K.—that despite our diversity, the Wodehouse reader is predominantly posh, and that Wodehouse wrote exclusively for and about the moneyed classes (predominantly men). Examples of this misguided belief pop up often.

The following extract came from an article written by Lucy Mangan in the June 15, 2015, *Guardian* called "How to Pass the Posh Test." It began with the serious point that although only 7% of the U.K. population is privately educated, they collar a disproportionately large chunk of the best jobs. The article goes on to offer some amusing advice on how the rest of us might improve our career prospects by appearing more posh than we are. At which point poor Wodehouse is lugged into the argument:

There isn't a list of books to read that will enable you to fake your way through posh. The instinct . . . is to work your way through the classics and some Booker winners, because they're highbrow. . . . The only flaw in this plan is that most posh people are thick. . . . Posh people have all read Wodehouse (the Psmith books as well as Jeeves and Wooster, if you really want to fart about with the best of them).

There are modern Wodehouse readers who fit the posh stereotype, and good luck to them—I wish them well. But as a stereotype it does not ring true. The evidence is clear that Wodehouse appeals to an extraordinary range of people.

Does it matter? I believe so, because the posh concept misrepresents Wodehouse as someone who can only be understood by an elite audience; as someone who represents an idealized view of the aristocracy; as a name to be associated with snobbery; as nothing more than an upper-class twit who wrote about upper-class twits, for the benefit of same. Anyone familiar with Wodehouse, as we are, knows the charges are ridiculous, but such ideas are in circulation (in Britain at least) and if they remain unchallenged there's a risk he will be considered by future generations as a writer of interest to the 7% rather than to us all. So I do think it's a view worth challenging, in a dignified and humorous sort of way.



Leaving the reading habits of the posh to one side, let's look at what else the modern Wodehouse reader is reading. I asked members of the Fans of P. G. Wodehouse Facebook group to nominate their favorite authors and to "like" suggestions put forward by others. From this little experiment I collated a list of fifty authors (from a long list of around 250) that Wodehouse fans love to read. A clear favorite emerged in Agatha Christie.

The second- and third-placed authors may come as a surprise—not Dickens or Doyle or even Kipling, but a couple of relatively modern writers in Douglas Adams and Terry Pratchett. If you haven't read them, you may be puzzled to understand the connection between modern science-fiction fantasy and Wodehouse. The answer lies in their humor. Douglas Adams, as I'm sure you know, was a great Wodehouse lover, and Terry Pratchett was a fitting winner of the Bollinger Everyman Wodehouse Prize for Comic Fiction. Importantly, both authors have been a pathway for new readers to discover Wodehouse. Many readers my age will have read one or both of these authors before discovering Wodehouse.

The next author in our top five brings us firmly into the world of the classics: Jane Austen. Wodehouse was reputedly not a fan, but I am, as are many other Wodehouse readers. Rounding off our top five was Jerome K. Jerome. I read *Three Men in a Boat* for the first time following a recommendation from another Wodehouse reader (to whom I am greatly indebted). It's easy to see how he appeals to Wodehouse fans. You can read the full list at *Plumtopia*.

I have singled out reading habits because I'm interested in how the modern reader first encounters Wodehouse, how our prior reading builds a pathway to Wodehouse, and what we can do to help new readers discover him. I believe the answer, again, comes down to the psychology of the individual. To explore this idea further, I want to bung in a bit of educational psychology—specifically, the theories of Jerome Bruner and Lev Vygotsky.

The nub of the thing is that people learn best when they have sufficient prior experience or knowledge to place this new information in context. The natty diagram below (courtesy of Wikipedia) puts the learner in the center. This learner can do a lot of things without assistance—construct simple sentences, basic mental arithmetic—because he or she has sufficient knowledge. In the outer circle, there are things this learner can't do, like translate Wodehouse into Swahili or fly an airplane, or at least not both at same time. In between are things that can be learned with a little assistance. This middle zone is that which Vygotsky referred to in his lighter moments as the Zone of Proximal Development.



The message for educators is to start by understanding what the learner already knows in order to extend that knowledge. We can apply this theory to the discovery of Wodehouse. If your prior reading has included British authors, humorists, and examples of nineteenth- and twentieth-century writing, you should not find Wodehouse challenging. But not all new and potential Wodehouse readers are in this zone.

For younger readers this is particularly true. The world of Wodehouse and much of the terminology he uses will be unfamiliar to them. They wouldn't immediately know a crumpet, let alone a spat. The early twentieth century is as distant to them as the Roman Empire, and it's not just technology and terminology that has changed. Writing styles have changed, too. Today's reader, accustomed to a modern literary diet, may never have come across anything so exotic as a semicolon in the wild. We cannot simply bung Wodehouse into the Christmas stocking and expect him to click. There is preparatory spadework required.

To give you an example, this extract comes from a book that my nine-year-old daughter brought home from school. It's Rachel Renée Russell's *Dork Diaries: Once Upon a Dork*. The series is incredibly popular.

The music started up again, and Brandon took my hand and led me onto the dance floor.
OMG!
Dancing with him was SO romantic.

The sentences are short and simple, the language utterly modern, and the reader is not challenged with any complex punctuation. The leap from *Dork Diaries* to Wodehouse is much bigger than the leap I once made from Kenneth Grahame, Enid Blyton, and Agatha Christie. We may need to prepare new readers—not just young readers, but modern adult readers also—by introducing a broader range of writers into their diet to help bridge the gap and build a pathway to Wodehouse.

Our approach to introducing Wodehouse should be tailored to the psychology of the individual. My pathway was through Enid Blyton's Famous Five stories, Agatha Christie, Jane Austen, and George Bernard Shaw. Many modern readers love sci-fi fantasy, making Terry Pratchett excellent prior reading. His work offers a diverse range of characters that appeal to male and female readers of all ages, including those with a taste for vampires and werewolves.

Romance continues to be a bestselling genre with modern readers, particularly women, and past writers like Jane Austen remain incredibly popular. For readers who enjoy historical romance with strong female characters and intelligent humor, the transition to Wodehouse should be easy. Wodehouse's romantic heroines are women of spirit. Indeed, they have more pep and ginger than most of the insipid 21st-century heroines we are expected to identify with.

Wodehouse's romantic heroes are perhaps a little more humble and ordinary, a little less dashing than Mr. Darcy, although three Wodehouse characters (Jeeves, Bertie Wooster, and Gussie Fink-Nottle) appeared in an internet list of 111 sexually appealing literary men. Astonishing! And there is a Wodehouse hero who consistently pops up in Facebook discussion as a favorite with the ladies—Rupert Psmith. But the modern romance reader may only know of Wodehouse—if she knows of him at all—as the creator of Jeeves, and not as a writer of comedy romance. So why not start your romance-loving friends with a dash of *Something Fresh* instead? Or *Leave It to Psmith* or *Piccadilly Jim*, *Quick Service*—the list goes on. It's all a matter of the psychology of the individual.

The modern reader's road to Plum also involves film and television. These can bridge the gap between Wodehouse's world and the modern one. Well-produced films or television series set in the early twentieth century help to develop our contextual knowledge of a place and time which we cannot experience firsthand, as well as to experience the British sense of humor.

The various adaptations of Wodehouse also play a part. In particular, the *Jeeves and Wooster* series has guided many new readers to Wodehouse. One lovely story of discovery was recounted in *Wooster Sauce* by Alex Connolly, who fell in love with the television series as a boy and overcame dyslexia and reading difficulties through sheer determination to read Wodehouse in print. He has since gone on to read Wodehouse widely.

Which leads me to one final myth that can now hopefully be debunked. There is a view often put forward on Facebook that someone either "gets" Wodehouse or they don't, and that Wodehouse can only

be understood by those of us in possession of superior taste and intellect. It's an appealing thought. I've spent most of my life under the misapprehension that in spite of all the evidence, I am an undiscovered literary genius. Many people believe that superior English language abilities are necessary to fully appreciate Wodehouse, or that an education in the classics helps the cause.

These advantages certainly put you in the best possible position to enjoy everything Wodehouse has to offer. But if we think back to Vygotsky's Zone of Whatsit, the rest of us can bridge the gap, even if we miss the subtleties the first time around. Until Bill Scrivener's convention talk today on pale young curates, I didn't know my orphreys from my chasubles, but that hasn't stopped me from falling in love with Wodehouse, or from expanding my knowledge through Wodehouse with the help of the wonderful Madame Eulalie annotations. Wodehouse is no more the province of an intellectual elite than he is an economic one.

So you may see me on Facebook from time to time wading into such discussions and advocating caution. We must guard against snobbery of any kind or we risk sounding like a meeting of the Wood Hills Literary Society. Let the world of Wodehouse be open to all, so we can say to the new reader, "Come in, come in. This is Liberty Hall!" That is certainly how I have been welcomed here today, and I shall endeavor to continue that spirit in the wide online world.

The diversity of Wodehouse's readership is a healthy sign for the future. His legacy does not rest in the hands of a few. It's already safely in the hands of the many. We may not know our orphreys from our chasubles, but thankfully we can turn for advice to experts and serious enthusiasts—like you!

Not Sir Roderick

MURRAY HEDGCOCK spotted a misstep in the Spring 2016 *Plum Lines*. On page 2 of the lead article by Robert McCrum (*Wodehouse in Wonderland*), Murray noticed that Roderick Spode carried the title of "Sir." Oops, we say. Spode was never knighted. According to expert Neil Midkiff: "All references to Spode are lacking any indication of knighthood or baronetage. He apparently jumped straight into an earldom (seventh Earl of Sidcup) on the death of an uncle, so we assume that he had no courtesy title (e.g., Viscount something-or-other) before that time because he was a nephew rather than a son." Murray hereby wins this issue's Citizen's Eagle Eye Award.

Wodehouse Penmanship

BY JOHN DAWSON

John Dawson is a founding member of the P. G. Wodehouse Globe Reclamation Project, which published the two-volume set Wodehouse in the Globe Newspaper (GRP Publications) in September 2015.

“My handwriting is shaky this morning. I am much disturbed, much disturbed.” (Sir Godfrey Tanner in Wodehouse’s “Creatures of Impulse,” 1914)

GRAPHOLOGY IS the study and analysis of handwriting, especially in relation to human psychology. Although graphology had some support in the scientific community before the mid-20th century, studies testing the ability of handwriting analysts to assess personality or potential job performance have been inconclusive or negative. As a pseudo-science, handwriting analysis is controversial. One important study concluded that the “overall level of originality, beauty, harmony, style, etc., of a person’s handwriting can be perceived but not measured.”

Having inserted that disclaimer up front, I confess to curiosity about the idea that certain personality traits can be discerned through one’s handwriting, and dabbled a bit in that type of analysis many years ago. My interest in the subject was rekindled when I began to pore over the handwritten pages in Wodehouse’s “Money Received for Literary Work” notebook from 1900–1908. I submitted a few pages to Deb Peddy, president of the American Handwriting Analysis Foundation from 2008 to 2012. Deb agreed to a blind test, knowing in advance only that the samples were those of a 21-year-old, right-handed male, from 1901 and 1903. I submit Ms. Peddy’s comments to the *Plum Lines* readers for “entertainment purposes only”:

General impression of writer: Highly intelligent, analytical, agile-minded, extremely capable and driven, acutely developed senses, critical disposition. The writing indicates strength of will and determination as the writer was highly driven and progressive in nature. He was truly motivated by the senses and easily immersed in his creative processes. There are clear indications of literary ability and an appreciation for culture. Many features in the script are typical of writers, artists, and poets.

The handwriting is expressive and dynamic but also fraught with tension. There is some release in the form of imagination and creativity. In some samples there is a sense of control, in others an infusion of excitement and enthusiasm. Habits of self-indulgence would likely be in response to unmanageable levels of energy or anxiety. Overall there is a great deal of vitality and intensity which produce a wide range of emotions the writer found difficult to express. He could be considered spontaneous and interactive as well as withdrawn and introspective. He could be directed and focused as well as restless and anxious.

The writer appears to have been adaptable to his environment with an intuitive sense of situations and people. He had a unique style, leaving a lasting impression. Charm and grace would prevail if the mood and occasion called for such. At the same time he would take pleasure in challenging people and directing conversations. It would be difficult to argue with his opinions or match his analytical abilities. Even in a “friendly” context it would be intimidating for most to oppose his view. His sense of humor would gravitate toward satire or sarcasm, but witty and funny, nonetheless.

In interpersonal relations he was inhibited and discerning, choosing friends and confidants very carefully. It was in social context that he was more flexible. It was important to him to establish contacts and make an impression. His personal style was dynamic but not in a contrived manner. Although he possessed social graces he preferred solitude and needed ample time for reflection.

The writing shows a high degree of intelligence and analytical prowess. There are many indications of his creative, unconventional thinking processes. He could be fiercely independent and took a novel approach to solving problems and developing ideas.

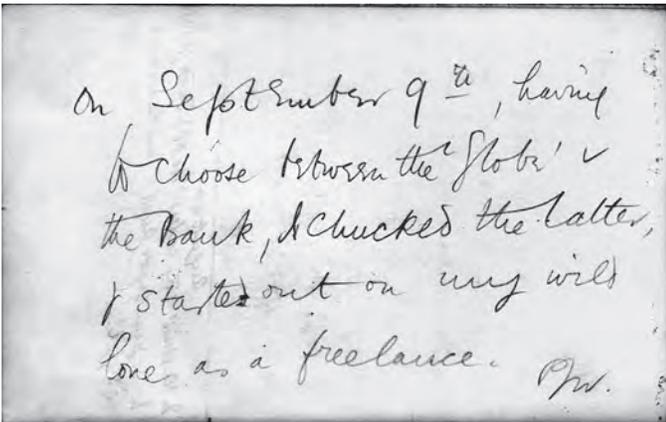
The combination of features in the writing suggests the writer was strategic in planning, was organized in method, and could accomplish anything through sheer force of will. He was consumed not only by his feelings but in gaining knowledge. He had an all-encompassing drive and was greatly affected by his experiences.

Naturally protective of his own sensitivities, he could be extremely defensive. He was very likely to relieve frustration with verbal assaults.

Sarcasm would be used as much in anger as in humor. Mental processes appear to be swift and definite. It is unlikely he was patient with those less certain. He was authoritarian in attitude and could be hypercritical of ideas outside his belief system.

Science or pseudo-science? In view of the known facts of Wodehouse's life and personality, some of Ms. Peddy's comments seem almost uncanny. It was, as mentioned above, a blind test.

PGW once engaged in a bit of handwriting analysis, through the character Lucille Brewster Moffam (to her husband Archie) in "Doing Father a Bit of Good" (1920): "Oh, there's a letter for you. I've just been to fetch the mail. I don't know who it can be from. The handwriting looks like a vampire's. Kind of scrawly."



From "Money received for Literary Work," September 1902. Deb Peddy's comments: "Script features: Predominantly angular with variety of connective forms, unique arcades, thick stroke with emphasis on horizontal pressure, minimal looping, normal to wide word-spacing, constriction of letters, varying degrees of vertical and right slant, rightward trends, delta d's, Greek e's, adequate to wide word-spacing, varying letter-spacing, sharp lower-zone formations."

But with the Bassett something less snappy and a good deal more glutinous was obviously indicated. . . . Stars were beginning to peep out, bats were fooling round, the garden was full of the aroma of those nifty white flowers which only start to put in their heavy work at the end of the day. . . . Her eyes were enlarged, and her whole map a good deal too suggestive of the soul's awakening for comfort.

Her aspect was that of a girl who was expecting something fairly fruity from Bertram.
Right Ho, Jeeves (1934)

Mr. Wodehouse Goes to WASHINGTON

SAVE THE DATE! Celebrate Plum! The Capital! Capital! Chapter will host the next international convention of The Wodehouse Society in Washington, D.C., on October 19–22, 2017. The event will feature new versions of the same pleasures as past conventions—riveting talks, a costume party, skits, and lots of music—plus a few surprises now being cooked up by CapCap members.

If you have never been in Washington in October, you're in for a treat—the weather is usually perfect and the busloads of tourists have departed. And, thank goodness, 2017 is not an election year. We will be at the Hamilton Crowne Plaza at 14th & K Streets, NW. Bertie and Jeeves never stayed there, but it's a comfortable hotel located within walking distance of almost everything worth seeing in Washington. And should any policemen's helmets or cow creamers turn up missing, the Magistrate's Court is just a stone's throw away.

As for travelling to Washington, Union Station (Amtrak) is two miles from the Hamilton, National Airport is about four miles, and Dulles and Baltimore/Washington Airports are about 25 miles away. Frugal travelers should be advised that flights to Baltimore/Washington tend to be less expensive than flights to the other two airports.

So mark your calendar! More info and registration materials to come in later issues of *Plum Lines*, on PGWnet, on our TWS website, and elsewhere.

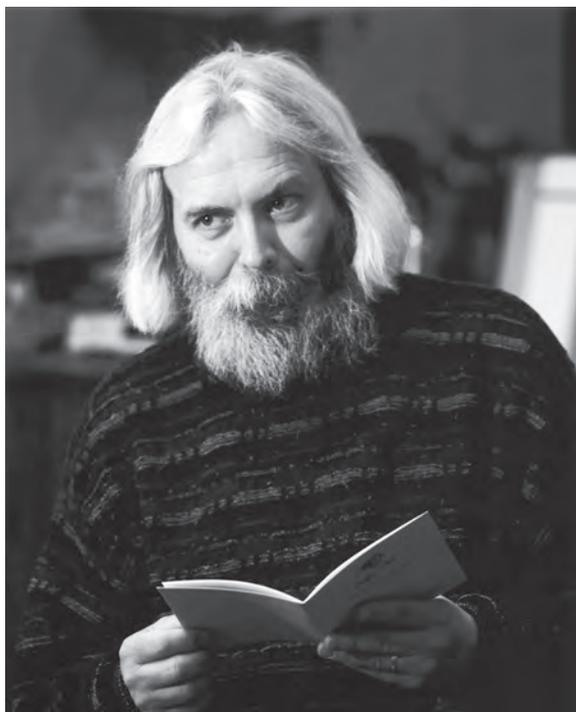


The Lincoln Memorial in D.C.

E-Blandings

IAN MICHAUD mentioned another online forum in which some members of TWS might have interest. Ian said, "If you're like many of us, you're allergic to Facebook, so you might consider the Blandings Yahoo! group. It's an e-mail group much like PGWnet, but members can post photos, files, and whatnot at the Blandings home page." The address is <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/blandings/info>.

Doug Stow, 1949–2015



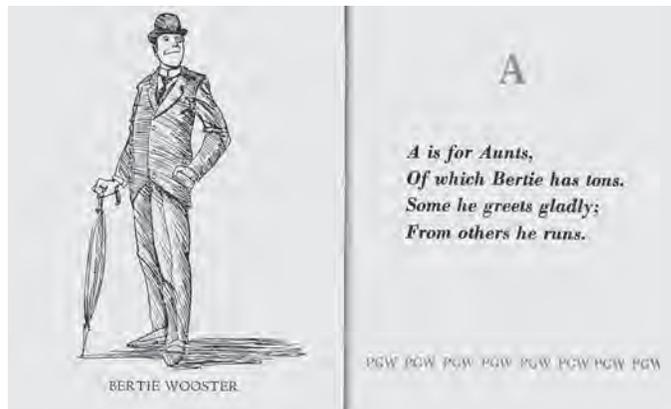
Doug Stow

DOUG STOW, a longtime and influential member of The Wodehouse Society, passed away peacefully on December 1, 2015. He was a beloved presence on Main Street in Half Moon Bay, California, as the owner of the Paper Crane, a greeting card and gift shop.

Doug grew up in Michigan with two brothers and two sisters. He quipped that he could never be a great writer because he'd had a perfect childhood. He attended Michigan State University and came to California after college. He and Margaret Lindsay met there and were married in 1975.

Doug was an early and devoted member of TWS and was generous with his time and talents. In 1980, Doug purchased an antique letterpress as a gift to Margaret (always having wanted one himself). He became the president of the Blandings Castle chapter in 1981, taking over from founder Pauline Blanc.

He compiled the column "Something New" for *Plum Lines* for three years (1992–95) and also created numerous mementoes for TWS events in the 1980s and 1990s. These included bookmarks, programs (for the 1993 and 1995 conventions), and small, handcrafted booklets that either featured pieces by Wodehouse (e.g., his poem "Printer's Error") or were a tribute to him in some way. All were typeset by hand and printed on the aforementioned antique press—and all were kindly donated to the particular event (usually a convention).



A spread from Plum Pudding: A Wodehouse Alphabet

Doug and Margaret also compiled and printed *Plum Pudding: A Wodehouse Alphabet*, with illustrations by Chris Marrinan. Produced in 1984 in a numbered-and-signed limited edition, hardbound and softbound, this little book displayed Doug's gentle humor to the fullest. It was one of the rare instances when he sold his work to fellow Wodehouseans; those who managed to snaffle a copy cherish it to this day.

We at The Wodehouse Society will miss his cheerful personality, wonderful humor, and delicate art.



I'll Trade You My 1909 Honus Wagner Card!

PETE GEORGIADY wrote a little item a couple of years ago, and apologizes for his extreme procrastination. (He is forgiven.) Pete purchased on eBay some antique Wills cigarette cards, notably #39 of a 1937 set of Famous British Authors. Pete says, "You would be correct in assuming that it depicts P. G. Wodehouse, jauntily posing in a light brown jacket and cloth flat cap." Other authors depicted in the 40-card set include Phyllis Bentley, G. K. Chesterton, Aldous Huxley, Somerset Maugham, A. A. Milne, and J. B. Priestley. Pete points out that "in an age when most trading cards feature photos of professional athletes, it was neat to see that the pop culture of between-the-wars Britain held writers in high regard. High enough, anyway, to be issued alongside cards picturing railway locomotives, coats of arms of public schools, and household hints."

The American Response to the Berlin Broadcasts

BY TODD MORNING

Todd has again ventured into the treacherous waters of Wodehouse's wartime experiences, though this time his topic is the reaction in the USA. According to Todd, it is a subject that is not well-covered in Wodehouse biographies. He found that a goodly amount was written in the U.S. at the time about the Wodehouse broadcasts.

IN THE VARIOUS accounts of the response to P. G. Wodehouse's radio broadcasts from Berlin in 1941, much has been written about the furor the talks caused in Britain, while much less has been written about the reaction in the United States. Robert McCrum writes in *Wodehouse: A Life*: "In America, where Wodehouse's offence was compounded by the *Post's* publication of the egregiously flippant 'My War with Germany,' public reaction had been almost as adverse as in Britain." McCrum does not focus on that U.S. reaction and provides few examples of what Americans said about the broadcasts. I feel that we must explore that American response further since it is an important part of the record. After all, Wodehouse had been told by the Germans that he was broadcasting solely to the then-neutral United States. And he frequently said that his primary reason for broadcasting was to thank his American fans for their letters of support when he was in a German internment camp.

I set out to discover if Wodehouse's broadcasts did indeed fall flat in America. I also wondered if anyone actually listened to the broadcasts over here. Wodehouse's statements about the broadcasts give the impression that he thought Americans could tune in to his talks in the same way they tuned their radios to *Little Orphan Annie*. But his talks were beamed over shortwaves, which are subject to the vagaries of atmospheric conditions: they frequently come with a dose of static, if they can be received at all. I wondered how many Americans even had shortwave sets. Did anyone but the most committed Nazi sympathizers ever listen to the ranting speeches and thumping martial music which German radio offered?

Even though the United States was still neutral in the summer of 1941, the pages of the many newspapers and magazines that I looked at were filled with news of the war in Europe. It is fair to say that the war was paramount in the American people's minds. But despite the public's focus on the great events of the conflict in Europe, there was also interest in the fate of one British humorist. From the time that Wodehouse

was swept up in the German invasion of France, the American wire services began running stories about him, and these were picked up by newspapers across the country. First, it was reported that he was missing, followed by the news that he had been interned. *Time* even printed the address of Wodehouse's German internment camp so that Americans could write to him: Gefangenenummer: 796 Lager-Bezeichnung: Offag VIII D Deutschland (Allemagne).

American goodwill toward Wodehouse quickly faded, however, after he was released from internment and announced that he would broadcast from Berlin. His situation was not helped by the interviews that he gave to both the United Press and Associated Press shortly before his first broadcast in late June 1941. I found that these two wire-service stories were carried by many newspapers, large and small. In these interviews, Wodehouse talked about his upcoming broadcasts and provided quotes that must have seemed to readers of the time as disturbingly self-absorbed:

Naturally, I hope the war is over soon, but if I am able to continue my work I will be satisfied. All I ask is a table, a typewriter, and no interruption. . . . I never have been able to work up a belligerent feeling. Just as I am about to feel belligerent about some country, I meet some nice fellow from it and lose all my belligerency.

Gestapo officers who had escorted him kept him under close surveillance at the first hotel in which they held him captive. "As if anyone would try to escape from this," said Wodehouse, referring to the comfortable furnishings of his suite.

The American press was quick to condemn Wodehouse for the statements from these interviews and his desire to broadcast. Syndicated columnist John Blake's comment is typical: "It all sounds very cozy. At a time when the air waves are crowded with sad stories about Germany's concentration camps, ghettos, Gestapo, and mass executions, won't it be diverting to know that Mr. P. G. Wodehouse is well, having a delightful time in Germany." On June 30, 1941, the isolationist *Chicago Tribune* published an editorial called "The Wrong Tie, P. G." The editorial invoked Jeeves, suggesting that he could impart some wisdom to his creator: "Mr. Wodehouse may have given the proposal of his German tempters the cream

of the Wooster brain before he accepted it, but Jeeves, his butler, must be in the background shaking his head. Jeeves would distinctly advise against that tie. Mr. Wodehouse, a philosopher in his way, doesn't know what war is. He will make a discovery."

Time went even further in attempting to make it seem as though Wodehouse's characters had turned against him with a rather heavy-handed parody. A few sentences will give you the picture:

"That won't wash," said Bertie firmly. "Why, it wasn't so long ago that my man Jeeves was reading me some fearful tripe Plum seemed to have written in some transatlantic mag—*Saturday Evening Post*, was it? Some such name. Well, anyway, some ghastly nonsense about Fascism not mattering as long as it lets one live in comfort. Y'know, sometimes," said Bertie, hitching his RAF uniform to ease the Wooster rump into a more comfortable posture, "sometimes I think Old Plum is getting a bit overripe."

An indication of the attitude of the American press to Wodehouse can be found in the headlines for an Associated Press wire-service story released on July 10, 1941. (Each newspaper created its own headline for a wire-service story.) This AP report centered on British Foreign Minister Anthony Eden's statement to the House of Commons about the Wodehouse broadcasts: "His Majesty's government has seen with regret that Mr. Wodehouse has lent his services to the German propaganda machine."

Headlines ranged from "Britain Takes Note of Wodehouse Talks" from the Cumberland (Maryland) *Evening Times* (mild), to "Eden Regrets P. G. Wodehouse Turned Traitor to England" from the Pampa (Texas) *Daily News* (hostile), to "P. G. Wodehouse Now German Propagandist" from the Fitchburg (Massachusetts) *Sentinel* (hostile again), to "Wodehouse Follows Benedict Arnold" from the Odessa (Texas) *American* (really hostile).

A few media outlets, however, rose to Wodehouse's defense, suggesting that condemnation of Wodehouse should wait until all the facts were known. An editorial in the Fresno (California) *Republican* stated: "Usually the best thing to do when a highwayman sticks a pistol into your ribs is to do what you are told. Wodehouse needs no Jeeves to advise him to comply." The commentator Boake Carter wrote: "Let not Wodehouse's vast following in America pass judgment on such questionable evidence from witnesses known

to have no regard for the truth. Let judgment of P. G. be withheld in simple justice, according to our own system of justice, until he himself has a chance to speak in his own defense." Even the Hollywood gossip writer Hedda Hopper (usually not one to refrain from kicking a man when he was down) came to Wodehouse's defense in a column titled "Let's Be Fair About Wodehouse" (although she didn't write this until April 1944, and she got several facts wrong—Wodehouse and his wife were living in Paris, not Vienna, for example):

There's been so much intolerance about P. G. Wodehouse, inventor of Jeeves and those delightful English stories. I read only the other day a story about Wodehouse by a Swedish newspaper man, who wrote that Wodehouse and his wife are living modestly outside Vienna, and that the Nazis have lost all interest in him. But folks still won't believe it. So much bitterness has been generated about P. G., I think it is only fair to tell you the history of a good deed that backfired. Guy Bolton told me the story. Wodehouse was living in France when he heard the German were coming. He and his wife could have flown to England and safety but wouldn't leave their three dogs behind. So the Germans picked him up and sent him to Germany and a concentration camp.

Many American newspapers seemed happy to repeat the many falsehoods about P. G. Wodehouse that were broadcast on the BBC on July 15, 1941, by William Connor (who wrote under the pen name "Cassandra" for the *Daily Mail*). Connor's broadcast was far more damaging to the British public's perception of Wodehouse than the broadcasts themselves, owing to such lines as: "The elderly playboy didn't believe in politics. He said so. No Good Time Charley ever does. Wodehouse was throwing a cocktail party when the storm troopers clumped in on his shallow life."

Time printed an interview with Connor about the controversy surrounding his Wodehouse broadcast in its issue of August 4, 1941. In this interview, Connor seemed to suggest that his antipathy toward Wodehouse went beyond the broadcasts and was rooted in the way Wodehouse portrayed English life through his novels: "There are Americans who still think that English people are Bertie Wooster calling each other 'Milord' and I thought the Wodehouse broadcasts would be very helpful to people like Burton Wheeler." (Burton Wheeler was a senator from Montana and a leading isolationist.)

When his talks were beamed to America, Wodehouse unwittingly became a tiny cog in a Nazi propaganda broadcasting machine that had been in place soon after they came to power in 1933. Shortwave stations sent signals to North America each day. I was able to find a program schedule for the Nazi North American broadcast on Saturday, April 19, 1941. On that day, the German signal began at 4:50 PM EST and signed off around midnight. Featured were a variety of programs, including German folk songs; “news” in English and German; commentary by the Nazi collaborator Fred Kaltenbach, who in the 1930s had been fired from his Iowa teaching job after he tried to organize a chapter of the Hitler Youth at his school; a comedy called “Fritz and Fred, the Family Quarrelers”; and a jazz ensemble that modeled its sound on the Paul Whiteman orchestra, presenting anti-Semitic lyrics set to hit tunes.

I couldn’t find any estimates of how many Americans actually listened to these Nazi broadcasts. According to Jerome S. Berg in his 2013 book *The Early Shortwave Stations: A Broadcast History Through 1945*, in the late 1930s, 75% of American households owned radios that featured shortwave bands. Most of these radios were rather hit-and-miss when it came to pulling in shortwave signals. More powerful shortwave receivers could cost over \$200—out of the financial reach of many Americans.

Which brings us to the question: Did anyone in the United States listen to the Wodehouse broadcasts? Interestingly, despite the criticism over the announcement that Wodehouse planned to broadcast on Nazi radio, I could not find a single U.S. media outlet that bothered to listen and report on any one of his five talks. In fact, the only account I could find from someone who listened to a Wodehouse talk was in the Letters section of *Time* on August 11, 1941. Parker F. Soule, Jr. from Dover, Delaware, wrote:

Sirs: In the July 14 issue we read more about P. G. Wodehouse and his broadcasts from Germany. I am prompted to say that on the evening of July 1, while “fishing around” in the shortwave band, I picked up “Berlin Calling” and it was announced that Mr. Wodehouse was about to broadcast. Upon listening to the broadcast as it progressed, my wife, two guests, and I were startled to hear the speaker repeat himself, not once, but twice, three, four, times—“and let us have—and let us have—and let us have.” In a moment there was a telling “click” as the dissertation continued. According

to the announcer, the speaker was Wodehouse in person. Was his face red when, in order to get Wodehouse “out of the groove,” he had to move the needle along the recording? I doubt it. Perhaps his hosts do not yet consider Mr. Wodehouse sufficiently trustworthy to broadcast in person, for fear of being duped by some twist of phrase or inflection.

Mr. Soule had it right. Wodehouse’s talks were prerecorded on wax discs, which I presume are even more prone to scratches and skips than vinyl records.

If reporters had listened to the broadcasts they would have heard not a word of pro-Nazi propaganda from Wodehouse. His talks were apolitical, lightly humorous accounts of his time in internment. Of course, Wodehouse failed to realize that his willingness to broadcast as a British citizen from an enemy capital on enemy airwaves played into the Germans’ hands. In time of war, with the survival of his country on the line, no broadcast would have been perceived as apolitical.

What conclusions can we reach about Wodehouse’s broadcasts to America? The Germans undoubtedly achieved their propaganda goal by creating the impression (albeit later proved false) that an esteemed British writer supported their cause. William Connor’s fears were not realized, however. Wodehouse’s broadcasts did nothing to help the isolationist cause in America. And what of Wodehouse’s sincere attempt to send a cheerful message to Americans, thanking them for their support during his time in internment? This is perhaps one of the saddest parts of the sad story, because when he talked, few seem to have listened.



Great Lesser Beasts

DAVID McDONOUGH found this in Mark Essig’s *Lesser Beasts: A Snout-to-Tail History of the Humble Pig*: “The same fondness for pigs could be found among wealthy landowners who raised enormously fat pigs for competition at agricultural fairs. No one enjoyed a pig’s company more than Lord Emsworth, hero of a series of comic novels by P. G. Wodehouse.” Essig then goes on to quote Wodehouse: “Watching [the Empress of Blandings] now as she tucked into a sort of hash of bran, acorns, potatoes, linseed and swill, the ninth Earl of Emsworth felt his heart leap up much in the same way as that of the poet Wordsworth used to do when he beheld a rainbow in the sky.”

Wodehouse Gets a German Trim

BY RANDALL BYTWERK

Randall would like to thank Martin Breit, author of the 2014 German biography P. G. Wodehouse: Gentleman der Literatur, for many helpful suggestions and references. Randall notes that the quotes are from the Overlook Press and Tauchnitz editions. His other key resource for his research was Tauchnitz's The Harvest, Being the Record of One Hundred Years of Publishing, 1837–1937.

WODEHOUSE'S BOOKS were popular in Germany from early in his career. According to the catalog of the German National Library, at least eighteen German translations appeared before 1945, the first dated 1917 (*The Intrusion of Jimmy*—in German, *Jimmy, der Eindringling*). It was published before the U.S. entered World War I, when Wodehouse was considered an American from the German perspective (the book includes the line “Translated from the American”). Eight of the translations appeared between 1933 and 1937.

Of course, many well-educated readers in Germany and throughout the Continent wanted to appreciate Wodehouse in his original language. Wodehouse's English-language publisher was Bernhard Tauchnitz, a Leipzig firm that put out its first English-language volume in 1843 and issued over 5,000 titles in its series of English and American authors by the 1930s. It was popular with English and American authors since it paid royalties at a time when that was unusual. Its market was the Continent, not only Germany—back covers included the note “Not to be introduced into the British Empire or the U.S.A.” Eighty percent of its readers were not native speakers. Tauchnitz published 39 Wodehouse titles, 19 after Hitler took power in 1933. Three are particularly interesting for some alternate editing.

The Tauchnitz edition of *Lord Emsworth and Others* appeared in 1938. It included “Buried Treasure,” which opens with a discussion of Hitler's moustache:

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



Randall Bytwerk studied the German editions of English-language Wodehouse books and found some interesting edits.

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

It is rather surprising that the passage was not cut. True, it was gentle mockery of Hitler's moustache, but it was still mockery.

A year later things were different. *The Code of the Woosters* appeared in June 1939. Life in Europe was even more unsettled than at, say, Blandings Castle after one of the disappearances of the Empress. Readers will remember Roderick Spode of Black Shorts fame, a caricature of Oswald Mosley, himself almost a caricature of Adolf Hitler. How was it possible to publish the book in Germany two months before World War II began?

The answer: judicious editing. Early in the German edition references to Spode as a “dictator” are left in. However, it would not do to allow anything more direct. Throughout the rest of the book awkward passages are simply excised.

At the beginning of Chapter 3 Spode discovers Bertie holding the most famous cow creamer in all of English literature. The original (with excisions in italics):

I had described Roderick Spode to the butler as a man with an eye that could open an oyster at sixty paces, and it was an eye of this nature that he was directing at me now. *He looked like a Dictator on the point of starting a purge, and I saw that I had been mistaken in supposing him to be seven feet in height. Eight, at least.*

Germans did not need to be reminded of the 1934 Röhm purge.

A few pages later, Bertie describes his astonishment at Gussie Fink-Nottle's confidence in dealing with Spode: "Even across the room one could see that, when it came to self-confidence, Mussolini could have taken his correspondence course." The sentence was cut in the Tauchnitz edition.

Two classic passages clearly unacceptable for those who admired the Führer were also cut. In the first, Gussie describes the development of Spode's Black Shorts. The sections in italics disappear from the Tauchnitz edition:

"He looks upon himself as a Man of Destiny, you see, and feels that marriage would interfere with his mission. He takes a line through Napoleon."

I felt that before proceeding further I must get the lowdown on this Spode. I didn't follow all this Man of Destiny stuff.

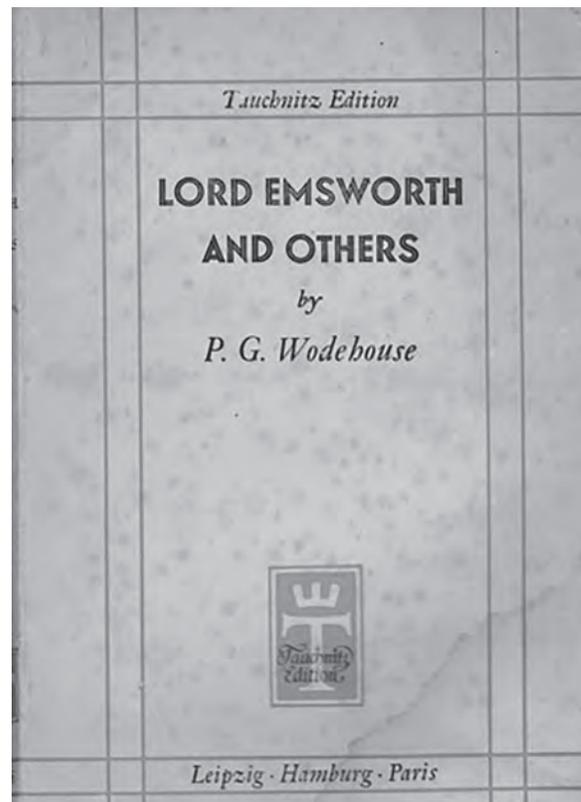
"How do you mean, his mission? Is he someone special?"

"Don't you ever read the papers? Roderick Spode is the founder and head of the Saviours of Britain, a Fascist organization better known as the Black Shorts. His general idea, if he doesn't get knocked on the head with a bottle in one of the frequent brawls in which he and his followers indulge, is to make himself a Dictator."

"Well, I'm blowned!"

I was astounded at my keenness of perception. The moment I had set eyes on Spode, if you remember, I had said to myself "What ho! A Dictator!" and a Dictator he had proved to be. I couldn't have made a better shot if I had been one of those detectives who sees a chap walking along the street and deduce that he is a retired manufacturer of poppet valves named Robinson with rheumatism in one arm, living at Clapham.

"Well, I'm dashed! I thought he was something of that sort. That chin . . . Those eyes . . . And for the matter of that, that moustache.



You'll find small but significant variations compared to the versions published in the U.S. and U.K.

By the way, when you say "shorts," you mean "shirts," of course."

"No. By the time Spode formed his association, there were no shirts left. He and his adherents wear black shorts."

"Footer bags, you mean?"

"Yes."

"How perfectly foul."

"Bare knees?"

"Bare knees."

"Golly!"

"Yes."

A thought struck me, so revolting that I nearly dropped my gasper.

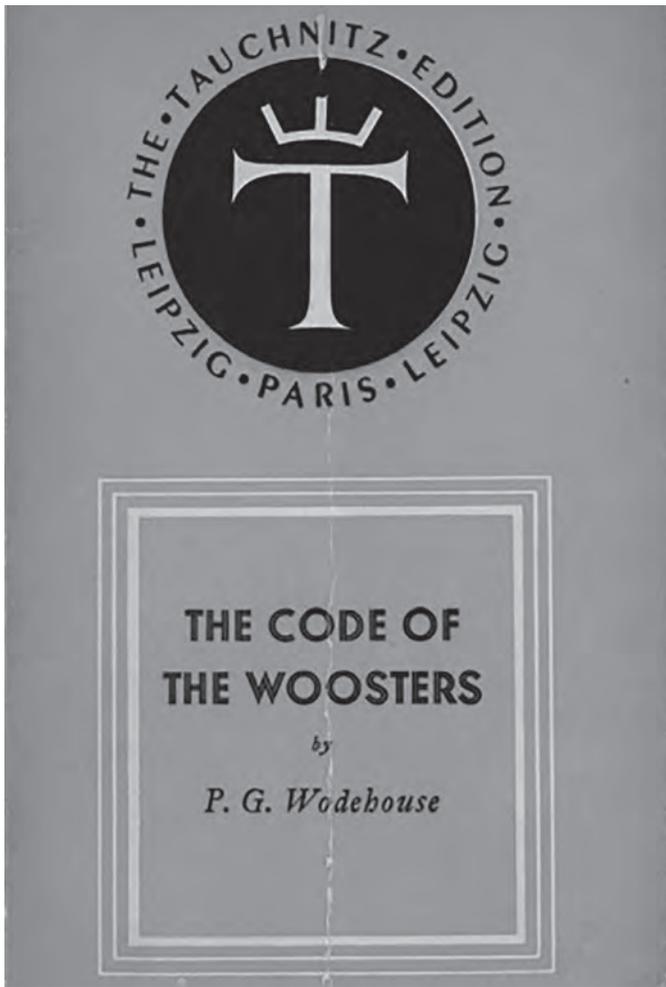
"Does old Bassett wear black shorts?"

"No. He isn't a member of the Saviours of Britain."

"Then ["But] how does Sir Watkyn come to be mixed up with Spode?"

Mocking Hitler's Brown Shirts was bad enough—but indirectly criticizing the Führer's face and moustache? That section had to go.

In one of the most quoted passages in the Wodehouse canon, Bertie Wooster tells off Spode. Again, the italicized passage was cut.



Even "The Code" was subject to not-so-subtle editing.

He asked me if I had called him a slob, and I said I had.

"A fat slob?"

"A fat slob. It is about time," I proceeded, "that some public-spirited person came along and told you where you got off. The trouble with you, Spode, is that *just because you have succeeded in inducing a handful of half-wits to disfigure the London scene by going around in black shorts, you think you're someone. You hear them shouting 'Heil, Spode!' and you imagine it is the Voice of the People. That is where you make your bloomer. What the Voice of the People is saying is: 'Look at that frightful ass Spode walking around in footer bags! Did you ever in your puff see such a perfect perisher?'*"

He did what is known as struggling for utterance.

And finally, there is the revelation of Eulalie. Bribed by a world cruise, Jeeves breaks the rules of the Junior Ganymede Club, and reveals Spode's secret:

"Mr. Spode designs ladies' underclothing, sir. He has a considerable talent in that direction, and has indulged it secretly for some years. He is the founder and proprietor of the emporium in Bond Street known as Eulalie Soeurs."

"You don't mean that?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good Lord, Jeeves! No wonder he didn't want a thing like that to come out."

"No, sir. It would unquestionably jeopardize his authority over his followers."

"You can't be a successful Dictator and design women's underclothing."

"No, sir."

"One or the other. Not both."

"Precisely, sir."

I mused.

"Well, it was worth it, Jeeves. I couldn't have slept, wondering about it. Perhaps that cruise won't be so very foul, after all?"

It would hardly do to even hint at a relationship between Dictator Hitler and women's undergarments.

Throughout the book things got lost, and not even in translation. The book is one of Wodehouse's best, however, and it is unlikely that readers noticed the slight awkwardness that resulted from the excisions.

One other Tauchnitz edition is worth a mention. While a "guest" of the Nazis, Wodehouse completed *Money in the Bank* and shipped the manuscript off before Hitler declared war on the United States. The American edition appeared in 1942, but the British edition had to wait until 1946, given Wodehouse's diminished standing in England at the time. However, the Tauchnitz edition appeared in August 1943, shortly before Wodehouse and his wife were allowed to move to Paris (which was still under German occupation). He even got royalties. That is astonishing, since Germany had been at war with England for four years and Germany was losing. Paper and labor shortages were curtailing all forms of publishing, yet the Nazis found the resources to publish a lighthearted English comic novel.

Wodehouse wrote a kind of social science fiction that appealed to German images of England, and when war loomed in 1939, the Nazi solution was to remove distressing contemporary allusions. They therefore returned Bertie and Jeeves to the timeless mists of a British upper class unconnected to world events. Perhaps the Nazis thought that a nation that produced the likes of Bertie Wooster was hardly likely to threaten the Third Reich.

Wodehouse's Extraordinary Scripture Knowledge

BY ELLIOTT MILSTEIN

RECENTLY,¹ on one of the many Facebook pages devoted to P. G. Wodehouse and his works,² someone³ posted a Wodehouse quote, which I immediately recognized as being from *Over Seventy*,⁴ having read that book many times.⁵ After reviewing the difficulties of being a humorist in a time of trouble and how people are giving up on humor, Wodehouse argues why humor is so important, ending the chapter with this:

And if any young writer with a gift for being funny has got the idea that there is something undignified and anti-social about making people laugh, let him read this from the Talmud, a book which, one may remind him, was written in an age just as grim as this one:

And Elijah said to Berokah, "These two will also share in the world to come." Berokah then asked them, "What is your occupation?" They replied, "We are merrymakers. When we see a person who is down-hearted, we cheer him up." These two were among the very select few who would inherit the kingdom of Heaven.⁶

Now I am most definitely not "learned in the Talmud"⁷ but I've read enough to know that this passage could not have come from Talmud. For one thing, the term "inherit the kingdom of Heaven" is very much a Christian phrase.⁸ And the whole story-like quality was not something I remember seeing in the little bits of Talmud I had studied.⁹ So even though I had never actually checked this out,¹⁰ it was perfectly natural for me to hit the Comment button and write: "Not a real quote."

The next day, however, there was a reply to my reply with a link to a website that had the quote.¹¹ I clicked on it and found that it was from a Reform Judaism website. I didn't put much faith in that. I mean, what do they know about Talmud?¹² And besides, they didn't even give a reference. Who quotes Talmud without a reference?¹³ It was enough, however, to make me wonder, so I took the time to try to find an original source, but to no avail. And there the matter might have ended.

However, as coincidence would have it,¹⁴ that very afternoon my wife and I were invited to partake of a



Elliott Milstein looking quite academic in Pseattle

Shabbat¹⁵ meal at the home of some Orthodox friends of ours, David and Ann Berris. It had been some time since I had broken bread on Shabbat at an Orthodox Jewish home,¹⁶ so I was looking forward to it. Besides incorporating the wonderful cuisine of my childhood,¹⁷ the Orthodox Sabbath meal is generally a truly joyous experience. There's lots of eating, drinking, singing, and telling of jokes. Actually, it's not unlike a TWS convention, now that I think of it. And, like one of our conventions, there is also much quoting of scripture.¹⁸

So, in the midst of all of the conversation and laughter, I decided to bring up this story, fresh in my mind from my encounter on Facebook. Even if the story didn't get a laugh, it would give me an opportunity to introduce some more folks to Wodehouse, something I always enjoy doing. So I did.

"Silly, right?" I asked as I concluded.

"Not so fast," said my Talmudic scholar friend David. "There are many passages in the Talmud that are very much like that. Remember—Talmud is not just Torah and Mishnah, but Midrash as well."¹⁹ And then I heard the voice of Norman Murphy in the back of my head: "Wodehouse never made anything up."²⁰ So I asked David if he thought he could find the passage for me. He promised to try.

Well, it wasn't more than an hour past sundown when I got his email:²¹ "Success! I have found the source of your quote. It is indeed Talmudic. From Tractate Ta'anit, page 22, side a." And he sent me a picture of the text in both English and Aramaic so that I could see for myself.

I noticed that there was no reference to the “kingdom of Heaven,” so I wasn’t completely crazy, but otherwise there was the whole section, from which Wodehouse only quotes a small bit at the end. I was also not crazy in thinking that such a story is an odd thing to find in the Talmud. My friend David goes on to say that “it’s part of what is called agadita, which is a kind of dialogue unrelated to any specific subject.” Well, I don’t know about you, but that sounds pretty obscure to me.

So now the mystery is: How the heck did Wodehouse ever come across this thing? *Over Seventy* was written in 1957, when he was well-ensconced in Remsenberg. I don’t think he was attending any Talmudic study classes on Long Island.²² It is possible he remembered it from his days when he worked cheek-by-jowl with Jewish writers, but somehow I don’t see Ira Gershwin quoting Talmud while they were trying to figure out where to put “Someone to Watch Over Me” in *Oh, Kay!*²³

A little more help from David provided a clue. It turns out that since medieval times it was common practice for Christian theologians to comb Jewish sacred text to find ways to convince Jews that Christian doctrine could be proved correct from Jewish writings. This passage²⁴ was reportedly used on a number of occasions as a pretext for proving three Christian precepts that were rejected by Jewish faith: (1) There is an afterlife (the passage refers to “the world to come”); (2) There is a resurrection (Elijah appears to the rabbi in the flesh); and (3) Good works take precedence over following the law (it honors a man who breaks a number of laws²⁵ in order to help people). We could not find a specific Christian text from Wodehouse’s time, but according to later sources that David found, there were many such treatises and sermons published from the seventeenth century to the early twentieth century.²⁶

Perhaps young Wodehouse came across one in the same library where he found James Martineau’s *Types of Ethical Theory* (1885), which he so famously quotes in “Jeeves Takes Charge,”²⁷ and he remembered it for forty or fifty years. Or perhaps he dipped into some 19th-century religious book later on. We may never know. But one thing we do know: While Bertie Wooster may or may not have cheated on his Scripture Knowledge exam, his pockets filled with lists of the kings of Judah (if the blotto Gussie Fink-Nottle is to be believed²⁸), we can rest assured that Plum certainly knew his stuff right down to the agadita from Tractate Ta’anit, page 22, side a, of the Babylonian Talmud.²⁹

Notes

1. April 3, 2016, to be exact.
2. “Fans of P. G. Wodehouse,” if you really must know.

3. Even though it’s a public forum, I feel a little funny about giving the name, but you can certainly look it up if you like.
4. I even knew the exact place, I’m proud to say: end of Chapter Seven: “Some Thoughts on Humorists.”
5. At least four or five times. Maybe more. If you haven’t read *Over Seventy*, you really should. I love the whole book, but especially the foreword. If you have read it, you’ve figured that out by now.
6. *Over Seventy*, Herbert Jenkins, 1957, p. 87–88. (Some of these footnotes are actually real—just to keep you on your toes.)
7. As the expression goes.
8. cf. The New Testament.
9. OK, “studied” may be pushing it a little. Let’s say “read.”
10. I first read the book in 1972 or ’73, long before there was Google or an internet or even home computers. The couple of times I read it in the 21st century, the passage was just so familiar, it never occurred to me to Google it.
11. <http://www.reformjudaism.org.uk/heaven-is-what-we-make-of-it-here/>
12. As a Reform Jew myself, I get to make fun of them.
13. OK, I do it later on in this paper myself. So sue me.
14. Or was it the hand of God?
15. Jews generally refer to the Sabbath by its Hebrew name.
16. Gosh, I don’t know—probably close to ten years or so.
17. I love cholent and Ann makes one you could die for. And don’t get me started on her gefilte fish loaf! Oy!
18. In this case, I mean real scripture.
19. Yeah, I bet you looked at this footnote! But really, I am not going to take up your valuable time explaining that statement. Suffice it to say that it was enough to shake any confidence I had in my glib assumptions.
20. Trust me. He said that.
21. Orthodox Jews typically keep their promises as quickly as possible after they make them because the Talmud says to do so (though I don’t have a direct reference but I have seen it written somewhere), but they can’t email until Shabbat is over, which is when the sun goes down.
22. I have been to Remsenberg twice and I don’t remember seeing a Yeshiva there.
23. I have no evidence that such a discussion ever took place between Wodehouse and Gershwin. I was just trying to be funny.
24. Actually it was the part immediately preceding the part Wodehouse quoted, but they are considered

part of the same agadita.

25. He failed to wear fringes and he wore black shoes. The fringes are a pretty well-known section in Deuteronomy, but no black shoes? Where did that come from?
26. The later sources also included Jewish commentators who refute the idea that this passage supports Christian doctrine, but we need not concern ourselves with that here. I mean, c'mon: *Plum Lines* is not a religious publication, right?
27. *Carry On, Jeeves!*, Herbert Jenkins, 1925, pp. 10 and 33. Another real footnote!
28. *Right Ho, Jeeves*, Herbert Jenkins, 1934, p. 226. And another real footnote!!
29. But not this one! Thanks for reading, folks. And if you haven't read *Over Seventy*, go do it right now.

The Talmudic passage can be found at <http://tinyurl.com/pgw-taanit>. Scroll down to p. 61 of the text on this site, or type "61" in the "find on this page" window in your browser.—Ed.

Chapters Corner

WHAT IS YOUR chapter up to these days? Tell the Wodehouse world about your chapter's activities! Chapter representatives, please send all info to the editor, Gary Hall (see back page).

Please note that our webmaster, Noel Merrill, tries to keep chapter activities posted on the society website. So, it's a good idea to send information about upcoming events to Noel on a timely basis. His contact information is on the last page of this issue.

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: Neil Midkiff



The Broadway Special

(New York City and vicinity)
Contact: Amy Plofker



Capital! Capital!

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



SIXTEEN CAPCAPPERS met on April 3 for wine, food, song, and general good cheer. The highlight of the fête was a presentation by Bruce Montgomery entitled "P. G. Wodehouse's Lyrics, Part 2: Flirting, Romancing, Loving, and Marrying (plus some notes about Guy Bolton)." Fortunately, Guy Bolton was not in attendance, because Bruce's one-hour condensation of Bolton's 94-year life of brilliant work and scandalous comings and goings would have left his face as red as an overripe tomato. Member Lenny Goldstein did not come unprepared and treated the group to a DVD view of Norman Murphy's walking tours of Plum's London. The food was fantastic, prepared by Scott Daniels's wife, Susan, the Alice Kramden of D.C.

Chapter One

(Greater Philadelphia area)
Contact: Herb Moskovitz



IT LOOKED for a while as though the first day of spring might be another day of winter. But Sunday, March 20, turned out to be a fine day, and the Chaps gathered once again at Cavanaugh's in Philadelphia's historic Head House Square.

Bob Rains (Oily Carlisle) brought a DVD of the BBC's 2013 docudrama *Wodehouse in Exile*, starring Tim Piggott-Smith and Zoë Wanamaker. He also brought all the necessary cables and plugs and who knows whatever else was necessary for the Chaps to watch the program on Cavanaugh's six large TV screens.

And the DVD wouldn't work.

It was suggested that Cavanaugh's screens only knew how to show sporting events and couldn't comprehend a literary program. But Bob Nissenbaum (Anthony, Lord Droitwich) came to the rescue, having thoughtfully brought another copy of the movie, just in case Oily's failed to work.

The movie tells the story of how Wodehouse was captured by the German forces in Le Touquet, France,

in May 1940, and was interned in a number of rather unpleasant places until shortly before he reached age sixty, when he was transferred to hotels in Berlin and then in occupied Paris.

In 1941, the Nazis asked him if he would like to reassure his American readers that he was doing all right while he was a captive. He did a number of radio broadcasts to the USA, which at that point was neutral and had not yet entered the war. But the Nazis then rebroadcast the talks to the U.K., and Wodehouse was publicly pilloried in Britain as a traitor. The end of the movie shows how he tried to clear his name.

When the movie finished, Oily did his best Robert Osborne impersonation and gave background information about the movie. We discussed the movie and pondered who the mysterious “Mackintosh” really was. Oily passed out copies of a review of *Wodehouse in Exile* that he had written for *Plum Lines* (Winter 2015), and he recommended that those who wanted further information consult *Wodehouse at War* by Iain Sproat.

The next meeting was scheduled for Sunday, May 15, at 1 PM.

Chicago Accident Syndicate
(Chicago and thereabouts)
Contact: Daniel & Tina Garrison



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



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



ALL THE REGULAR members who attended the May 8 meeting professed to having enjoyed *The Heart of a Goof*, the collection of nine Wodehouse golf holes. I mean golf *stories*. Coincidentally, we were nine in all, thanks to member Janette’s friend Jane, who tried us out to see whether she would become a member.

I can’t remember everyone’s favorite quote, but new member Mike’s Overlook copy was full of Post-Its and member Ed observed that the nine stories seem to progress over the course of the day, in that pivotal scenes followed the sun, with the last story ending at

dusk. Original member Mike (still looking thin but with a sexy deep voice after recovering from his therapies) related that he recognized many of the characters from his own golfing days. We were very grateful for member Shawn’s discussion notes, especially considering that the collection was not his suggestion.

Our next novel for discussion is *Summer Moonshine* (thanks to vigorous lobbying by member Ed), which I believe is a complete novel. Our next meeting will be July 10.

Members at the meeting did agree that another cricket outing would be enjoyable. With luck, we can manage another September Saturday game at Cornerstone Park in Littleton.

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 Melonsquashville (TN) Literary Society
(Tennessee)
Contact: Ken Clevenger



OUR MOST recent gathering was on March 5 at the Sequoyah Hills Presbyterian Church in Knoxville, and, to resort to cliché, a good time was had by all.

We had a terrific cast for our reading of “Unpleasantness at Bludleigh Court”: Audrey, Kathy, and Fran were Narrators; Allan was Mr. Mulliner; Bill Watts read as a non-rabbit-plugging poet; Lucy was cast as Charlotte Mulliner; Noel played Aubrey Trefusis (born a Bassinger); Charles (standing in for Bill Dotterweich) was Wilfred, the air-gun toting boy; and Ken, in an obvious bit of typesetting, was the Colonel.

Our joy, in addition to the Wodehouse story and the fine rendition by this cast of characters, was our

wonderful audience of Liz, Paula, Debbie, Tanya, Harry, Jack, Joan, and the two lovely Joyces.

It was our usual “bring a plate of finger foods, sweet or savory, to share” and the usual groaning board barely stood the strain. Well done, all!

A general consensus arose that the story was one of our favorites and that the gathering of friends and fellow Wodehousian aficionados was a great way to launch into the spring.

The Knoxville Opera Guild’s Croquet Tournament, arranged by our own Audrey Duncan, was to have been on Saturday, May 21. Several Melonsquashvillians planned to be involved, and we wished them well on the lawn, through the wickets, and into the tea tent.

Sadly, the Melonsquashville (TN) Literary Society, a regional chapter of TWS, will not have a scheduled meeting again until sometime later in July due to other obligations of the priority-scrambled scheduler. Friends of Wodehouse are encouraged to celebrate Plum’s literature and wondrous light in their own inimitable ways in this interval.

The Mottled Oyster Club / Jellied Eels (San Antonio and South Texas)

Contact: Lynette Poss



HERE’S A BRIEF catch-up of the Oysters and Eels, mottling and jellied in San Antonio and south Texas. The Lili (Janet and Bryan), who set a lavish table with soothing libations, hosted the annual Christmas bash in December. We toddled in with potluck dishes, although none compared to what Janet and Bryan made. Those who missed out on hearing about the Psmith in Pseattle adventures during our November meeting were caught up. Then the business of digging in began, accompanied by the tradition of giving the Empress of Blandings a new home for 2016. This correspondent doesn’t remember who now has custody of the pig, except that it is not she. She offered to host the 2016 Christmas party. Whoever has the Empress will certainly show up for the handoff.

Thanks to all the glad tidings that night, discussion of the December book, *A Few Quick Ones*, was postponed until January.

We’ve read “Death at the Excelsior” (February), *Do Butlers Burgle Banks?* (March), and *Ring for Jeeves* (April). In May, we cast votes on September’s selection, one of the Bollinger Everyman Wodehouse prize winners for comic fiction.

Our vacation reading line-up is penciled in the calendar: *Lord Emsworth and Others* or *The Crime Wave at Blandings* (whichever one you have—May); *A Damsel in Distress* (June); *Louder and Funnier* (July); and *Pearls, Girls and Monty Bodkin* (August). The summer, which in south Texas starts in April, will find us in Belfer, Roville-sur-Mer, and Mervo, with a Green Swizzle in hand.

If you are a Wodehouse fan living in or near San Antonio, or just visiting, come join us. We meet at 7:00 PM on the first Thursday of each month at the Barnes & Noble at the shops at La Cantera, 15900 La Cantera Pkwy. Food and drink not being far from our minds, we are sometimes at a nearby Emsworth Arms before the meeting.

The New England Wodehouse Thingummy Society (NEWTS)

(Boston and New England)

Contact: John Fahey



THE DAY did not look promising. Molly the dog was pensive. Birds huddled within shrubs in quiet introspection. Indifferent snow fell with abandon, obliterating young sprouts newly emerged from the soil. In other words, it was spring in New England and the NEWTS were having a Nottle.

NEWTS are a simple and hardy lot. Bring a NEWT to the feeding trough and you have a contented NEWT. A valiant effort was made to counteract the effects of the weather but there was a certain something lacking among those gathered. Until, that is, the NEWTS started reading a story.

A group reading of one of the Master’s works has become as obligatory as browsing and sluicing. On this day the chosen work was a golf story, “The Heel of Achilles.” During the reading of the first page, a spontaneous guffaw erupted among the assembled. From thereon in the pace quickened, and the world began to change. The snow stopped falling. The sun beamed down. Birds chirruped merrily. Molly the dog began barking. All was right with the world. The Master’s hand had once again brought sweetness and light upon the land.

However, as any student of Wodehouse can attest, while a happy resolution is assured, the tale is in the telling, and this day was no exception.

It was I, your intrepid reporter, who had selected the short story for this day’s reading. While handing out copies, I casually remarked that while the day

wasn't promising, I had selected this story because golf brought thoughts of spring. A Bean remarked that he never thought of golf in the spring, and then threw out some gag about how in the spring a young man's thoughts turn to love. I countered that there are several blokes I know who have been talking about nothing else but golf for the past several weeks, to which the Bean replied, "They must be married."

At this point an Aunt spoke up and said that she's not a young man and her thoughts turn to love in the spring. I mean to say, what! Whoever said these are the times that try men's souls was off the mark. I can state without reservation, it is aunts who try men's souls.

The Northwodes

(St. Paul, Minneapolis, and vicinity)
Contact: Mike Eckman



SINCE THE Northwodes' favorite Kentucky Derby Day venue was sold, it was a challenge to find a place that had a screen on which to watch the race, was quiet enough to allow conversation, had good mint juleps, and radiated a flavor of the 1920s. The Downtowner Woodfire Grill in St. Paul was available and met the requirements. Mary McDonald organized the outing, and thirteen Northwodes attended. Eight wore headgear appropriate for the day, ranging from baseball caps to top hats to an extravagant wide-brim hat slanted at a saucy angle. Since there were twenty horses in the traditional pass-the-hat and pick-a-horse, but only thirteen attending, some had the chance to wager a second time. Our devoted server, Linda, wanted in on the action and contributed a buck. The favorite, Nyquist, was still in the hat at the onset of the second round. Faith Sullivan snared that slip and won the pool.

The Orange Plums

(Orange County, California)
Contact: Lia Hansen



SOMETIMES WHEN we are discussing a great passage from the Master's work, someone will ask a question that stops the flow of conversation and sends it coursing upon an entirely different path. For instance: "What good is having a figurine of the Infant Samuel at Prayer if the blasted thing is made of foam rubber and bounces?" We determined that in order to be authentic, the Infant

S at P must be made of terra cotta or plaster to provide a truly smashing purge of pent-up frustration.

Our friend the Submariner arrived with his own figurine of said Infant at Prayer and pointed out that his was made of solid material and if hurled with appropriate feelings of frustration or rage would result in a most satisfying smash! He didn't hurl it, of course, because evidently these little figurines are rather difficult to find. A subsequent search of eBay supported this claim.

As I was searching on the web I learned that during the Victorian era, figures of the Infant Samuel were so popular and ubiquitous that people who were raised in that time had grown quite sick of the Infant by the time they were adults. I imagine this is why Wodehouse seemed to take such glee in having his characters pulverize them. This led me to wonder if authors who are growing up today will in the future take equal pleasure in smashing and pulverizing Hello Kitty characters.

I also wonder if all of the figurines of the Infant Samuel were well and truly smashed. There must be some that have survived. The search continues.

The Pale Parabolites

(Toronto and vicinity)
Contact: George Vanderburgh



The PeliKans

(Kansas City and vicinity)
Contact: Bob Clark



The Perfecto-Zizzbaum Motion Picture Corporation

(Los Angeles and vicinity)
Contact: Karen Shotting



The Pickering Motor Company

(Detroit and vicinity)
Contact: Elliott Milstein



ON FEBRUARY 27, 2016, the Pickering Motor Co. gathered at Sue and Dicron Mahakian's house. The reading assignment was "Jeeves and the Old School Chum." For the third meeting in a row, everyone had done the reading. This success means we will stick with the "short story rather than a novel" policy.

“Jeeves and the Old School Chum” involves an occasional theme of Wodehouse: how unbearable it is to associate with a health-food fanatic. Wodehouse consistently portrays health-food fanatics as bossy and unpleasant people—witness Clarissa Cork in *Money in the Bank* and Madeline Bassett forcing Gussie Fink-Nottle to become a vegetarian in *Stiff Upper Lip, Jeeves*. This was an opinion Wodehouse shared with George Orwell, who had this to say in *The Road to Wigan Pier*: “The food crank is by definition a person willing to cut himself off from human society in the hopes of adding five years onto the life of his carcass; that is, a person out of touch with common humanity.”

On March 19 the Pickering Motor Co. cocked a snook at food cranks everywhere by having dinner at Polonia, a fine Polish restaurant in Hamtramck in the heart of Detroit’s Polish community. We enjoyed potato pancakes, pierogies, polish sausage, stuffed cabbage, and pitchers of Okocim, a fine Polish beer. Back in 2009, celebrity chef Anthony Bourdain visited Polonia for his “No Reservations” show. He liked it and so did we. Mrs. Cork and the old school chum would not approve, but a good time was had by all.

The Pittsburgh Millionaires Club
(Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania)



The Plum Crazyies
(Harrisburg, Pennsylvania and vicinity)
Contact: Betty Hooker



THE PLUM CRAZIES met on March 13 at the home of Betty and Tom Hooker. Following a divine buffet worthy of Anatole, Bruce G. Montgomery delivered a fascinating talk about the early history of musical comedy and Wodehouse’s collaborations with Jerome Kern and Guy Bolton and others. Bruce played several songs, including “Put Me in My Little Cell” (“the quiet comforts of a gaol”), “Rolled Into One” (wherein a fickle ingenue sings that “you don’t have much fun if you stick to one”), “Nesting Time in Flatbush” (“where there’s room to swing a cat”), and “Cleopatterer.”

A particular favorite was “We’re Crooks” (“But we’ve never been in Congress for we draw the line at that”). It drew mock protest from the consigliere contingent of

the Plum Crazyies for the memorable line “But we never could be lawyers for we’ve got some proper pride.”

In other news, the Dutch Apple Theatre in Lancaster is producing *Anything Goes* this fall. P. G. Wodehouse and Guy Bolton collaborated on the original book, with music and lyrics by Cole Porter. The book was revised prior to the show’s premiere following a disaster at sea similar to the original plot. Since Wodehouse and Bolton had other commitments, additional writers were brought in to revise the book. While later revivals revised the script further, it still retains Wodehouse’s characteristically complicated plot, witty dialogue, and improbable romantic pairings.

The Plum Street Plummies
(Olympia, Washington and vicinity)
Contact: Thomas L. R. Smith

WHO KNEW THAT, in a small town like Olympia, Washington, there would be enough people to start a TWS chapter? I certainly did not. However, at the recent Psmith in Pseattle convention, it turned out that Olympia was infested with Wodehouseans. Seven of us, each unknown to the other, met for the first time at that gathering and discussed the possibility of getting together regularly. Two exploratory meetings were held, and they have borne fruit.

We are proud to announce the establishment of the Plum Street Plummies. Our headquarters is Casa Mia Restaurant on Plum Street in Olympia, where we will meet monthly, more or less.

At our first official meeting, on March 12, 2016, Thomas Smith, Owen and Susan Dorsey, Sarah Wiley, and Ann Essko met to browse and sluice and decide on an official name for our chapter and to discuss the book *Indiscretions of Archie*. We successfully achieved all of our objectives. Thanks to Owen and Susan (our own Archie and Lu), we also learned that there were significant differences between the serialized *Strand* version of *Archie* and the published book.

On April 23, we met at Tom Smith’s house to discuss Robert McCrum’s biography *P. G. Wodehouse: A Life* on April 23. Also on display were copies of the Foreign Office, FBI, and U.S. State Department files on Wodehouse. After a lively discussion, Owen Dorsey suggested we read Wodehouse in chronological order, so at our next meeting, we will read *The Pothunters*.

So, if you are passing through, let us know and meet us for what passes for high tea in Olympia!

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



The West Texas Wooster
(West Texas)
Contact: Todd Gregory

At the moment, no doubt, she might be wishing that she could hit him with a bottle, but deep down in her I was prepared to bet that there still lingered all the old affection and tenderness.

Right Ho, Jeeves (1934)

Lord Emsworth and the Girl Friend

BY DAVID LANDMAN

It was, in itself, quite a trivial thing, but it had an astoundingly stimulating effect on Lord Emsworth's morale. What happened was that Gladys, seeking further protection, slipped at this moment a small, hot hand into his. It was a mute voice of confidence, and Lord Emsworth intended to be worthy of it.

"Lord Emsworth and the Girl Friend"

THIS PASSAGE from Wodehouse's story "Lord Emsworth and the Girl Friend" describes the climactic moment when a young girl's trust gives Lord Emsworth the courage to face down their mutual antagonists: McAllister, in the matter of flowers, and Lady Constance, in the matter of speeches to be delivered in a marquee to an audience that included a horde of rowdy London urchins. The passage has achieved a

measure of fame: It's been singled out for comment in the books of Richard Usborne (1961), Geoffrey Jaggard (1968), Frances Donaldson (1982), Barry Phelps (1992), Robert McCrum (2004), and Sophie Ratcliffe (2011), and perhaps in many other sources as well.

But why, we ask, has this particular episode been so popular with biographers? Aren't there others equally deserving of esteem? For example, the scene where the hero meets his father at the place where three roads meet and slays him springs to mind. Perhaps that is not Wodehouse. My memory, never very good, is shaky on this point. Certainly deserving, though, is the scene in "The Story of Cedric" where the hero, pinioned at the neck by a fallen window sash so that his head is alfresco and the rest of his body is intramural, so to speak, is informed by Myrtle that he is to marry her.

The particular interest in the Emsworth/Gladys scene, I believe, begins with the reference to the story by Ian Hay (Maj. Gen. John Hay Beith), as quoted in David Jansen's biography of Wodehouse. Hay wrote in a letter to an unknown person that "Rudyard Kipling once told me [it] was one of the most perfect short stories he had ever read." Disregarding Kipling's (or Hay's) allocation of degrees of perfection, it is here that we first find that the story has been called to our attention as gilt-edged.

The focus narrows to Gladys with Richard Usborne's brief remark that "this child who comes out best in all the books is the slum girl on fête-day at Blandings. . . . This girl cops McAllister, Lord Emsworth's gardener, on the shin with a stone and helps Lord Emsworth to defy his sister Connie."

Geoffrey Jaggard in *Blandings the Blest* writes of Gladys that "one could call her a Dickens character and do her less than justice, for it was not in Dickens to portray a child who could stiffen the sinews of a vacillating earl, sharing modestly his victory over his own weaknesses, yet emerging lightheartedly free from any sentimentalizing taint whatever. The result is surprisingly and tenderly humanistic, and as economical as it is effective."

Frances Donaldson developed the theme of tender humanity. She quotes generously from the episode where Emsworth and Gladys face the wrath of McAllister, and, though she does not specifically say so, it is obvious that the pathos of hot-hand-slipping-into-hand moved her to write that "'Lord Emsworth and the Girl Friend' is noticeably different from any other Wodehouse story in that some real feeling enters into it." By limiting her comment to short stories, her remark, as far as I am aware, is justified, but we should remember that there are plenty of subtly observed deep feelings in *The Coming of Bill* and other early novels.

Barry Phelps calls the moment “as beautiful and feeling an adult-and-child relationship as you can find,” but notes that “the sentiment is lightly masked by the prose of a master humorist.”

Robert McCrum calls the handclasp “a unique, moving, and highly revealing expression of intimacy.”

But, before the chorus breaks into “Small Hands I Held Beside the Salad Bar,” Sophie Radcliffe throws cold water on her predecessors’ enthusiasm as she senses “a reserve about this ‘mute vote of confidence’ that borders on tragi-comedy.” And there the matter stands.

I see no reason to disagree with the biographers that, whether one finds the scene moving, reserved, or tragi-comic, it is pure gold. What I now wish to point out is that there is more of interest in the story than this poignant moment.

For one thing, we note as a minor singularity that Ern, whose banishment from the School Treat is the prime motivator of the story, makes only a brief appearance and does not speak a word. One might say the same of the pumpkin in “The Custody of the Pumpkin,” but to my mind, Ern wins in a canter because he bites Constance in the leg—something the pumpkin lacked the nerve to do.

The surpassing uniqueness of “Lord Emsworth and the Girl Friend,” however, is that, running through it and unifying it, consciously or unconsciously on the part of Plum, is a serious theme, a tacit meaning conveyed by the totality of the episodes in the story. Broadly stated, that theme has to do with modes of charity.

The story juxtaposes two expressions of charity: The Blandings Parva School Treat, a consciously organized and socially obligatory annual fair that included inner-city children, is set beside a benevolence arising from spontaneous and heartfelt personal contact. One might say the difference is between charity and *caritas*. The intimate human bond between Gladys and Clarence wins hands down (or hands clasped, if you will), but even so, the School Treat, despite Emsworth’s displeasure, is in no way disparaged.

Poor London children in Edwardian times lived in noisome conditions. Benevolent agencies multiplied, and an annual gala at Blandings Castle’s contribution to one such charitable cause. It assuredly does good as the kids get a day of fresh air, a treat, and a chance to shy rock cakes at the silk hat of the squire. But in holding a yearly fête, Constance—for it is she who spearheads the affair—is also fulfilling a social obligation. *Noblesse oblige* about sums up Connie’s attitude. Even calling the School Treat a “fête” smacks a bit of side. Clarence, on the other hand, finds the affair a pain in the neck both figuratively and actually as he is obliged to wear a stiff

collar. He chafes at the philanthropic inconveniences his title obliges.

But Emsworth’s nature responds instinctively to an injustice done to another human being. He sees himself as one of the oppressed, a “poor peon” as Wodehouse says, and when he discovers that he and Gladys face the same antagonists, an immediate bond is formed. The lass takes heart from his presence; the lord gets backbone from hers.

It should be remembered that in 1928, when “Lord Emsworth and the Girl Friend” was first published (*Liberty*, October 6), the challenges facing philanthropic souls were seen as local and social. Today we have many concerns over crises of global and ecological dimensions. In 1928, a “silent spring” was not yet imagined. Emsworth feels no responsibility to combat global poverty, pollution, and malnutrition. He certainly knows nothing of the severe slum conditions of Drury Lane where Gladys and Ern live. Like some great sages before him, Emsworth leaves the world alone—at least the world beyond Blandings.

Nevertheless, Emsworth participates in both forms of charity: He lends his grounds and very likely foots the bill for the *pro bono publico* affair, and he forms the personal bond with Gladys and Ern. What this story can be read as saying is that organized, inclusive events such as the School Treat are meritorious, but human-hearted compassion on an intimate scale is an equal if not greater good.

It may be objected that I’ve put too much weight on what is only a charming and sentimental short story. But when a tale clearly has a theme, as does this story, the reader is justified in reading into it whatever meaning the details of the text support. The author’s intention (or lack of intention) is beside the point once he or she has whispered those fateful words, “Go little book.”

As Emsworth is said to be the character most like Wodehouse himself, we wonder how much this story consciously or unconsciously expressed Plum’s feelings. Sophie Radcliffe tells us that Wodehouse made “stealthy transfers of cash” to his struggling writer-friend William Townend. Barry Phelps tells us that “Wodehouse had always been charitable in both senses of the word, although his only public donation to charity was the \$20,000 [Herbert Warren Wind says \$30,000] he and Ethel gave to the Bide-A-Wee Association in 1966 to build the P. G. Wodehouse Shelter for stray animals at nearby Westhampton—and the public nature of the gift was only to encourage others to give, too.”

I think we can be sure that a friend in need always felt the encouraging and benevolent hand of Plum holding his or her own.

Ohio Light Opera—Again!

FROM HOLLY SCHWARTZ (aka Lady on the Train):
For the third summer in a row, the Ohio Light Opera will offer a Wodehouse musical. This year's production will be the Bolton/Wodehouse/Kern 1917 show *Have a Heart*. Debuting on July 7, it will appear seven times through August 12, in repertoire with the classic operettas *La Vie Parisienne* (Offenbach) and *The Mikado* (Gilbert & Sullivan), and a few musicals.

The Ohio Light Opera is located in Wooster, Ohio, at the College of Wooster. For more information, or to reserve tickets, email them at ohiolightopera@wooster.edu, check out the website at ohiolightopera.org, call them at 330-263-2345 (Box Office) or 330-263-2329 (Group Sales), or write to them at Ohio Light Opera, 1189 Beall Ave, Wooster, OH 44691.

We saw OLO's 2014 production of *Oh, Lady! Lady!!* and their version of *Oh, Kay!* in 2015, and enjoyed both very much. We thought all members of TWS would like to know about this upcoming production, and we hope to see you in Wooster!

On August Bank Holiday he was not allowed to potter pleasantly about his gardens in an old coat: forces beyond his control shoved him into a stiff collar and a top hat and told him to go out and be genial. And in the cool of the quiet evenfall they put him on a platform and made him make a speech. To a man with a day like that in front of him fine weather was a mockery.

“Lord Emsworth and the Girl Friend” (1928)

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Quick Ones (unless otherwise credited) courtesy of
John Baesch and Evelyn Herzog.

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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