



# Plum Lines

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## Of Pigs and Prawns

BY PETER NIEUWENHUIZEN

*We are always pleased when Peter, the president of the Dutch Wodehouse society, gives a talk at one of our conventions, as he did at the 2019 Pigs Have Wings event.*

THE PIG IS the usual suspect in a city like Cincinnati, known as Porkopolis, but what can we say about the prawns? We know them from our cocktail parties and afternoon teas. But what about the creature itself? So much to learn. Are there multiple species? Is the female deadlier than the male? And what did Wodehouse intend with his great, ominous prawn mystery?

One of the best-kept secrets of P. G. Wodehouse is his story of the prawns. The beloved Empress of Blandings ate Gally Threepwood's manuscript in the novel *Heavy Weather* (1933), leaving only a hint of this intriguing story. Let's analyze this further.

One of the major antagonists in the novel is Sir Gregory Parsloe-Parsloe (Tubby), seventh baronet, of Matchingham Hall, Much Matchingham, three miles from Blandings Castle in Shropshire. We meet Tubby for the first time as he strives to top Lord Emsworth in the battle for the biggest pumpkin in "The Custody of the Pumpkin" (1924). Later, the battle between these giants is about the fattest pig: is it *Pride of Matchingham* or *Empress of Blandings*? Sir Gregory inflames the rivalry by luring away Lord Emsworth's pig-man, George Cyril Wellbeloved, with his gold in "Company for Gertrude" (1928).

In *Summer Lightning* (1929), we find that Gally and Tubby knew each other as young men, when they were both members of the Pelican Club. They played mischievous tricks and placed bets on a variety of issues, and Tubby tended to cheat at those bets. At the big Rat contest, Tubby stuffed Gally's dog Towser with steak and onions, causing this noble creature to lose the match to Tubby's dog Banjo. Tubby even once stole Lord Burper's

false teeth in order to pawn them. Gally still remembers these sly deeds and plans to recount them in his memoirs. These threatened disclosures arouse a great deal of trepidation among those whose past behavior might be mentioned. Gally leverages the threat of publishing these anecdotes to get others to comply with his demands. He has Tubby Parsloe by the short hairs when he threatens to reveal "the full, true and complete story of the prawns, omitting nothing." This message causes great concern to the otherwise confident Sir Gregory. The story is mentioned eight times in the novel.

Unfortunately, what Gally actually wrote in his memoirs remains a mystery. Tubby commissions the detective Percy Pilbeam to steal the manuscript for £500; then Gally decides not to publish his book for the sake of Sue Brown, the apple of his eye, so she can marry his nephew Ronnie Fish. The story ends without further manuscript action.

The novel *Heavy Weather* appeared in 1933. This book continues the story some ten days later, in early August. Again there is an attempt to steal the



*A beaming Peter at the TWS 2019 convention*



*The story of Gally's memoirs winds through two novels.*



manuscript. Monty Bodkin, a nephew of Sir Gregory (and now Lord Emsworth's secretary), is trying to obtain it at the request of Lord Tilbury, aka George Alexander Pyke, first Viscount Tilbury and the owner of the Mammoth Publishing Company. Tilbury is keen to publish Gally's scandalous memoirs at all costs. "The story of the prawns" is mentioned at least four times and Gally hints at even more excesses of the juvenile Parsloe. According to Lady Constance, Gally and Lord Emsworth's sister, only one copy of the manuscript exists. Percy Pilbeam lays his hands on this copy again and hides it in the Empress's new pigsty. Fond of a tasty snack, she nibbles the manuscript almost completely, to the dismay of Lord Emsworth, who fears stomach trouble for his prize pig.

The Empress does leave some scraps of Gally's magnificent masterpiece; one of them contains a fragment of "the story of the prawns." Parsloe, Lady Constance, and Lady Julia read this fragment, and then Tubby destroys it.

The battle between Parsloe and Lord Emsworth for the fattest pig is continued in *Pigs Have Wings* (1952). Needless to say, the Empress wins the silver medal again at the Shropshire Agricultural Show. But this time there is no mention of the destroyed manuscript or the notorious story of the prawns.

Readers waiting impatiently for the background of "the story of the prawns" were given no more clues in this or subsequent works. This gap prompted other



authors to attempt to describe a possible scenario themselves.

Charles Gould, a Wodehouse scholar and collector, took the lead and wrote the first script. In his 1984 book catalogue, he composed a text in rhyme called "Prawns in Epic," with prawns in jelly as the subject. It began:

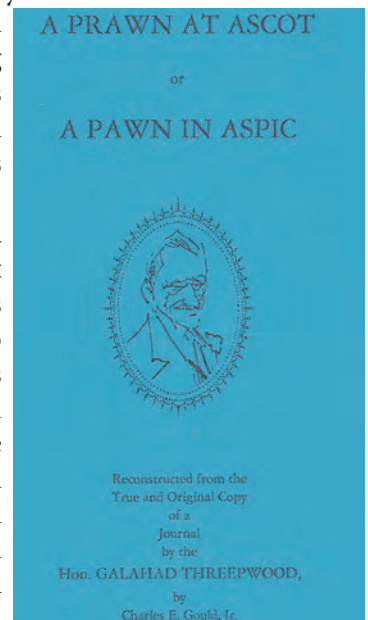
Great events come now and then,  
 which call for the poetic pen,  
 Events whose moment and whose pith,  
 establish them at once as myth.

And what happened with Tubby Parsloe at Ascot where he consumed too many prawns?

And in the all-controlling scales,  
 he weighed the Parsloe 'gainst the snails.  
 The beam shot up; and Parsloe's weight,  
 as much by Nature as by Fate,  
 Hung in the balance not two ticks,

and then crashed like a ton of bricks.  
 The gods are just; for, as he fell,  
 he took the prawn tureen as well;  
 And when the dust of battle cleared,  
 the throng about him turned and cheered—  
 For what upon his brow was seen?  
 A helmet? No! The prawn tureen!  
 Thus does the warrior from the field  
 return not on but in his shield;  
 And what though prawns are food for gods,  
 and what though Homer sometimes nods,  
 We simple mortals cannot fail  
 to see the moral in this tale  
 Of how on Ascot's grassy lawns  
 a Parsloe yielded to some prawns.  
 Indeed, 'tis not too much to say:  
 the Prawns of Fate had won the day.

In 1987, this poetic text was followed by a prose text in Gould's bibliophilic booklet *A Prawn at Ascot, or A Pawn in Aspice*. According to the subtitle of his work, he derived his text from an original copy of the manuscript by Gally Threepwood. In this booklet, Gould makes a plausible argument that Parsloe had acquired a considerable sum of money at the Ascot horse races and celebrated his earnings in a revolting way by buying and gulping countless numbers of prawns in jelly, followed by buckets full of champagne. Slightly tipsy, he tumbled from his chair and lost control due to the excess of shrimp and alcohol, so that the contents of his stomach were ejected in a well-aimed jet onto the shoes of a duchess. An unsavory affair, which would make Tubby an easy victim for blackmail by Gally.



In 1993, Norman Murphy stated that he had managed to get hold of the preserved manuscript of Galahad Threepwood. Murphy published these edited memoirs. In the prologue, he explains that in 1929 Gally Threepwood still had a copy of his memoirs and had left it to Sue Brown, now Mrs. Fish, after her marriage to Ronald. Sue was the daughter of Gally's old flame Dolly Henderson, who had a special place in his heart. In Murphy's "copy," Gally devoted a chapter to

the mysterious question of the prawns. In this version, Tubby cheated once again and his friends decided to teach him a lesson. Tubby's greatest fear was the wriggling arthropod animals, and his friends made proper use of that aversion. They tipped a bowl full of prawns into his shirt and in utter confusion he quickly pulled off his clothes to get rid of the crustaceans. Naked, Tubby fled in search of clothes and wrapped himself in a tablecloth in shame—and in the presence of the Prince of Wales. This incident also presented a wonderful opportunity for blackmail.

In April 1997, Wim Duk, the Oldest Member of the Dutch P. G. Wodehouse Society, began his quest for “the greatest PGW character.” His report was published in the Dutch magazine *Nothing Serious*. In the first chapter, he started with the lowest species, including shrimps and prawns. He referred to a suggestion made by the chairman of the Swedish Wodehouse society about Parsloe's habit of eating prawns. In this version, one of the prawns jumped from Tubby's hand to land in a lady's brassiere. Tubby immediately went hunting for his lost shrimp in that area—yet another fine way to damage his reputation.

In *A Wodehouse Handbook* (2006), Norman Murphy recorded a clue for the source of the prawn story, noting the 44-year correspondence between P. G. Wodehouse and James Penrose Harland, a professor of classical languages at the University of North Carolina. In a letter of September 28, 1961, Wodehouse wrote that “the story of the prawns wasn't really so very funny. I found it in a Victorian book by a man named Binstead, but it really isn't good enough to reveal to the public.” Wodehouse knew Binstead as a member of the Pelican Club and a Pink 'Un, a reporter for the pink tabloid *The Sporting Times*. Murphy located the Binstead book and found the story: A person places a bet, loses, and flees without paying. After some time the bookmaker recognizes him in Newmarket, where he is dressed



in rags and selling prawns from a tray. The link with Tubby Parsloe and the prawn secret was not clear to me.

The story could end here, but I bring you new information which may give Wodehouse's final word on the matter. Let me tell you of two Dutch boys who went on a quest for the origin of the story, and of their correspondence with Wodehouse that turned up in 2015.

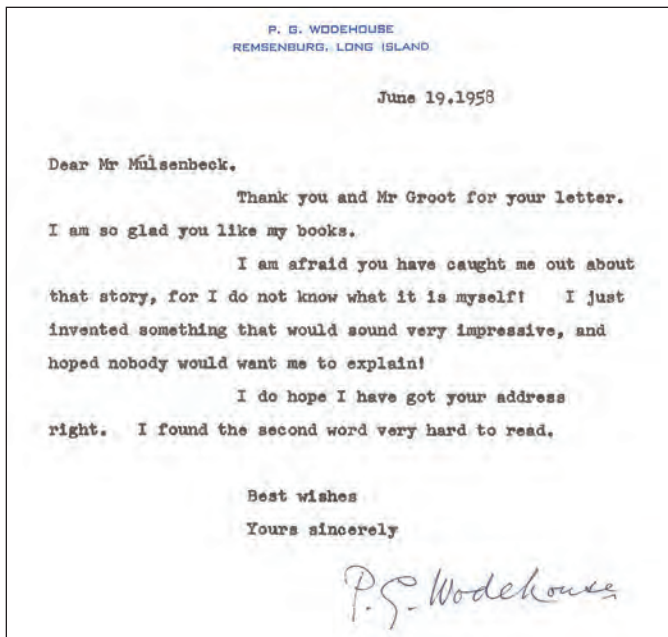
In 1958, two sixteen-year-old boys, Joost Hulsenbek and Jaap Groot, were at the Carmel Boarding School in Oldenzaal in The Netherlands, led by the Carmelite fathers and monks since 1923. In their evening hours of leisure at the boarding school, the two friends discovered Dutch translations of Wodehouse books in the school library. One of the translators, Willy Wielek-Berg, was responsible for the first Dutch versions of *Summer Lightning* and *Heavy Weather*. For reasons unknown, Wielek translated “Emsworth” as “Elmsworth,” and the story of the prawns was translated into Dutch as the equivalent of “the story of the deer.”

The two schoolboys read this mysterious episode of the “deer.” They puzzled over it and decided to write to Wodehouse himself and ask him what this story about the deer could mean.



*Carmel Boarding School in Oldenzaal, The Netherlands*

In Remsenburg, Wodehouse undoubtedly scratched his head and wondered where in those novels he had written about “the story of the deer.” Finally he realized the error and took up his pen and replied to the boys to give them the answer to the mystery—and to the story of the prawns. Wodehouse explained in his letter to Joost and Jaap (dated June 19, 1958) that they had caught him in a story-within-a-story scheme that he hadn't ever worked out. According to Wodehouse, the phrase “the story of the prawns” sounded threatening and ominous, but he had no clue what it meant or what he really was planning to work out:



I'm afraid you have caught me out about that story, for I do not know what it is myself! I just invented something that would sound very impressive, and hoped nobody would want me to explain!

The two boys weren't at all disappointed by this reply. Both have continued reading Wodehouse throughout their lives. Joost Hulsenbek was born in 1942 in Deventer, The Netherlands, and ended up with a splendid career. After graduating from the Carmel boarding school, he studied law at Utrecht University, held a position as an attorney general, and finally became vice president of the National Safety Board in the Netherlands. And occasionally, when dining on venison or having a shrimp cocktail, he remembers the exciting correspondence with Wodehouse in regard to mysteries of prawns and deer.



*Joost Hulsenbek reflects on a good life that included correspondence with PGW about the prawns/deer mystery.*

# The Wodehouse Society 2021 Convention Update: San Diego!

BY JOHN G. KAREORES

WHAT HO, Wodehousians one and all! Unless you have been sleeping in the potting shed like Bertie in *Thank You, Jeeves*, you already know that our next rousing get-together will take place October 15–17, 2021, in San Diego, California, for the 21st international convention of The Wodehouse Society. Yes, that will be an exhausting week of partying since, as we all know, October 14 is Winnie-the-Pooh's birthday—but we must persevere. There will be plenty of time to pack the two-seater and make travel arrangements, so please mark it on the calendar.

Over the next year and a half, I will be enthralling you with tantalizing tidbits regarding San Diego and its history, things to do, and useful information to help get the juices flowing. We expect to create excitement bordering on pandemonium in anticipation of the convention. Tell your friends—no, *bring* your friends for the delightful browsing and sluicing that we are sure to enjoy that weekend. We hope that the only police we encounter will be costumed versions.

I'll leave you with several fun facts about San Diego. If you plan to come as Captain Biggar or Sir Buckstone Abbott, be advised that it is illegal to hunt jackrabbits from the back of a streetcar in downtown S.D. Also, Psmith might find the city challenging, as he claimed he would take any job provided it had nothing to do with fish. San Diego was once the tuna capital of the world and is renowned for its marvelous seafood.

Seriously, if that's permitted in these ranks, San Diego is a lovely city with a mild climate averaging near seventy degrees year-round. A wonderful time will be had by all!



# Psmith: Psocialist?

BY DAVID L. LEAL, UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

SOCIALISM IS said to be making a comeback. Once consigned to the ash heap of history, we now hear of it everywhere. Youth identifies with it, elders denounce it, and public opinion surveys show its rising popularity.

Do these young fans understand this new (to them) philosophy? Do they really want the government to own the means of production, ranging from chicken farms to china dog manufacturers? Or do they just want a little more taxing and spending and a little less inequality and austerity?

We will leave this debate to politicians, pundits, and political scientists. This essay will discuss Psmith and his “psocialism” (a term I first saw in Osborne), including what he said about it, what he meant by it, and how he provides a stylish role model for today’s young radical. In doing so, we examine Psmith in his family and class contexts, suggesting that he might have been more of a traditionalist reactionary than a leftist revolutionary.

## Socialism at Sedleigh

WE FIRST LEARN of Rupert Psmith’s economic views in *Mike and Psmith*. As we all know, the boys meet at Sedleigh after receiving “bad” and “scurrilous” reports from Wrykyn and Eton.

“I am with you, Comrade Jackson. You won’t mind my calling you Comrade, will you? I’ve just become a socialist. It’s a great scheme. You ought to be one. You work for the equal distribution of property, and start by collaring all you can and sitting on it.”

This might be seen as purely humorous, but it strikes a discordant note. The last part suggests that Psmith’s definition is not that of the dictionary. A critic of such utopias might claim that Psmith sees how socialism can go wrong—someone (namely a political party) collars it all (namely the economy) and keeps it (namely for itself). Just ask George Orwell, a strong Wodehouse supporter who also knew a thing or two about socialism. After this theorizing, Psmith becomes a man of action. He decides to steal a study, and we receive a second clue about his political philosophy:

“Might have been made for us,” said Psmith approvingly.

“I suppose it belongs to some rotter.”

“Not now.”

“You aren’t going to collar it!”

“That,” said Psmith, looking at himself earnestly in the mirror, and straightening his tie, “is the exact programme. We must stake out our claims. This is practical Socialism.”

“But the real owner’s bound to turn up some time or other.”

“His misfortune, not ours. You can’t expect two master-minds like us to pig it in that room downstairs.”

This suggests that Psmith is not averse to the redistribution of property, but the scene contains a jarring, *Lord-of-the-Flies* element—the character of Spiller, the victimized study owner. This smaller and outnumbered boy appeals to the rule of law, the housemaster Mr. Outwood, but unsuccessfully. Whom does he represent in the socialism of Psmith? The capitalist fat cats who get their comeuppance? Or is he a stand-in for what actually happens in a socialist paradise, where the dictatorship of the proletariat turns into *Animal Farm*?

These early episodes suggest that Psmith does not have standard socialist views; his “practical Socialism” is more about individual self-interest than the greater good. On the other hand, we might detect a shrewd parody of socialist reality, which undoubtedly goes right over Mike’s head but is great fun to the wise-beyond-his-years Psmith.

## Socialism in the City

PSMITH CONTINUES his socialism despite, or maybe because of, his involuntary foray into capitalism. At the New Asiatic Bank, he tells Mr. Bickersdyke that “I incline to the Socialist view,” an unusual statement for a new employee to make to his manager in the center of finance. He also tells Mr. Waller that “Socialism is the passion of my life,” although he declines the invitation to speak with him at Clapham Common because “my Socialism is rather of the practical sort. I seldom speak.”

Mike displays little enthusiasm for the bank but, despite his hero worship of Psmith, does not convert to socialism. He accompanies Psmith to Clapham Common to hear Mr. Waller and fights with the local window-smashing and police-kicking toughs, but that is part of his friend-to-the-end persona and not a commentary on Waller’s politics. Mike may not be “absolutely free from brain” (*Mike and Psmith*), but he

does not have the imagination to be intrigued by ideas, good or bad, and he would be the first to admit it.

*Psmith in the City* is not a manifesto to fire up English youth with an enthusiasm for capitalism and the empire it embraces. After his first day, Mike ponders his situation: “He did not look forward to a career of Commerce with any greater pleasure than before; but there was no doubt that with Psmith, it would be easier to get through the time after office hours.” In *P. G. Wodehouse: A Literary Biography* (1981), Benny Green sees the book as an anti-banking “polemic.” Mike has little comprehension of and less interest in his work. As Wodehouse writes, the only item on the daily schedule of any interest to junior City employees is lunch. And, as did Wodehouse, Mike dreads the day when he will be sent abroad. No wonder Mike dreams of a farm and Psmith dreams of we know not what.

### Practical Socialism

**Y**EARS LATER—after his experiences as a bank clerk, Cambridge student (and possible cricket Blue), New York City journalist, and dead-fish whisperer—Psmith returns to the socialist theme. This gap in years and experience suggests that his interest in socialism was not a will-o'-the-wisp that was quickly forgotten.

In *Leave It to Psmith*, he steals the Honourable Hugo Walderwick’s umbrella and gives it to Eve, an action he later explains as “Merely practical Socialism. Other people are content to talk about the Redistribution of Property. I go out and do it.” What is this practical socialism? For Psmith, it means going about the redistribution of property wherever you are.

This sense of this phrase was not original to Wodehouse, however. The following item appeared in the “By the Way” column, conducted by Wodehouse in the *Globe* newspaper, on October 11, 1907:

M. Lefèvre, the treasurer of the Radical Socialist Congress, found to-day, on rising to make a speech, that his pocket had been picked, and that he was the poorer by £64. M. Lefèvre is a stout upholder of the even distribution of wealth, but he did not want the thing to start quite so soon.

This comment was sparked by a news account in the *Daily Express* of that morning, headlined “Practical Socialism.” Neil Midkiff, in an annotation on the Madame Eulalie website, notes that “while the two words had long been used together in a positive sense, the *Daily Express* headline writer used them ironically in a way that must have influenced Psmith’s definition

of it, which would first appear half a year later in the serialization of *Mike* as *The Lost Lambs* in *The Captain*, April 1908.”

### Why Socialism?

**B**ENNY GREEN claims that Wodehouse tells us that “Psmith has embraced Socialism in a fit of pique after his father’s action in whisking him out of Eton and into Sedleigh has deprived him of the otherwise certain honour of representing Eton against Harrow at Lord’s.” He later says that Wodehouse “instructs us that the only reason for Psmith’s dangerous flirtation with Marxist dogma is the frustrating of his expectation of a career at Eton.”

This is a possible interpretation, but it is not clearly stated in the text. Nor should we conflate socialism with Marxism, as the former does not necessarily imply the latter. An alternative possibility is that the youthful world of Psmith was shaken to its core—no more Eton and no cricket matches at Lord’s. Faced with such a calamity, we might not be surprised if a young person reevaluated his old certainties. Psmith may have turned to socialism as a way to get back at the world, but he could also have been looking for a new framework to make sense of his changing environment and create some emotional distance from his past life.

Despite the “dangerous flirtation” claim, Green does not take Psmith’s political comments seriously, arguing that by the time Psmith enters the bank, “the rampant parlour socialism of the Sedleigh days has dwindled to little more than an instrument of conversational irony, if indeed it was ever very much more.”

I take Psmith more seriously, even if Green does refer to Psmith’s “eccentric interpretation of Marxism.” It is one thing to call your chums “comrade” but quite another to tell your new and unsympathetic City boss about your socialist interests. This suggests an earnestness (or recklessness) that goes beyond persiflage, as he risked getting the mitten. He also mentions his socialism to Eve, a confession that might have ended romantic proceedings quickly. More generally, young people try on various ideas and poses without being overly serious or entirely flippant. It is part and parcel of “Youth, with all its glorious traditions.”

Note that Psmith claims to be a socialist in several novels published from 1909 to 1923. This is no fleeting interest but rather a sustained character trait from Sedleigh to Blandings. It is also remarkable given the political context of agitation at home and revolutions abroad: he is discussing something controversial and contemporary, not theoretical and historical. Maybe the future Psmith of Wodehouse’s imagination, a successful barrister, will have different views, but I somehow

doubt it. He is no Mr. Bickersdyke, renouncing his youthful ideals for the sake of earthly gain. I see him as continuing to shock his respectable Inner Temple friends with enthusiastic remarks about socialism, at least until the global realities of socialism, Marxism, and communism become impossible to ignore.

We might also consider the context of Psmith's life at the bank, specifically the economic and social changes of the time. The landed gentry began its long decline in the 1870s due to free trade, competition from America, and agricultural recession. It is no wonder that Wodehouse created young people who grew up in affluence but now must work for their livings. The new industrial and merchant classes were pushing their way into politics and society, and Psmith's circumstances encapsulate these changing times. Consider the following passage in *Leave It to Psmith*:

"We had hardly got married," resumed Phyllis, blinking, "when poor Mr. Smith died and the whole place was broken up. He must have been speculating or something, I suppose, because he hardly left any money, and the estate had to be sold. And the people who bought it—they were coal people from Wolverhampton—had a nephew for whom they wanted the agent job, so Mike had to go. So here we are."

This speculation about speculation is just speculation, and by someone who Eve would say is not very well versed in the bruising realities of life. Even if we take into account the odd passions of Psmith's father, which could have led to bad investments, the more likely explanation is the economic difficulties facing English agriculture. A gentry that relied on the land was losing money and influence, and it may be no coincidence that the Smith estate was sold to a nouveau riche business family. The words "coal" and "Wolverhampton" were undoubtedly chosen to convey the horror of a world turning upside down.

No wonder Psmith is always making disparaging comments about push, rush, "Work, work, always work! The curse of the age," and "these days of strenuous competition"—in other words, the capitalist mindset that has shoved aside the leisurely, old-world virtues of the Shropshire Smiths. If this is what capitalism has wrought, no wonder young Psmith is intrigued by socialism. And given the circumstances of Wodehouse's own life, this fairly superfluous introduction of socialism may be his revenge against the global capitalism that kept him from Oriel College, Oxford, and almost forced him to go abroad in the early 1900s.

### Socialist or Counterrevolutionary?

WHAT DOES Psmith mean by "Socialism"? When discussing Mr. Bickersdyke's prior run for Parliament, he tells Mike that their manager "was as fruity a Socialist as Comrade Waller is now" (*Psmith in the City*). According to the narrator, Waller at Clapham Common "crouched to denounce the House of Lords. He bounded from side to side while dissecting the methods of the plutocrats. During an impassioned onslaught on the monarchical system he stood on one leg and hopped."

This suggests that Psmith believes in a moderate version of socialism. He is not about to join the Heralds of the Red Dawn. He does not "yearn for the Revolution" and seek to "massacre the bourgeoisie, sack Park Lane, and disembowel the hereditary aristocracy" ("Comrade Bingo"). He never advocates a government takeover of the New Asiatic Bank. He expresses skepticism about private property, to be sure, so he likely supports some degree of redistribution and regulation.

We might also consider an alternative theory—that Psmith advocates socialism not because he is enthusiastic about revolutionary ideologies but out of an upper-class frustration with capitalism and all its nouveau riche social climbers and pushers. His socialism might be interpreted as a push-back against the capitalism that upset his world, and in this way he is more counterrevolutionary than revolutionary. He may see the enemy of his enemy as his friend.

In the political world of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, capitalism and conservatism were not the same thing (this is still true, one might point out, although it is a distinction rarely understood). In the Victorian Era, many saw the new capitalist economy as posing a threat to traditional values, virtues, and institutions. During the lifetime of Psmith and his father, the traditional pillars of conservative society—the landed gentry, the Church of England, and the monarchy—lost considerable power. The decline of agriculture squeezed the profits of the country-house set. The new factories and big cities drew workers who previously lived in a rural England dominated by the gentry and clergy. A Church of England that depended on tithes and a settled society began to lose influence. Queen Victoria's rule cemented a constitutional monarchy that avoided politics.

The power of the traditional upper class was thereby slowly but surely displaced by a new industrial and merchant class. These upstarts, seen more positively as Thomas Jefferson's "natural aristocracy," pushed their way into society and politics. They invaded everything from Parliament to London clubs and from the public

schools to the prestigious regiments. As the old families declined, Psmith may have seen socialism as the only way to counteract these capitalist trends. If there was no going back to the old ways, why not roll the dice with the new socialism?

Seen this way, Psmith moves from “so improbable a receptacle of revolutionary passion” (Green on Psmith’s real-life model, Rupert D’Oyly Carte) to an understandable searcher for meaning in a changing world. And he is not engaging in “precocious political posturing” but rather reacting to the very real and bruising economic transformations that disrupted his life.

This is not to claim that Wodehouse was the new Trollope, intentionally chronicling the changes wrenching English society. Nevertheless, he did write about what he knew and saw, as Norman Murphy showed, so we might not be surprised to see hints of social realism at play in his characters and plots.

#### Psmith as Fashion Role Model

WODEHOUSE ONCE SAID that Psmith the character was handed to him “on a plate with watercress around it.” Did Psmith the socialist have any antecedent?

Green points out that it might have been Henry Mayers Hyndman (1842–1921), Trinity College Cambridge undergraduate, Essex County cricketer, and founder of Britain’s first socialist political party. George Bernard Shaw wrote that “he seemed to have been born in a frock coat and top hat.”

Today’s young socialist could do worse than consider Hyndman and Psmith (the above debate about the latter’s beliefs notwithstanding) as fashion role models. Throughout all recorded history, revolutionary thought seems to go hand in hand with regrettable fashion choices. The first caveman to express doubts about cave ownership undoubtedly had “a style wholly his own” (*Psmith in the City*). The lefty youngster who mounts today’s barricades may wear a Che Guevara T-shirt and Crocs, but the example of Psmith suggests the revolution is not incompatible with a monocle, “zippy waistcoat,” and “knife-like crease in his trousers.” If this essay does nothing but inspire a Well-Dressed Socialist Movement, it will have been worth a bite out of the author’s time.

It is notable that Hyndman supposedly converted to Marxism after reading *Das Kapital*, but according to Tuchman (quoted by Green), he may have “adopted Socialism out of spite against the world because he was not included in the Cambridge eleven.” The alleged parallel with Psmith is clear, and it is also reminiscent

of the claim that Franklin Delano Roosevelt became a “traitor to his class” because he was passed over for membership in the Porcellian, the most aristocratic of Harvard’s Final Clubs.

History may well turn on such small events, just as a rupee fluctuation may have given us Mike, Psmith, Ukridge, Lord Emsworth, Bertie Wooster, Jeeves, Uncle Fred, Mulliner, and many other friends.

## Brian Taves

BRIAN TAVES, who died on December 17, 2019, was a Wodehousean, a formidable film historian, and a fine writer. He was a lifelong aficionado of Jules Verne and wrote brilliant introductions for many of Verne’s novels. He wrote books and essays on the great adventure writer Talbot Mundy, penned a biography of Thomas Ince, and was an authority on director Robert Florey. The author of many books on film history, he was a film archivist with the Library of Congress from 1990 until his retirement a few years ago.

Brian was also a Wodehouse scholar who spoke at four conventions and wrote fourteen articles for *Plum Lines*, in addition to his invaluable book *P. G. Wodehouse and Hollywood: Screenwriting, Satires, and Adaptations*.

As Tony Ring has written, Brian was “not only a pleasant, easygoing man, but also an invaluable reference point, particularly for Plum’s involvement in films and the theatre, often being able to find answers to the more obscure questions.”

The Wodehouse Society will miss Brian’s humor and erudition very much.



Author, film historian, and Wodehousean Brian Taves



# Rivals of P. G. Wodehouse: Ogden Nash

BY BOB RAINS



Famed poet of humor Ogden Nash was honored on a postage stamp in 2002.

FREDERIC OGDEN NASH was born on August 19, 1902, in Rye, New York. His family had strong southern roots. A great-great-grandfather was a revolutionary governor of North Carolina whose brother was a Revolutionary War general after whom Nashville, Tennessee, is named.

Nash started rhyming at an early age. At age ten, he wrote a poem for his sister's wedding; in 1917 he penned a patriotic ode in support of America's entry into World War I.

As with Wodehouse, Nash's education was negatively impacted by his father's changing financial situation. A stay at the Shaw School in Groton, Connecticut, was curtailed because of concerns for Ogden's eyesight as well as the collapse of his father's company. Later, when his father's finances rebounded, Ogden was able to attend St. George's Secondary School in Newport, Rhode Island, where he contributed short stories and poems to the school's literary magazine, the *Dragon*. He went on to Harvard College, but withdrew after one year largely because his father had once again lost employment. He had no further formal education.

Nash returned to St. George's, where he taught French for a year, then moved to New York City to become a bond salesman. This suited him about as well as working in a bank suited Wodehouse. In a year and a half, he managed to sell one bond—to his godmother.

Wishing to pursue a literary career, Nash began writing streetcar advertisements for the Barren G. Collier firm (which had previously employed F. Scott Fitzgerald in a similar capacity). Meanwhile, he and

his roommate Joe Alger wrote a children's book, *The Cricket of Carador*, which they sold to Doubleday, Page & Company. Nash next became an assistant in Doubleday's advertising department. He thrived at Doubleday, increasingly working on the editorial side with authors such as Stanley Kunitz, Christopher Morley, and Thorne Smith. During his seven years at Doubleday, Nash wrote one of his classic animal poems, "The Turtle": "The turtle lives 'twixt plated decks / That practically conceal its sex. / I think it clever of the turtle / In such a fix to be so fertile."

Toward the end of his years at Doubleday, Nash attended a dinner party thrown by his sister Gwen, which he described years later:

At a dinner dance in November 1928, I surreptitiously shifted my place card at the table while my hostess's back was turned so that I might sit next to a girl I had met during cocktails. Fortunately, she did not realize that I had substituted myself for her allotted companion, a rich and handsome former Princeton fullback, and I was able to attract her attention with well-phrased remarks about Al Smith and P. G. Wodehouse, remarks which changed imperceptibly into other and more personal compliments.

Even though the young lady, Frances Leonard, shared Nash's enthusiasm for Wodehouse, it would take two and a half years of ardent pursuit before Nash married her in June 1931. (It appears that Nash's famous aphorism, "Candy / is dandy, / But liquor / is quicker," failed to speed his wooing.) Their union eventually produced two daughters, Linell and Isabel.

Meanwhile, Nash had been sending poems and other pieces to the *New Yorker*. In December 1929, the *New Yorker* accepted a poem about Utah Senator Smoot—he of Smoot-Hawley tariff fame—which was published in January 1930. It would be the start of a four-decade relationship. Nash's next poem in the *New Yorker*, "Spring Comes to Murray Hill," begins in classic Nash fashion: "I sit in an office at 244 Madison Avenue / And say to myself / You have a responsible job, havenue?" Nash returned to the theme of earning a livelihood in another poem that July, writing, "I would live all my life in nonchalance and insouciance / Were it not for making a living, which is rather a nouciance."

In late 1930, after some extended cajoling, Nash accepted an offer from founding editor Harold Ross to go to work for the *New Yorker*. Shortly thereafter, Simon & Schuster published Nash's first book of poems, *Hard Lines*. It was a great literary and financial success, becoming a best seller. It received favorable notices in numerous newspapers and journals. Famous writers, including H. L. Mencken, Alexander Woollcott, and Robert Benchley, were effusive in their praise. One letter gushed, "I simply revel in your poems. . . . I think the book is simply terrific and this cannot be too widely known." It was from P. G. Wodehouse.

Although Nash admired Ross greatly, his tenure as an employee at the *New Yorker* lasted a mere three months. He later summarized the situation as follows: "Harold Ross hired me under two misapprehensions: first, that he wanted a managing editor, and second, that I would be a good one." Nash did not long remain unemployed: He next took an editorial position at Farrar and Rinehart, which lasted less than three years.

Beginning in September 1933, Nash earned his living primarily as a freelance poet. This enabled him to leave the New York area and move to Baltimore, where Frances's parents resided. Nash was prolific. In 1935 alone, he published 125 poems in various magazines. He had contracts to produce poems for the *Saturday Evening Post*, *Redbook*, and the *New York American*. And the *New Yorker* kept begging him for more. During the 1930s, his poems were collected and published in six books, starting with the aforementioned *Hard Lines* (1931) and ending with *I'm a Stranger Here Myself* (1938). Nash accomplished all this despite the fact that he had become a rather serious "social drinker." Alarmed, Frances threatened that if he didn't get his drinking under control, she would sleep with the next man who asked her. While Nash did not exactly become a teetotaler, he got the message and reformed his ways.

Like so many other authors of the day, including Wodehouse, Nash answered Hollywood's siren call and spent two frustrating sojourns there trying to write movie scripts, with entirely predictable results. He did make uncredited contributions to something called *The Wizard of Oz*. His second Hollywood stretch ended with his becoming seriously ill, and, after a hospitalization, he returned to Baltimore on the advice of his doctors. A later flirtation with being a screenwriter ended before it began.

Nash's first foray into musical theatre was far more successful. He collaborated with S. J. Perelman on the book, and wrote the lyrics to Kurt Weill's music, for the 1943 hit *One Touch of Venus*, which opened to highly favorable reviews. The show ran 567 performances



Ogden Nash circa 1940

on Broadway and made Mary Martin a star. It might have received even more recognition but for another show which opened that year, *Oklahoma!* Several hit songs came from *Venus*: "Speak Low (When You Speak Love)," "I'm a Stranger Here Myself," "That's Him," and of course "One Touch of Venus." This title song has lyrics of an uncharacteristically risqué nature for Nash:

Venus found she was a goddess  
 In a world controlled by gods,  
 So she opened up her bodice,  
 And equalized the odds.

If you have a touch of Venus,  
 Men of iron turn to clay.  
 Confidentially, between us,  
 They are suckers in the hay.  
 Look what Beatrice did to Dante,  
 What DuBarry did to France,  
 Venus showed them that the pantie  
 Is mightier than the pants.

Unfortunately, Nash's subsequent efforts writing lyrics for musicals were unsuccessful, with shows not getting produced, or not making it to New York, or closing after brief runs.

With Hollywood having left him physically ill, musicals not being a reliable source of income, and a college professorship unavailable due to his own lack of even a bachelor's degree, Nash continued to support his family and lifestyle by producing prodigious amounts of poetry, mostly publishing poems first in magazines,

then collecting them in books. In 1953, Little, Brown brought out *The Private Dining Room* to glowing reviews. *Time* magazine observed that Nash had “provoked so many chuckles that many readers have never paused to appraise the discipline, economy and pungency of the Nash poem at its best.”

Nash also found that writing poetry books for children (but not writing down to them) was a good income supplement. His daughter Linell illustrated some of his children’s books.

Nash wrote Hallmark cards poems for nearly a decade. (“How speedy is the life we’re living! / Now Christmas starts before Thanksgiving! / If this continues, by and by / We’ll be singing carols in July. / Since one must keep in step somehow, / Here’s next year’s ‘Merry Christmas’ now!!!”) Another source of income was writing verse for advertisements. Although he would not deign to write copy for a constipation remedy, he was happy to do so for cigarettes. (“I don’t happen to go for psychoanalysis, / But I’ve made my own Lucky-Strike-o-analysis, / I’m pernickety about what I like, / And for thirty years I’ve smoked Lucky Strike.”)

Nash also made money on the lecture circuit but disliked the separations from Frances. Lengthy road trips also took a toll on his health. He finally gave up the lecture circuit in 1968 on his doctors’ advice, which he had been ignoring for a decade.

Nash found some success in the mediums of radio and television. He also began recording phonograph albums of his poems. Additionally, Noël Coward recorded Nash’s verses accompanying Saint-Saëns’s “Carnival of the Animals,” which became a perennial favorite. Nash himself performed several live symphonic readings in various major venues.

Nash was a master of repartee. You will, no doubt, recall that Dorothy Parker famously wrote, “Men seldom make passes / At girls who wear glasses.” Nash did her one better, responding: “A girl who is bespectacled / She may not get her necktacted; / But safety pins and bassinets / Await the girl who fassinets.” (Quite improbably, in *Kill Your Darlings*, a 2013 biopic about Allen Ginsberg, Nash appears briefly in a nonspeaking role, and Ginsberg’s pals recite Nash’s response to Parker.)

Nash was a master of meter, but he happily contrived asymmetrical verses when it served the purpose, as in “Nuptial Reflection,” where he noted: “The reason for much Matrimony / Is Patrimony.”

Although Nash was rightly known as a great wit, it was not all fun and games with him. Consider his haunting “The Middle,” in which he wrote: “When I remember bygone days / I think how evening follows

morn; / So many I loved were not yet dead, / So many I love were not yet born.”

Nash often wrote lovingly of his family, sometimes to their embarrassment. But he could be downright Wodehousean concerning children, as best exemplified in “To a Small Boy Standing on My Shoes While I Am Wearing Them,” which ends: “You may take a sock at your daddy’s tummy / Or climb all over your doting mummy, / But keep your attentions to me in check, / Or, sonny boy, I will wring your neck. / A happier man today I’d be / Had someone wrung it ahead of me.”

While not personal friends, Nash and Wodehouse greatly admired each other’s work. In 1932, Nash edited a book entitled *Nothing But Wodehouse*. In the foreword, he wrote, “Every schoolboy knows that no one can hold a candle to P. G. Wodehouse, and not for lack of effort either.” In 1946, Nash reviewed *Joy in the Morning* for the *New York Herald Tribune* in his own inimitable style, beginning: “Bound to your bookseller, leap to your library / Deluge your dealer with bakshish and bribery, / Lean on the counter and never say when, / Wodehouse and Wooster are with us again.”

Wodehouse reciprocated, including Nash poems in two humor collections. *The Week-End Book of Humor*, coedited with Scott Meredith, featured Nash’s “Song to Be Sung by the Father of Infant Female Children.” A second collection, also coedited with Meredith, *The Best of Modern Humor*, included several of Nash’s animal verses as “The Ogden Nash Menagerie.” In the introduction to these verses, Meredith wrote:

Ogden Nash swears he has proof that, when he left Cambridge [*sic*] University in his freshman year, he left of his own accord. Well, we don’t know. We have reliable information that he was heaved out on his ear for making rhymes out of such words as “rhinoceros” and “preposterous.” Our own feeling is that he should have been given the Pulitzer Prize and at least \$75.00 in cash for bringing his original and refreshing version of verse into United States literature, but you know those fellows who do the discharging at Cambridge.

Actually, Nash wasn’t heaved out of Harvard, but the truth is that he did feel he had earned a Pulitzer, which he never received.

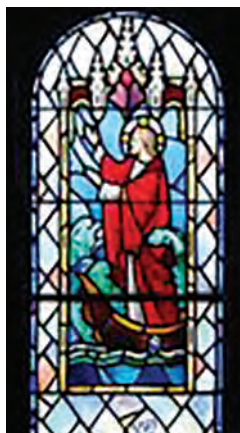
Ogden Nash died on May 19, 1971, of Crohn’s disease. According to one source, his condition was aggravated by a lactobacillus infection acquired from consuming coleslaw that had been improperly handled. If so, it was a poignant end for the man who had once

written: "A mighty creature is the germ, / Though smaller than a pachyderm. / His customary dwelling place / Is deep within the human race. / His childish pride he often pleases / By giving people strange diseases. / Do you, my poppet, feel infirm? / You probably contain a germ."



St. Andrew's-by-the-Sea Church

Memorial services were held in Baltimore and at St. Andrew's-by-the-Sea Church near North Hampton, New Hampshire, where he and Frances spent many summers. The church later installed a stained-glass window honoring Nash.



The Nash window

Ten days after Nash's death, the *New Yorker* published his poem "You Steer and I'll Toot." It was Nash's 353rd poem in the *New Yorker*. And in 2002, on the centennial of his birth, the Postal Service issued a commemorative stamp featuring Nash with six of his poems. Among the poems was "The Turtle." Thus, the word "sex" appeared for the first—and quite possibly the last—time on an official U.S. stamp.

It is ineffably sad that Nash has fallen out of favor and that kids know him not. A recent visit to Barnes & Noble's flagship store in Manhattan revealed no titles either by or about him. One can only hope that sometime in the future Nash's star will shine again. In the meantime, whenever you might be at risk of feeling despondent, I suggest carrying in your pocket or purse, and dipping into as needed, a copy of *The Pocket Book of Ogden Nash*.

Etched into the Ogden Nash window is Nash's insignia so that his humor radiates whenever the sun shines through.



# Chapters Corner

WHAT IS YOUR chapter up to these days? Please send all news to Gary Hall (see back page). Note that webmaster Noel Merrill keeps chapter items posted on the society website. It's good to send advance info about upcoming events to Noel, whose 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: Bill Franklin



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



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



**Chapter One**  
(Greater Philadelphia area) Contact: Mark Reber



THE CHAPS OF Chapter One, as is their wont, gathered at Cavanaugh's Headhouse on January 26. A special guest of honor, Mr. James Armstrong, was in attendance, having been invited by Vladimir Brusiloff, aka Herb Moskowitz. Mr. Armstrong seems like a young pip, but do not be deceived. His benign and youthful

countenance conceals the fact that he is the creator of many plays, musicals, and stories. You may read more about him at <http://armstrongplays.blogspot.com/p/blog-page.html>. Chappies were informed that James's favorite of all his plays is *Capital*, and we were invited to visit him on February 3 at the NY Theatre Barn for a reading of one of his musicals.

The main purpose of our meeting was to discuss *A Damsel in Distress*, and the discussion was ably led by Mr. Brusiloff. Vladimir neatly outlined how Plum first wrote the book in serial form for the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1919 and published it as a book later that year. The book was filmed in 1937, starring Fred Astaire, Joan Fontaine, George Burns, and Gracie Allen.

Mr. Brusiloff had clearly sweated and toiled over his fine slide show presentation (which had Oily serving as tech support, fondly alluding to Mr. Brusiloff as "Boss"). He highlighted several historical aspects of interest to the Chaps, particularly that Ms. Fontaine's terpsichorean skills were not up to snuff, ensuring that Mr. Astaire's partner would again be Ginger Rogers in future films. (This was the first RKO Astaire movie in which he was not paired with Ms. Rogers.) Alas, the movie *A Damsel in Distress* did not do well at the box office. Also of historical interest was Plum's flirtation with the powers of Hollywood. In a 1931 interview with the press, Plum waxed eloquent about how Hollywood studios paid him a lot of money for very little work. He became persona non grata after this controversial interview.

Anyone interested in Herb's presentation can email him.

Other housekeeping items were discussed at the meeting. Longtime member Murray Wilson has donated nearly a hundred works of Plum to Chapter One.

The next Chapter One meeting will take place on March 22. We will have a collective reading and discussion of two contemporaneous humorous essays by Wodehouse and A.A. Milne.

—Ram Gopalan

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



**WHAT HO**, fellow Plummies. Your faithful scribe here, reporting that the Syndicate is back in operation. We gathered shortly before Christmas at the

Garrisons' digs. It was good to catch up with our literary friends, and to share fond remembrances of those no longer among us. Bob Molumby brought a marvelous assortment of PGW books (see pic), and many were scooped up despite sincere laments over our inability to honor previous pledges not to add more books to the household shelves. We all agreed that having a book exchange is a must for future meetings!



*It's not an accident that the Chicago chapter has such fun.*

Our hope is that our next meeting will feature the much-talked-about letters in Plum's own hand to the mother of a recent recruit.

A last bit of news. I've been asked to step in to fill the triumvirate vacancy left by Susan Diamond's passing last year. I joined TWS in 1996 and was first called to serve as our chapter's treasurer when the Syndicate put on the 1997 convention. Susan's calm, poise, and humor will be a tough act to follow, but I will endeavor to give satisfaction.

—Will Saddler

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



**ON SATURDAY**, January 18, a Junior Bloodstain was held at 10:30 AM in the Roosevelt Hotel during the Baker Street Irregulars (BSI) weekend in New York City.

Aficionados of both Sherlock Holmes and the stories of P. G. Wodehouse discussed "Death at the Excelsior," a 1914 short story by P. G. Wodehouse that shows clear Sherlockian influences.

—Elaine Coppola

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



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



**The Flying Pigs**  
(Cincinnati area and elsewhere)  
Contact: Susan Pace or Bill Scrivener



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



**A Little  
More Bertie Than Jeeves**  
(Waynesville/Sylva, North Carolina)  
Contact: Beth Baxley

**The Melonsquashville (TN) Literary Society**  
(Tennessee)



**T**HE MELONSQUASHVILLE (TN) Literary Society met on December 7 at the Clevengers' home in Alcoa. There were eighteen of us, and we were delighted to welcome Janan Dakak of Knoxville to his first meeting. Our reading was "Sundered Hearts," a Wodehouse Christmas story in the guise of a golf story.

The BBQ and fixins lunch went down well, as did the level in the sherry and port bottles. In honor of the title, one clever attendee contributed "Sundered Hearts" cookies. And with other offerings of baklava, tiramisu, and more, the sweets were outstanding again this year. This was verified by my grandchildren, who swept in like vultures later that afternoon and sampled most, if not all, of the leftovers.

Our readers were Fran, Mary Jane, and Stephen (all narrative voices); Sabrina and Lee (the champion

sports heroine Mabel Somerset and Mabel's hero, the golfer Mortimer Sturgis); Alan (the Oldest Member); and Bill (the Young Man). They all did a marvelous job of entertaining us, and the surprise twist of the croquet complication was a well-received Wodehousian touch with our croquet-mad contingent.



*The Melons, deep in their November reading*

Our next local event will likely not be until Saturday, May 23, but mark your calendars now for a reprise of the 2017 reading of Linda and Ralph Norman's adaptation of *Joy in the Morning*. Details will be coming out, like daffodils, in the spring.



*Happy Melonsquashers*

In other local Wodehouse news, the NC Stage Co., in Asheville, North Carolina, presented *Jeeves Saves the Day*, running from late January until late February 2020. This next Margaret Raether adaptation of Wodehouse promised to be another good show. The western North Carolina chapter, A Little More Bertie than Jeeves, was to have seen the 2 PM Sunday matinee on February 23, along with four Melonsquashvillians.

—Ken Clevenger

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



AS I SEAT MYSELF in anticipation of applying fingers to keyboard, I note that the Mottled Oyster/Jellied Eel chapter has been in existence since 2003. We are few but we are mighty, ten or so lovers of Plum who truly enjoy our monthly trysts. If any Wodehouse fan should be living in our vicinity or happen to be in the area of San Antonio, Texas, we would love to have you join us on the first Saturday of each month at 2 PM at the Igo branch of the public library, Meeting Room A.

In November, we were delighted to welcome Deepa Ramani who visited us from Austin.

Those present at our December get-together at member Craig Hardwick's home witnessed the transfer of our mascot, the Empress, to the person who put up the wimpiest and fewest objections. We were short a few participants this year, and her majesty almost missed the event herself, due no doubt to suspicious activity in the neighborhood by Sir Gregory Parsloe-Parsloe. Yet she managed to free herself and make it home in time and is now in good hands until next year (we hope).

For our February meeting, *Something Fresh* was to have been up for discussion. (The title happens to be a newly-discovered favorite of your scribe.) If history should repeat itself, the table likely was covered with cupcakes to help celebrate January and February birthdays again, as was the case last year. Below is a shot of a few of the surprise treats brought last year by hungry Oysters to share, with members Randy Anderson, Craig Hardwick, and Liz Davenport doing their best to resist the call of the cupcakes.

—Lynette Poss



**The New England Wodehouse Th ingummy So ciety (NEWTS)**

(Boston and New England)  
Contact: Lynn Vesley-Gross



or Roberta Towner

THE NEWTS swarmed again for the holiday season outside Boston at the Watertown venue they discovered last year, which is also NEWT Stef Adams's place of work: a bicycle factory! In the rarefied atmosphere of the Seven Cycles shop, much mischief was perpetrated. We wonder when Stef will find the pearl necklace in the handlebar. Refreshments reached and exceeded their usual high standard. President Roberta Towner again presented the best pies ever. Each time she brings them, they are the best pies ever. "Gosh, what a season!" (Wodehouse in a letter to Denis Mackail, December 25, 1950)

The NEWTS have acquired their very own artificial Christmas tree for reuse at the December nottles. It is stored now in a secret location in a summerhouse in Valley Fields. There was a festive gift exchange in which no one got any of the works of Spinoza.

The group reading of a story featured "Buried Treasure." NEWTS looked quite handsome in great sweeping moustaches, as they read seriously. We adjourned optimistic for the future, like Brancepeth Mulliner. The next nottle will be at the end of March.

—Lynn Vesley-Gross



*One could not swing a cat without hitting a NEWT at the recent nottle.*

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



**T**HE NORTHWODES met on November 17, 2019, to discuss *The Code of the Woosters*. Attendees were Richard Rames (banjolele), Hilly Windle (vocals), Mike Eckman (electric Spinoza), Bruce Willey (bagpipes), Gail Toussant (flute), Barb Sipple (vibes), Bill Sipple (drums), Jim Pogue (audio mix), Karen Langenfeld (sax, clarinet), Joel Langenfeld (accordion), Joe Dolson (violin, keyboards), Janna Kysilko (vocals, pianoforte), and Mike Engstrom (tuba). The silver cow creamer, a small leather-bound notebook, Eulalie, and the screwball plot driven by romantic entanglements, revenge, a love of Anatole’s cooking, and an all-star cast of eccentrics, made this one of Wodehouse’s great books. We still enjoy the delicious moments of rereading “I could see that, if not disgruntled, he was far from being gruntled” and also Bertie’s reply, “Oh, am I?” to Madeline’s “Exactly. You know your Shelley, Bertie.”

Plum’s allusions were illuminated by the fine research of Richard Rames and Holly Windle. We noticed that some important plot developments happen offstage. We never see Anatole. Uncle Tom Travers only briefly appears and has no lines. The need to pay the absent female novelist Pomona Grindle motivates Dahlia to keep Tom happy. We felt the ending a touch contrived, with Stiffy and Stinker well-affianced after many tribulations, the stolen cow creamer spirited off to Uncle Tom, Bertie safe from Madeline, Spode conveniently cowed, and Jeeves receiving the round-the-world cruise he had been planning for since the novel’s opening.

We also shared memories of the TWS convention in Cincinnati. At the January Baker Street Irregulars weekend in New York, Mike Eckman and Dick Sveum attended the Junior Bloodstain meeting for fans of Holmes and Wodehouse.

—Michael Eckman

### The Orange Plums

(Orange County, California)

Contact: Lia Hansen or Diana Van Horn



**A**DMIRAL BIFFEN here, pulling up to the pier to disembark with the latest from the poop deck on what the Orange Plums have been up to since you heard from us last.

Mostly we’ve been celebrating Christmas—with two wonderful gatherings in the month of December! The latter of the these (appropriately taking place at the Olde Ship Pub and Restaurant in Orange County) was our annual Boat Race Night binge—elaborate trivia

board-game shenanigans of our own design which are far more about guffaws than grand knowledge of Plum’s scriptures. As you’ll see from the photo below, by taking second place in this heated competition, Diana Van Horn was forced—ahem, delighted—to take home the gigantic ostentatious object traditionally signifying the win. This also ensures that the rest of us won’t have to look at the foul thing the rest of year. (The prize for the first-place winner is of course to *not* have to take home this blighted hazard to pedestrians and traffic.)

—Adm. George J. Biffen (Jeff Porteous)



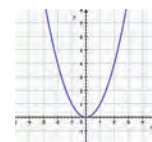
*The not-so-coveted prize from Boat Race Night*



*Orange Plums in the red and green season*

### 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: Doug Kendrick



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



**T**HE PICKERINGS gathered at the Smith residence in November. Thanks to Sherry and Mike for the delicious spread and good cheer. We welcomed our newest member, Elif. Elliott explained that our chapter was formed because a chapter was needed to host the 2003 convention. Elif quipped that necessity is the mother of convention, which endeared her to us all.

The reading assignment for this meeting was *Money in the Bank*. This book was written while Wodehouse was interned in Germany. We discussed Wodehouse's internment, the radio broadcasts to the U.S., and the impact of the broadcasts on the course of his life. The book has many of the classic Wodehouse themes: country houses have impostors, vegetarianism is bad for the soul, and writers of crime stories are good fellows.

Elliott reminisced about meeting John Mortimer at the U.K. society's formal dinner many years ago and remembered reading his play *The Dock Brief*. Your humble scrivener actually saw it many years ago. We then discussed the Aubrey/Maturin novels. We do fly off on tangents, especially if they involve British writers.

On December 15, the Pickerings gathered at Larry's house for the traditional holiday gathering. Larry was a gracious host, once more serving his famous shakshuka, the specialty of the house which never fails to delight and satisfy. One felt like Bertie after one of Anatole's repasts. This led to a discussion of Anatole and some of the dishes mentioned by Bertie. There was some discussion of trying for an Anatole-themed dinner.

The meeting started earlier than usual because Elliott persuaded us to take on the task of putting the latest *Plum Lines* in envelopes and affixing the postage thereto. After a few fits and starts, we got a system flowing and the work went smoothly. This is the city that perfected the assembly line, so we would expect no less of ourselves.

The next meeting is March 28, 2020, timed again to coincide with a *Plum Lines* mailing. The reading assignment will be *Joy in the Morning*.

—Robert Walter

**The Pittsburgh Millionaires Club**  
(Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania) Contact:  
Allison Thompson



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



**T**HE PLUM CRAZIES met on Saturday, February 22, for lunch at the Boiling Springs Tavern and then moved on to the Allenberry Playhouse for the 2 PM performance of *Leading Ladies* by Wodehouse fan, York native, and esteemed Broadway writer and director Ken Ludwig. *Leading Ladies* is particularly suited to the Plum Crazyies because it has the rare distinction of being set in York, Pennsylvania.

Our next meeting will be held in late spring. More details to follow.

—Betty Hooker

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



**The Right Honorable Knights of Sir Philip Sidney**  
(Amsterdam, The Netherlands)  
Contact: Peter Nieuwenhuizen



<https://wodehouse-society.nl>

**T**HE KNIGHTS of Sir Philip Sidney had the pleasure of attending the 3rd Annual Wodehouse Film Festival in Theatre Perdu, Amsterdam, on November 16, 2019, featuring television adaptations of the Wodehouse stories and novels. Every film was introduced by one of our society members, who had prepared a short explanation about each story. *Uncle Fred Flits By* (1955) was introduced by Donald Duk. David Niven starred as Uncle Fred, 5th Earl of Ickenham, who ends up with his nephew Pongo Twistleton posing as a vet, clipping the parrot's toenails.

The second film was *The Purity of the Turf* (1990), introduced by Knight Jannes Koster, starring Stephen Fry and Hugh Laurie as Jeeves and Wooster at Twing

Hall, placing bets at the village games and struggling with the treacherous bookie Steggles.

The third film was *The Go-Getter* (2013), introduced by member Ole van Luyn. This was one of the recent BBC *Blandings* episodes. The acting was quite over the top, and the film became almost a parody, with Lord Emsworth's son Freddie trying to earn a fortune with Donaldson's Dog Biscuits with the help of Beach the butler and in spite of secretary Baxter.



The fourth film was a novelty, introduced by our chairman, a 1969 sketch by Monty Python's Flying Circus. *Twentieth-Century Vole* parodied the yes-man culture of Hollywood, as Wodehouse had done in the Mulliner tale "The Nodder."

After this series of films, various documentaries were presented. Some fragments of *The Long Exile* (2002) were shown, introduced by member Marcel Gijbels. The Knights saw clips of Wodehouse's life, including his capture by the Germans in France early in the war, his internment in Tost (Upper Silesia), and his time in Berlin during the infamous radio talks.

The sixth film was *The Smile That Wins* (1978), introduced by Ronald Duk, twin brother of Donald. In this episode from *Wodehouse Playhouse*, John Alderton plays the detective Adrian Mulliner, who is in love with Lady Millicent Shipton-Bellinger. By advice of his doctor he tries to overcome his stomach problems by smiling. But his sinister smile leads to great confusion.

The last film was a fifteen-minute clip of a speech, "Plum at Home," which Sir Edward Cazalet gave following the dedication of the Wodehouse memorial stone at Westminster Abbey last November. In his speech, Sir Edward reminisced movingly about his visits with his grandfather and grandmother.



The auditorium for the 3rd Annual Wodehouse File Festival

During the festival, the members could enjoy tapas and drinks, and each participant received a small booklet with information about the movies.

The second big event was the launch of our Wodehouse Book Club. We started with a discussion of *Carry On, Jeeves*. Members studied the book by reading it, listening to a Dutch podcast, or watching the *Jeeves and Wooster* series on YouTube. It was a great success. The second Book Club gathering will be on April 24, with *Something New* on our list.

The next regular meeting of the Knights was to be held on February 16, 2019, at the Pilsener Club, Begijnensteeg 4 in Amsterdam.

—Peter Nieuwenhuizen

**Rugby In All Its Niceties**  
(Rugby, Tennessee Region) Contact:  
Donna Heffner



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



**The West Texas Wooster**  
(West Texas)  
Contact: Troy Gregory



## The P. G. Wodehouse Collection at Vanderbilt University

WELCOME TO THE inaugural column devoted to The P. G. Wodehouse Collection at Vanderbilt University, which was officially launched at the 2019 TWS convention in Cincinnati.

Two highlights of recent donations to the collection are Wodehouse's brown, green, and grey checkered cap, which he often wore when walking to the Remsenburg Post Office, and a photograph of him wearing it in the company of Guy Bolton. Donated by Elliott Milstein, these items were part of Lot 147 of Sotheby's 1998 auction of James H. Heineman's Wodehouse Collection.



In October, the collection received its first research request—international, no less! As part of research for a book on neo-Victorian fiction, a visiting scholar at the National University of Singapore wished to consult an article that was published as a *Plum Lines* supplement in 1982. We confirmed that the item was among the 82 *Plum Lines* issues and twelve Supplements donated by Nancie Burkett. The Curator of Special Collections then scanned and sent the article to the scholar, who was most appreciative.

To date, 554 items have been donated to the collection, and a substantial number of additional items are being processed for shipping. The online database of holdings may be seen at <http://www.wodehouse.org/PGWCVU>.



## Marlene “Molly” Gatz

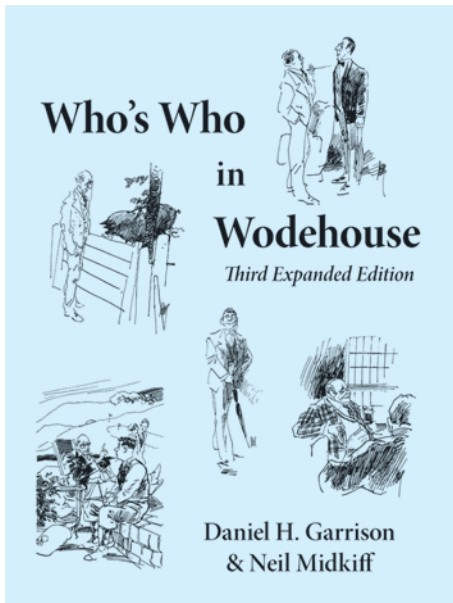
MARLENE GATZ of Omaha, Nebraska, passed away on October 29, 2019. Born in 1931 in Omaha, Molly spent her childhood in Webster City, Iowa. She returned to Omaha for college and for the rest of her life. Molly spent 14 years as an English teacher at Omaha North High and 21 years as a counselor at Omaha Benson High. She loved her students and they loved her, many becoming lifelong friends. She loved to travel in the United States and in Europe; she particularly enjoyed trips to England. Molly also enjoyed reading, visits with friends and former students, and the Irish Terriers she spent many years owning and training. Molly was a longtime member of The Wodehouse Society, first joining in 1991.

Baxter had the feeling—it was one which he had often had in the old days when conversing with Lord Emsworth—that an exchange of remarks had begun which might go on forever. A keen desire swept over him to be—and that right speedily—in some other place. He did not care where it was. So long as Lord Emsworth was not there it would be Paradise enow.

*Fish Preferred (Summer Lightning) (1929)*

# Who's Who Update

BY NEIL MIDKIFF



FOR OVER THREE DECADES, earlier editions of Daniel H. Garrison's *Who's Who in Wodehouse* have served as a guide to the remarkable variety of characters created by Wodehouse. Since the 1989 second edition, scholars have identified many short items of fiction, stories told in narrative verse, and even a few full-length stories which were never collected in books and thus escaped previous compilations. In addition, the increasing online availability of early magazine and newspaper appearances has made it possible to compare the varying published versions of even the most familiar stories.

At the 2015 convention of TWS, Dan and I agreed that a new edition was in order, and we began collaborating via the Internet on expanding the scope and depth of *Who's Who*, more than doubling the size of the last edition. At subsequent TWS conventions (Washington in 2017 and Cincinnati in 2019), as well as on my web pages, the third edition was announced as "in progress" and "forthcoming." The book is now ready to order through the print-on-demand services of Lulu.com. More than eighty copies were sold in the first week after its announcement on PGWnet.

I've set up a web page at <https://madameulalie.org/neil/whoswho.html> which provides preview excerpts from the book and convenient links to order it from Lulu.com. The book is available in trade paperback, hardback, and letter-sized paperback with larger print. For 2020 at least, the prices will be set just to cover the costs of publishing and production, so that as many fans as possible can enjoy this resource.

# TheRadioLady.com

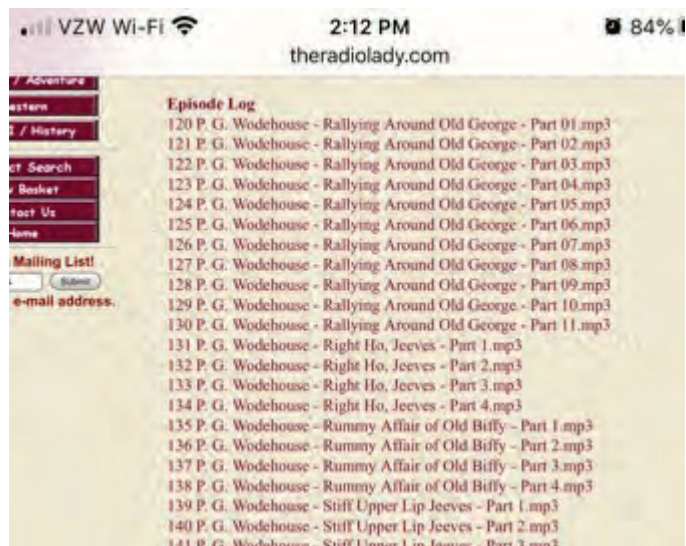
BY JEFF PORTEOUS

THROUGH A RECENT e-discussion with Anita Avery (a longtime TWS member and the curator of The P. G. Wodehouse Collection at Vanderbilt University), I was made aware of an online source for wonderful BBC radio drama adaptations of Wodehouse's work.

Said source is TheRadioLady.com—a site which sells a lot of recordings of old-time radio artists on mp3, but has in particular a big collection of British material and within that an amazing assortment of some of Plum's best and most popular. These are quality BBC productions, dramatic radio adaptations (not just audiobooks) that have aired on the BBC and at least some on NPR "over here" as well. Some have already been made commercially available and are indeed relatively common (the hysterical Bertie/Jeeves stories starring Richard Briers and Michael Hordern for example). But some have not, so said gems have likely not been heard since they were actually played on the air decades ago.

What's more, they're cheap! Each mp3 disk contains many hours of priceless PGW, and it's only \$6. The Radio Lady has and sells three disks chock full of Wodehouse titles, so for a mere \$18 and shipping, you can get something like 90 hours of Plum adaptations. I, of course, ordered my three immediately. And I felt duty-bound to share this gold strike with you—as well as try to help out the Radio Lady, since she has obviously done us such a wonderful favor (and I told her I'd spread the word among my fellow Plum fans).

Below is a sample of the titles as listed on the website. I really don't think you could do better for entertainment on long car commutes. (Note again, they're mp3s, not audio CDs, so they require a compatible disk player.)



# The Berlin Broadcasts in Historical Context

BY TODD MORNING

READERS OF *Plum Lines* will know that for the past several years I've been delving into the details of P. G. Wodehouse's talks on German radio in 1941. For 79 years a great deal has been written about these broadcasts. Yet nearly every account of Wodehouse's Berlin broadcasts gets a few details wrong, with some inaccuracies frequently repeated. Take, as just one example, the reaction of the British public libraries to the broadcasts. In 1945, George Orwell wrote in his essay "In Defense of P. G. Wodehouse": "One result of [the first broadcast] was that numerous lending libraries withdrew Wodehouse's books from circulation." Despite the passage of many years since Orwell's essay, the notion that public libraries throughout the United Kingdom withdrew Wodehouse's books still comes up. The truth, however, is that only five libraries (out of over 500 public libraries in the UK at the time) removed Wodehouse's books, while two more decided not to purchase new works that he might publish, but left alone the books already in their collections. At the same time, some libraries vigorously defended the inclusion of Wodehouse's books in their collections. The majority didn't even bother to discuss the matter.

As I mentioned, this is just one example. Untruths about this period of Wodehouse's life reappear every few years, usually in a newspaper article that feeds off a previously published inaccurate report. Read some of these accounts and you'd come away thinking that Wodehouse gave cocktail parties for German officers at his house in France, that his wife Ethel reveled in the attention of Nazi officials, and that Wodehouse's prewar writings betray a pro-Nazi bias. None of these are true.

Most chroniclers of this period also fail to place the Wodehouse talks in the context of the wider propaganda war between Britain and Germany, and often don't explain what the Germans hoped to gain from his broadcasts. Finally, it is rarely mentioned that Wodehouse was far from the only Allied citizen who ended up on German radio, despite not supporting the Nazi cause. British and American POWs were regularly featured on Nazi broadcasts. I even came across a book written by a Jewish-American POW who hosted a show on German radio named (almost unbelievably) *Krautland Calling* (more on this later).

As soon as the Nazis took power, they recognized that radio could be a valuable propaganda tool. They used radio to spread propaganda not only to the Germans but to citizens of other countries as well.

German shortwave broadcasts to the United States began in 1933. By 1935 Nazi broadcasts over shortwave could be heard throughout Europe, Africa, South America, Southeast Asia, and even Australia.

The British, to their detriment, were slower to recognize the advantages of radio for spreading propaganda. Soon after war broke out in September 1939, British leaders were horrified to learn of the popularity with their citizens of the German radio programs featuring William Joyce (known to the British as Lord Haw-Haw). A December 1939 report estimated that on some nights as many British citizens listened to Lord Haw-Haw as tuned in the BBC's Home Service bulletins. Edward Stourton, in his book *Auntie's War: The BBC During the Second World War* (Doubleday, 2017), quotes from a December 5, 1939, memo from the BBC Director General Frederick Ogilvie:

We are getting a disturbing amount of reports from Public Relations Officers at Commands and from other sources which indicate that the Hamburg broadcasts in English are becoming a definite factor affecting public morale in this country. The transmissions are, I think you will agree, ingenious, and though the British public's first reaction was one of amusement, I am not sure that the constant reiteration of Lord Haw-Haw is not having a bad effect.

Stourton writes that this same memo went on to suggest that "putting P. G. Wodehouse on the air to mock Haw-Haw might be an effective remedy." (The BBC never acted upon this suggestion. Wodehouse's life story might have been very different if they had.) The BBC eventually shifted their listeners away from Haw-Haw by offering more compelling programming and accurate news reports. It didn't help that in the war's early months, the BBC offered endless hours of live organ music, interspersed with annoying reminders of proper wartime behavior—earning the "Auntie" nickname.

After the fall of France, the propaganda war shifted to the then-neutral United States. In this battle, though, the British consistently outmaneuvered the Germans. According to Lynne Olson in *Those Angry Days: Roosevelt, Lindbergh, and America's Fight over World War II, 1939–1941* (Random House, 2013), the Germans continued their shortwave broadcasts and quietly passed

money to American pro-Nazi and isolationist groups. The British, on the other hand, responded on multiple fronts, enlisting the British community in Hollywood, sending prominent citizens and war heroes on speaking tours, and, perhaps most significantly, allowing Edward R. Murrow to broadcast from London with the sound of exploding bombs reverberating in the background. The British began their own shortwave broadcasts to the United States, often featuring talks from prominent authors. J. B. Priestley's wartime broadcasts are well remembered in Britain. Less well known is that in the same period, Priestley regularly gave talks which were beamed to the United States.

Nicholas John Cull, in his book *Selling War: The British Propaganda Campaign Against American "Neutrality" in World War II* (Oxford University Press, 1995), states that in December 1940 a British press officer was able to report: "There is such a marked sweep of pro-British feeling running through the States that even striptease dancers discard their brassieres and what-have-you to the tune of 'There'll Always Be an England.'"

Despite their propaganda success, however, the British were locked in debate as to what image of their country should be projected to the USA. According to Cull, some on the British side saw the effectiveness of playing up the image of Britain as a land of quaint cottages, quiet country lanes, and well-tended gardens. The publication in August 1940 of the hugely popular poem "The White Cliffs" by Alice Duer Miller (which sold 300,000 copies in the U.S.), about an American finding happiness with her English husband at his estate in Devon, seemed to underscore the effectiveness of this approach. Others, such as Priestley, chaffed at this sentimental image. He wrote: "This isn't the England that is fighting the war. The Christmas card caricature of England couldn't fight this war for a couple of days. . . . They don't make 16-inch guns or Hurricanes or Spitfires down on the old family place in Devon."

P. G. Wodehouse seems unwittingly to have become part of this controversy. While researching an article for the Summer 2016 edition of *Plum Lines* about the American response to the Wodehouse broadcasts, I came across an August 4, 1941, interview in *Time* magazine entitled "Acid for Wodehouse." This article was written after the poisonous BBC broadcast by William Connor in which he accused Wodehouse of being a rich playboy, happy to collaborate with the Germans. I am surprised that I have not read any accounts of this *Time* interview with Connor in biographies of Wodehouse, because in it Connor lays out his motivation for his savaging of the British humorist:

Highly enjoyable to hefty, bespectacled William Connor was the national hubbub about his broadcast. In his office at the *Mirror* he continued to turn out vitriolic screeds in longhand, taking time out occasionally to blow a few toots on his mouth organ, an inspirational aid. Said he last week: "I have never been so pleased over anything in my life . . . The BBC is anathema to me. . . . There are Americans who still think English people are Bertie Woosters calling each other 'Milord' and I thought the Wodehouse broadcasts would be very helpful to people like Burton Wheeler."

Burton Wheeler was a leading isolationist senator from Montana. It is not known if he ever read Wodehouse. You will note that in this interview Connor didn't refer to anything that Wodehouse actually said in the Berlin broadcasts. Instead, he stated that he thought Wodehouse's comic creations were hurting the British cause. In this he seemed to agree with Priestley on what constituted the correct portrait of British life to send to Americans. Connor, however, wanted to go a step further and not only abolish Christmas card sentiments: he wanted to purge any humor from portrayals of England and the English.

Connor and Priestley got it wrong, though. Americans weren't as naive about British life as they presumed. The growing American support for Britain was not undermined by a painting of a thatched cottage or a description of Bertie Wooster poking a hot-water bottle with a sharp stick. But as E. B. White wrote, "Why is it, do you suppose, that an Englishman is never happy until he has explained America?"

Chroniclers of Wodehouse also fail to mention that the Germans frequently persuaded British and American POWs to take part in their broadcasts. For instance, the American Nazi propagandist Mildred Gillars (known to Allied soldiers as Axis Sally) featured Allied prisoners on her radio show in a segment called "Survivors of the Invasion Front." In some cases, Axis Sally fooled the American prisoners into agreeing to be interviewed by claiming that she was with the Red Cross, and any complaints that the prisoners had about life in the camps were edited out.

It seems that the Germans had no trouble finding prisoners willing to sit in front of a microphone. Paul Schmidt, who worked as a German foreign office interpreter, wrote a memoir entitled *Hitler's Interpreter* (first published in 1951). In this he described his efforts in 1943 to persuade the British and Canadian prisoners who were captured in the Dieppe raid to broadcast:

We learnt that the English language broadcasts from Germany were listened to attentively, and we were told the best time to give them. "If you want to, you yourselves can give your family the news of your capture over German radio," we told the English. Despite the strict rule against broadcasting, almost all of them were prepared to do so.

Why were the Germans interested in having prisoners broadcast? The answer lies in Schmidt's interrogation of the Canadian prisoners:

We were interested to find out that people in Canada were unlikely to hear our propaganda. When the Canadians who had been captured at Dieppe wanted to send personal messages, we asked them whether their families had a shortwave set so that they could receive messages from Germany. They said they had not, and explained that personal messages from prisoners of war were relayed by local transmitters. If this was so, it was a perfect way of making our attempts to exploit such messages for the purposes of propaganda of no avail, because the local transmitters relayed the greetings and cut out the propaganda.

Perhaps the most extreme example to use prisoners for radio propaganda was *Krautland Calling*. (Yes, the Germans signed off on the title.) The daily half-hour program, broadcast in the war's final months, was hosted by a Jewish-American POW named Hal Lister. Lister wrote of his experiences in *Krautland Calling: An American POW Broadcaster in Germany* (Eakin Press, 1990). The program, which featured music and messages from POWs, was broadcast over medium wave and never reached North America. The Germans hoped that Allied soldiers in Europe would tune in for the music and stay tuned for other programs aimed at demoralization. In this they failed. Lister and two other GIs who worked at the station as musicians eventually escaped. The Germans packed up their station and ran for it as the American army approached in April 1945. After the war, Lister was interviewed by the FBI but never charged.

Some Nazi sympathizers who worked as radio propagandists suffered a harsher fate, however. William Joyce was tried and executed by the British after the war; Mildred Gillars spent twelve years in a U.S. prison.

It is clear that the Germans wanted Wodehouse to give talks on their radio because they hoped

Americans would listen to him and then stay tuned for the propaganda. Did this work? The CBS news reporter Harry Flannery, who interviewed Wodehouse a few days before the first broadcast, wrote a year later: "[Wodehouse's broadcast] was one of the best Nazi publicity stunts of the war." However, Flannery was in Germany during the time of PGW's broadcasts and so was not in a position to judge their effectiveness as propaganda with the American or British public. The truth is that the broadcasts only resulted in condemnation of Wodehouse in Britain and America. When I looked into the American reaction to the broadcasts for my 2016 *Plum Lines* article, I could find only one account (actually, not a news report but a letter from a reader to *Time*) in which someone listened to a Wodehouse broadcast. This letter writer noted that the talk must have been recorded in advance (which it was).

Many who write about the Wodehouse broadcasts, however, still give the impression that they played an important part in Germany's overall propaganda efforts. This is not the view of historians who have extensively researched propaganda in World War II. Over the past several months, I've read about ten books about World War II propaganda with titles such as *Hitler's Radio War*; *Hitler's Airwaves: The Inside Story of Nazi Radio Broadcasting and Propaganda Swing*; *Propaganda in War, 1939-1945*; *Nazi Propaganda in the 2nd World War*; and *Spinning History: Propaganda in World War II*. Only two of these books mentioned the Wodehouse talks, and they dealt with them in just a few sentences. While there is no doubt that the broadcasts (and the fallout from the broadcasts) were important in Wodehouse's own life, historians do not feel that they played a significant part in the propaganda war.

"I've got one of my dyspeptic attacks. You haven't a digestive pill on you?"

"I'm sorry. I came out without any."

"Hell!" he said, rubbing the abdomen. "I'm in agony. I feel as if I'd swallowed a couple of wild cats. Hullo," he proceeded, changing the subject, "what's that safe door doing open?"

I threw out the suggestion that somebody must have opened it, and he nodded as if thinking well of the theory.

"Damned carelessness," he said. "That's the way things get stolen."

And before my bulging eyes he stepped across and gave the door a shove. It closed with a clang.

*Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit* (1954)

# Wilde Plums

IN A 2019 ARTICLE in the *Washington Post*, Michael Dirda recommended the Dornford Yates mysteries, which were written under that pen name by Cecil William Mercer. Michael knew about these books from a prior recommendation to him, wherein the Yates books were described as featuring “rich and witty young people, who slipped around Europe in a Rolls-Royce . . . and regularly thwarted master criminals.” According to Michael, the books are done “in a showy, high-flown manner—half Oscar Wilde, half P. G. Wodehouse.” The protagonist is Bertram Pleydell, nicknamed Berry. The Pleydell clan, both male and female, “incessantly exchange teasing banter, quips, and affectionate insults.” While Michael calls the Berry stories effervescently silly, Yates also wrote a number of serious thrillers.

I don't know if you ever read a book called “The Masked Seven”? It's one of those goose-fleshers, and there's a chap in it, Drexdale Yeats, a private investigator, who starts looking for clues in a cellar one night, and he's hardly collected a couple when—*bingo*—there's a metallic clang and there he is with the trap-door shut and someone sniggering nastily on the other side. For a moment his heart stood still, and so did mine. Excluding the nasty snigger (which Stoker might quite well have uttered without my hearing it), it seemed to me that my case was more or less on all fours with his. Like jolly old Drexdale, I sensed some lurking peril.

*Thank You, Jeeves (1934)*

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