

“Never Built at All, and Therefore Built Forever”¹: Camelot and the World of P. G. Wodehouse*

JAY RUUD

In his later years, P. G. Wodehouse wrote “I go in for what is known in the trade as ‘light writing’ and those who do that—humorists they are sometimes called—are looked down upon by the intelligentsia and sneered at” (*Over Seventy* 785). Essentially, he was identifying himself as a “middlebrow” writer, if by “middlebrow” we are describing the sometimes unbridgeable gulf separating the middle class from the tastes and cultural achievement of the elite “highbrow” group.² While the term was initially used pejoratively (Macdonald 1), it has recently been seen as designating a literature, more popular, more likely feminist (Macdonald 1-2), that resists the male-dominated intellectual elitist productions of high modernism (and post-modernism) in favor of detective fiction, historical fiction, and the comic novel, of which Wodehouse was the master. Wodehouse creates a secondary comic world in his fiction, a world not of the highbrow modernist’s ironic reassessment of cultural standards or the overturning of old forms, but of long-gone Edwardian values, among which are the even more antiquated tenets of chivalry, at least chivalry as conceived of in Victorian England.

Modern medievalism is in itself a kind of middlebrow perspective: is there a more middlebrow novel than T. H. White’s *Once and Future King*? If middlebrow is a means by which the middle classes aspire to the tastes of the highbrow culture, then chivalry, perceived as the distinguishing feature of aristocratic medieval society (only the truly

*For debates inspired by this article, please check the *Connotations* website at <<http://www.connotations.de/debruud0241.htm>>.

noble can truly love, as medieval love poets were fond of asserting), is in Wodehouse's fiction a distinctly middlebrow activity. Wodehouse is fully aware that his chivalry is an anachronism, practiced by his more idealistic characters against the modern, realistic, and mercantile interests of the powerful older women in his stories. But then so is his Edwardian world: his characters adopt an outmoded sense of nobility, filtered through a by this time outdated Victorian lens, that perfectly fits Wodehouse's Edwardian society which is also an imagined, idealized place no longer existing in reality.

Auden, Waugh, and Orwell admired Wodehouse³ chiefly for his depiction of a self-contained but perfectly realized comic world, comparable to the "green world" of Shakespearean comedy. Wodehouse's universe follows its own inner logic and, though reminiscent of the Edwardian country estate, is depicted over and over again as if coexisting with the "real" world of depression-era and even post-1945 England. Like Tolkien's Middle Earth and Pratchett's Discworld, Wodehouse's Blandings Castle and Totleigh Towers provide an escape from mundane reality. In Wodehouse's case, it is an escape into a more innocent world wherein the dangers are produced by folly rather than malice.

It is my contention that Wodehouse was largely influenced, in the creation of his fictional world, by the romance world of Arthurian legend. In an article published in this journal in 2011, Lawrence Dugan described Bertie Wooster as being "like a comic knight who is given a quest and performs it" (236). In this he was anticipated by Inge Leimberg, who wrote of Wodehouse in 2003-04 that "figures of knight errantry never lose their charm for him, and he finally exalts them by making the knight-errant surpass himself in exchanging the sword with the slapstick" (75). I would like, first, to expand on these suggestions and then assert what I consider the likely source for Wodehouse's medievalism.

Wodehouse, of course, knew Malory's work and grew up at a time when Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* (arguably a middlebrow creation themselves, scorned by critics like Carlyle⁴) were especially popular.

He was certainly aware that the Arthurian world was not “real” in any physical or historical sense, but was a kind of idealized “medieval” world, complete with a chivalric code of honor and certain romanticized attitudes toward love that only truly apply within the boundaries of Arthurian fiction. These chivalric ideals Wodehouse adapts—often with tongue in cheek—to his own imagined Edwardian milieu. Although some of these attitudes may be attributed to the values of his public school upbringing, those principles were certainly also influenced by nineteenth-century medievalism. I contend that this transformed Arthurian chivalry pervades Wodehouse’s work, and that Wodehouse associates those ideals chiefly with Tennyson, whom he always admired as his favorite modern poet.

At Dulwich College, his public school, Wodehouse received a classical education in Latin and Greek, and his study of English literature would have taken him from the *Knight’s Tale* through the *Faerie Queene* (see McCrum 30), the wisdom of those days being that “modern” poets could be read without the need of formal instruction. In Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Spenser, Wodehouse would have been immersed in notions of chivalry. On his own, he found Tennyson, and found much to admire, particularly in the great Victorian’s medievalism. In a letter to a friend, the 18-year-old Wodehouse wrote in 1899: “I read some Browning today. I still like Tennyson better, though. I think some of the descriptions of nature in T. are absolutely whacking” (Ratcliffe 41).⁵ Almost 50 years later, he wrote to Guy Bolton that reading Shelley was “like being beaten over the head with a sandbag. I’m afraid I’ve got one of those second rate minds, because while I realize that Shelley is in the Shakespeare and Milton class, I much prefer Tennyson, who isn’t” (Ratcliffe 424). Perhaps the clearest evidence of Wodehouse’s affection for Tennyson is that, on July 21, 1940, when he was arrested by the Nazis in France and taken to a prison at Loos, Wodehouse took time to grab two books to bring with him: one was the complete works of Shakespeare; the other, a volume of Tennyson (see Green 182).

In his *Idylls*, Tennyson is fairly prescriptive about his notion of what constitutes Arthurian chivalry. In “Guinevere,” he enumerates tenets of his knights’ code:

To reverence the King, as if he were
 Their conscience, and their conscience as their King,
 To break the heathen and uphold the Christ,
 To ride abroad redressing human wrongs,
 To speak no slander, no, nor listen to it,
 To honour his own word as if his God’s,
 To lead sweet lives in purest chastity,
 To love one maiden only, cleave to her,
 And worship her by years of noble deeds
 Until they won her; (465-74)

Wodehouse is never so prescriptive, and by personal inclination is not so very much concerned with the King or with Christ, but he does create a world wherein the righting of wrongs, the honoring of one’s word, and the love and service of one’s lady are of primary, if often ludicrous, importance.

A cursory glance at some of Wodehouse’s novels reveals ample evidence of his interest in the chivalric ideal. One of his early masterpieces, *A Damsel in Distress* (1919), not only alludes to the romantic cliché in its very title, but, as Laura Mooneyham White notes, “update[s] the archaic patterns of romance. The ‘damsel’ is not rescued from a tower, island or enchanted forest but instead leaps into our hero’s taxi” (181). In case we have missed the Arthurian overtones of the novel, Wodehouse gives us a police officer whose voice “slid into the heated scene like the Holy Grail sliding athwart a sunbeam” (*Damsel in Distress* 40). Furthermore, Inge Leimberg asserts that the plot of the *Damsel in Distress* is “modelled closely on Tennyson’s *Maud*” (57-58). That “closely” may be a bit overstated (one being a comedy and the other a tragedy), but both poet and novel have a lady named Maud, being kept from her true love by her family, particularly an interfering brother, and complications ensue from that interference—tragic ones in Tennyson, farcical ones in Wodehouse, including physical humor (as when Maud leaps into George’s taxi to plead

for his help) as well as improbable situational humor (such as Maud's family mistaking George for the man Maud claims to be in love with).⁶ And it is true that the novel's protagonist, George, makes his own connection with Tennyson's poem: ever since he has learned his beloved's name, "[w]hen he has not been playing golf, Tennyson's *Maud* has been his constant companion" (*Damsel in Distress* 111).

Two other novels from Wodehouse's more mature period, *The Code of the Woosters* (1938) and *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit* (1954), imply even in their titles a chivalric code of honor that, as William Vesterman claims, inspires the whole corpus of the Jeeves and Bertie Wooster books. Vesterman characterizes this code as "a natural and sempiternal social hierarchy, one cemented by reciprocal personal loyalties with duties extending above, below, and sideways" (97). The code demands a strict feudal loyalty to fellows in one's own circle. It also involves a view of love that is not simply idealized but even courtly, admitting the possibility of love at first sight, and, especially in Bertie Wooster's case, a realization that honor demands "only a lady may honorably break engagements" (Vesterman 100).⁷ That the roots of these ideals are in medievalism is clear from incidents like the following: in *The Code of the Woosters*, Madeline Bassett, a damsel Bertie considers "ghastly" but who believes he is in love with her, says he reminds her of the troubadour poet Geoffrey Rudel, famous for loving a lady from afar. "He fell in love with the wife of the Lord of Tripoli," Madeline tells Bertie, who comments: "I stirred uneasily. I hoped she was going to keep it clean" (*Code of the Woosters* 40). Of course, there is always an air of farce beneath the ideals, so that a cow creamer becomes an item of exaggerated value, and the stealing of a policeman's helmet is a bold and significant pastime. Thus Vesterman sees Wodehouse as

expressing the feudal spirit in a style that is mock-heroic but also and simultaneously straight pastoral, the same combination that William Empson finds at work in *Don Quixote*. The idyllic virtues of Bertie's world serve a commonly acknowledged romantic nostalgia, a yearning for a place a long, long time ago in a galaxy or Middle-earth far, far away. (Vesterman 100)

Wodehouse's other most popular series of novels, centered on Blandings Castle, is equally infused with the spirit of chivalry, chiefly through the aptly named Galahad Threepwood, younger brother of Lord Emsworth. His Christian name immediately conjures images of Arthurian chivalry, but the great irony of Galahad's name is that, far from being the pure and spiritual knight of Malory or Tennyson, Galahad is a well-known philanderer and partier who has reached late middle age none the worse for wear. In his debut novel, *Summer Lightning* (1929), we are told:

A thoroughly misspent life had left the Hon. Galahad Threepwood, contrary to the most elementary justice, in what appeared to be perfect, even exuberantly perfect physical condition. How a man who ought to have had the liver of the century could look and behave as he did was a constant mystery to his associates. (*Summer Lightning* 153-54)

The irony of his name is so palpable that his niece Millicent declares "It always makes me laugh [...] when I think what a frightfully bad shot Uncle Gally's godfathers and godmothers made when they christened him" (*Summer Lightning* 153). In part, Galahad is a stock figure, what Benny Green calls "the monied younger son without the encumbrances of responsibility, ambition, or guilt" (223).

But there is more to Galahad than a self-involved ne'er-do-well. For Galahad, too, has a chivalric code of sorts, one that Green calls "a code of conduct at least as admirable as those in current usage on the ramparts of Blandings" (224): he is consistently the upholder of the values of courtly love. And this code makes Wodehouse's Galahad in his idealism not so very different from Tennyson's after all. For Galahad, in *Summer Lightning* and in the six subsequent Blandings novels in which he appears, is characterized as the unrepentant romantic whose chief motivation becomes consistently to encourage and help to bring about the unions of young people in love. He is what Robert Hall calls the "*deus ex machina*" figure in the novels who, like Jeeves in the Wooster series, is instrumental in bringing about the happy endings, concocting "clever ways of outwitting his sisters and preserving both

Lord Emsworth's absent-mindedness and the romances of the young folk who have been sent to Blandings to separate them from their loved ones" (Hall 31).

Galahad has been a believer in true love ever since he was forced by his family to give up his youthful passion for the chorus girl Dolly Henderson some thirty years ago. The figure of the unattainable beloved, a Countess of Tripoli far away and married to another, has sustained Galahad like the unattainable grail. Young love should triumph, Galahad believes, remembering his own failure. This association should be apparent to readers from Gally's first appearance in *Summer Lightning* when, coming across the lawn at Blandings, he trips over the dog, but "so graceful was the agility with which he recovered his balance that he did not spill a drop of the whisky-and-soda in his hand. He continued to bear the glass aloft like some brave banner beneath which he had fought and won" (153-54). He is a knight crusading under a banner of victory, and he holds aloft a grail-like glass, miraculously keeping it from spilling.

These same chivalric ideals lie behind typical Wodehouse short stories as well. Consider, for instance, the collection of mature Wodehouse stories entitled *Young Men in Spats* (1936). Wodehouse uses the idea of chivalry as a shaping force in very nearly every story in this collection: the stories typically feature a protagonist motivated in some way by the tradition of chivalry or courtly love as conventionally presented in Arthurian romance. In the first story, "Fate," Freddie Widgeon feels compelled to carry a heavy suitcase for a young damsel in distress because his love for his fiancée inspires him to chivalrous acts: "One of the things that being engaged does to you, you must remember, is to fill you to the gills with a sort of knightly chivalry" (13), comments the narrator. In "The Code of the Mulliners" (a title anticipating the later *Code of the Woosters*), Wodehouse's favorite narrator Mr. Mulliner describes the situation of his nephew Archibald. Convinced that he must find a way to end his engagement to Aurelia Cammerleigh because of what he believes is his mother's insanity, Archibald attempts to convince *her* to break it off with *him*. The code

of the Mulliners, it seems, like the code of courtly love, will not allow a gentleman to desert his beloved: According to Mr. Mulliner himself, “an engagement cannot be broken off by the male contracting party. When a Mulliner plights his troth, it stays plighted” (219).

The final story of the collection, “The Fiery Wooing of Mordred,” not only includes a protagonist with an Arthurian name (albeit a villainous one), but the knightly Mordred, following the conventions of courtly love, also falls in love at first sight with Annabelle Sprockett-Sprockett in his dentist’s office. As the narrator explains: “Most of the Mulliners have fallen in love at first sight, but few with so good an excuse as Mordred” (240). He is even willing to perform feats of knightly service for her: when she asks him if she may see the dentist ahead of him, “[c]onsidering that Mordred by this time was in the market to tackle dragons on her behalf or to climb the loftiest peak of the Alps to supply her with edelweiss, he was able to assure her that he did not mind” (242-43). The incongruity of giving the same weight to tackling dragons and giving up dental appointments is quintessentially Wodehousean. Like any true lover, Mordred also writes poetry—or at least tries to. Of course, his various sheets of rejected poetry catch fire when he throws his cigarette in the wastebasket and nearly burns down the Sprockett-Sprocketts’ mansion, but it turns out that is what they are hoping for, since they want to collect the insurance money and move to London. Ultimately, Mordred does complete the quest set for him by his lady and wins her hand.

I should mention, too, that even in Wodehouse’s golf stories, these chivalric elements enter, with the rules of golf replacing the chivalric code as a framework for life’s decisions. This point is made most manifest perhaps in the delightful “Sundered Hearts,” in which the narrator (the club’s Oldest Member) states baldly:

In the days of King Arthur nobody thought the worse of a young knight if he suspended all his social and business engagements in favor of a search for the Holy Grail. [...] Why, then, blame the man of to-day for a zealous attention to the modern equivalent, the Quest of Scratch? (77)

As the story continues, something much like a courtly love affair blooms between golf fanatic Mortimer Sturgis and Mabel Somerset, which the narrator calls “a case of love at first sight on both sides” (79). Like any good courtly lover, Mortimer believes his love for Mabel will ennoble him: “With her at his side, what might he not do? He might get his handicap down to six—to three—to scratch—to plus something!” (82). Filled with these chivalric echoes, the story ends with Mortimer parodying the concluding lines of Tennyson’s romantic comedy *The Princess*, a rendition in which Tennyson’s

*My bride,
My wife, my life! O, we will walk this world,
Yoked in all exercise of noble end,
And so thro’ those dark gates across the wild
That no man knows. (338-42)*

becomes

*My bride,
My wife, my life, O we will walk the links
Yoked in all exercise of noble end,
And so thro’ those dark bunkers off the course
That no man knows. (97)*

But to support the contention that Wodehouse’s chivalric attitudes have their chief source in Tennyson’s poetry, I would like to spend some time focusing more specifically on an earlier story of Wodehouse’s, the one short story that Wodehouse actually sets in the court of King Arthur: “Sir Agravaire,” first published in *Collier’s* magazine in 1912 and later reprinted in his first collection of adult stories, *The Man Upstairs* (1914). The story is unique as far as I know among Wodehouse’s mature fiction in not being set in the Edwardian comic world of the Woosters and the Blandings, but in the earlier secondary creation of Camelot. It appeared at a pivotal moment in Wodehouse’s career: already well-known as the author of boys’ books in the public school genre of *Tom Brown’s Schooldays*, Wodehouse was aiming to break out of that mold and into adult fiction. He spent the years from

1909 to 1914 traveling back and forth between Britain and the U.S., trying to establish himself as a writer of adult fiction on both sides of the Atlantic. He wrote to his friend Leslie Havergal Bradshaw late in 1909: "So far from wanting to get my boys' books published this side, I look on them as a guilty past which I must hush up" (Ratcliffe 75). In 1910, he published *Psmith in the City*, his first significant adult novel. Prior to publishing "Sir Agravaire," he had also begun his work in musical theater, had even done his first collaboration with Jerome Kern. Musical theater farce would eventually become the model for his later, best-known fiction. But his fiction in the teens was characterized by more sentimentality and a somewhat more serious approach than would define his later farces. I have found no critics who disagree with Richard Osborne's judgment⁸ that

[Wodehouse's] first two short story collections, *The Man Upstairs* and *The Man with Two Left Feet*, are of interest now only to remind us that young Wodehouse, though possibly a born writer, had a long period of hack apprenticeship before he found his form and, jettisoning sentimentality and seriousness, came into his birthright. (Osborne 168)

This may explain why no one, to my knowledge, has ever written a word of criticism regarding "Sir Agravaire"—until now. But the tone of this story seems less sentimental and more in line with Wodehouse's more mature fiction. I want to argue that in this story, from whose kernel the chivalry of his later works would grow, while giving an appreciative nod to Malory, Wodehouse essentially owes his inspiration to, and follows the structure of, Tennyson's "Tale of Gareth and Lynette."

In both tales, a knight of little or no repute becomes champion of a damsel who brings a request to Arthur's court. Of course, this is also the case in Malory's "Book of Sir Gareth," but Wodehouse's details are more in line with Tennyson's. In Tennyson, the King allows his nephew Gareth, who has been disguised as a lowly kitchen knave, to claim a quest that Lynette had specifically asked be given to Lancelot. In "Sir Agravaire," the worst of Arthur's knights is the sole volunteer to take on the quest—the defeat of a dragon—proposed by Yvonne, for

she is a plain girl who does not excite the sympathies of any of the more important knights: both Gawain and Pelleas turn down the quest flat, making up lame excuses.

For both Gareth and Agravaine, the damsel proves unattractive in the conventional sense: we are told that Lynette is beautiful, but her constant deriding of the kitchen knave makes her unlikeable until she softens her attitude toward Gareth as he begins to show her that deeds make the knight. Yvonne is plain, but Agravaine falls in love with her at first sight; to him she appears beautiful.

Moreover, the quest turns out to be something different from what it was originally thought to be. In the case of Tennyson (but *not* Malory), the final knight whom Gareth must defeat is assumed to be the most powerful and dangerous, but is revealed to be a small boy dressed in a frightening suit of armor too large for his use and who is easily defeated. In the case of Agravaine, there is no dragon at all, but he finds that Yvonne's father had sent her to court to ask for help in order to hoodwink a knight into marrying his daughter. The danger proves to be toothless in both tales, and (again unlike Malory) both tales end with the marriage of the knight to the damsel who brought the original quest.

A wise man, or hermit, provides some insight in both tales: In Tennyson, the hermit is absent, but has left sculpted in the rocks that Gareth and Lynette pass a representation of the allegory of "[t]he war of Time against the soul of man" (1168)—an allegory that is adopted by Gareth's four villainous adversaries in their symbolic armor. In "Sir Agravaine," more directly applicable to his story, the knight seeks out a wise man dwelling in the forest, in a scene reminiscent of the wise hermits who are perpetually available in Malory's "Book of the Sangraal." The wise man reveals to him, in different words but over and over again, *ad nauseam*, the truth that one sees differently through the eyes of love than normal people see.

Both of the tales follow an archetypal comic pattern, in which youth triumphs over the established norms created by the old. Part of this is reflected in the relationship of the tales to their ultimate source: the

contemporary narrator, representing youth, triumphs over the older storyteller. In the end of Tennyson's tale, the modern narrator throws over Malory by having Gareth marry Lynette, the shrewish sister, rather than Lyonors, the damsel in distress in her tower:

And he that told the tale in older times
Says that sir Gareth wedded Lyonors,
But he, that told it later, says Lynette. (1392-94)

Wodehouse answers Tennyson's ending with the beginning of his own story, where he reveals he is revising the old tale to make it new, to make it conform to the demands of the modern world. Wodehouse claims he has found the story in "an old black letter manuscript" and has seen fit "to touch the thing up a little here and there, for writers in those days were weak in construction" (239). He goes on to claim that he has revised the title somewhat, parodying Caxton's chapter headings for Malory by claiming the original title of the tale was

"How it came about that ye good Knight Sir Agravaine ye Dolorous of ye Table Round did fare forth to succour a damsel in distress and after divers journeyings and perils by flood and by field did win her for his bride and right happily did they twain live ever afterwards," by Ambrose ye monk. (239)

Wodehouse goes on to fill his story with anachronistic language that brings the story into the twentieth-century and reflects the comic triumph of the modern over the traditional. The story begins with Wodehouse peopling the arena at a knightly tournament with "itinerant merchants" selling score-cards, shouting "ye cannot tell the joust-ers without a score-card," and making the herald sound like a referee at a boxing match: "'Ladeez'n gemmen! Battling Galahad and Agravaine the Dolorous. Galahad on my right, Agravaine on my left. Squires out of the ring. Time!'" (239). And at the end of the story, the Wise Man of the forest tells Agravaine to "'Pay at ye desk'" as he

leaves (253). But Wodehouse returns to the archaic at the very end, where he includes language probably intended to reflect Malory, writing: "And Agravaine rode on his way marveling" (253) (though in fact that specific phrase actually appears not in Malory but Howard Pyle's 1905 text *The Story of the Champions of the Round Table*, closely based on Malory and, it would appear, familiar to Wodehouse).⁹

Ultimately, what precisely has Wodehouse learned from Tennyson's tale about the nature of chivalry? In practical terms, for Gareth, chivalry consists, first, in fulfilling his lady's demands, putting his life in danger for her sake—and ultimately winning her heart through valiant deeds. For Agravaine, too, chivalry involves risking his life—he has no idea that the quest is bogus and truly believes he may be going to his death. Chivalry also involves love at first sight, and it entails risking his freedom, for he refuses to leave Yvonne's castle even though she sets him free, because he will not leave her. True love is the definition of chivalry in both tales.

On a more profound level, something else that Wodehouse could have learned from Tennyson's "Gareth and Lynette" is wound up in what Merlin tells Gareth when the young knight first arrives in Camelot. The young king, Merlin says, will bind him by vows no man can keep, and the city itself, he says "is built / To music, therefore never built at all, / And therefore built for ever" (272-74). Indeed, Camelot as presented in Tennyson's *Idylls* is built to the music of his verse, and not in the "real" world. It is what Tolkien refers to as a "sub-creation," a fully-realized and consistent secondary world with its own rules and laws, upon encountering which a reader's disbelief can be suspended because of, in Tolkien's terms again, the fictional world's "inner consistency of reality" (88). And so, perhaps, it is from Tennyson that Wodehouse learns the importance of maintaining the inner consistency of his later farcical mock-Edwardian world that remains its own middlebrow never-never land, ordered by the Code of the Woosters and by Galahad Threepwood's courtly values well into the 1970s. Like the Camelot of Tennyson and his own "Tale of Agravaine," Wodehouse's fictional world never aged, and, built of the

music of his own glittering language, it was never built at all, and remains therefore built forever.

University of Central Arkansas
Conway, AR

NOTES

¹Tennyson, "Gareth and Lynette," 273-74.

²In the Introduction to her collection *The Masculine Middlebrow, 1880-1950: What Mr Miniver Read*, Kate Macdonald lists Wodehouse as the chief representative of the comic middlebrow novel (17), and, in a separate essay in that text, Nicola Humble considers Wodehouse, along with Conan Doyle, as part of a middlebrow movement that gave "an increasingly central role to the bachelor" (90). More importantly for Wodehouse studies, Ann Rea is editing a collection of critical essays on Wodehouse and the middlebrow, set to be published by Ashgate in 2015.

³Auden admired Wodehouse a great deal. One might consider particularly his reference to Bertie Wooster and Jeeves in his essay "Balaam and the Ass," in which he remarks, regarding a speech of Jeeves, "So speaks comically—and in what other mode than the comic could it, on earth, truthfully speak?—the voice of Agape, of Holy Love" (53). Such an attribution suggests Bertie's innocence is almost Edenic. Orwell, defending Wodehouse from charges of treason stemming from his World War II radio broadcasts from Germany, argued that he was too politically naïve to be a traitor, and insisted that his entire oeuvre existed in an outdated, perhaps more innocent, Edwardian world: "His picture of English society had been formed before 1914, and it was a naïve, traditional and, at bottom, admiring picture," Orwell says, though this world is somewhat idealized: "Wodehouse's real sin," Orwell contends, "has been to present the English upper classes as much nicer people than they are" (350). But it is Waugh who goes furthest in this vein. Wodehouse's characters are not Edwardian, he says, but are "creations of pure fancy," living in an "idyllic world [that] can never stale." In Wodehouse's world, Waugh asserts, "there has been no Fall of Man; no 'aboriginal calamity.' His characters have never tasted the forbidden fruit. They are still in Eden. The gardens of Blandings Castle are that original garden from which we are all exiled" (567-68).

⁴Thomas Carlyle's oft-quoted dismissal of the *Idylls* occurs in a letter he wrote to Emerson in January 1867, wherein he charges Tennyson's work with an "inward perfect" of *vacancy* that might kindle in the reader "considerable impatience at being treated so very like infants, tho the lollipops were so superlative" (Slater 552-53).

⁵There are at least two instances of Wodehouse's taking Browning as a source for his medievalism: once in his novel *The Mating Season*, and once in *The Code of the Woosters*, Wodehouse has Jeeves greet Bertie Wooster's arrival (in the first instance at Deverill Hall, in the second at Totleigh Towers) with the expression "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came," alluding to Browning's famous 1855 medievalist poem. Bertie, of course, has no idea what Jeeves is talking about either time. But these are exceptions and do not change the fact of Tennyson's greater influence overall.

⁶For Wodehouse and farce, see especially Galligan, "P. G. Wodehouse: Master of Farce." Typically "farce" is defined as a broad comedy with exaggerated and highly improbable situations (including mistaken identity, incredible coincidences, unlooked for revelations, and similar plot twists), along with the use of slapstick or physical humor (Harmon and Holman 213): in short, a text similar to the kinds of musical comedies Wodehouse would have seen (and worked on) in New York. In a letter to Bill Townsend, Wodehouse described his fiction this way: "I believe there are two ways of writing novels. One is mine, making the thing a sort of musical comedy without music, and ignoring real life altogether; the other is going right down into life and not caring a damn" (qtd. in Leimberg 56). With this in mind, Galligan describes Wodehousean farce in this way: "You cannot ask for better farcical plotting. Farce must take a group of preposterous characters through a series of ridiculous actions in a way that remains, granting the author's initial premises, perfectly credible. It must always teeter on the brink of chaos, yet it must finally reveal itself as fully controlled. To get such results it must have what *The Code of the Woosters* has—a plot that combines the best qualities of a fun-house mirror and an algebraic equation" (Galligan 613).

⁷Others have remarked upon this code. As Richard Fogle puts it, the code demands "absolute loyalty to a pal, particularly an old school pal" (111); and Robert McCrum notes the importance of romanticized love as a part of this set of values, which involve an "acknowledge[ment] that love is universal" (253).

⁸Fogle, for example, declares that, while these stories show promise of what is to come, "these are 'serious' without conviction, perfunctory counterfeits of real life and emotion [...]. The mature stories are wholly humorous, and they are stylized, with symmetrical farce-plots" (101).

⁹Malory's late fifteenth-century English, as printed by Caxton in 1485, is the earliest of early modern English, and for hundreds of years has been one of the charms of *Le Morte Darthur*, Malory's great compendium of medieval Arthurian legend. Pyle became extremely well known for illustrating his own retellings of the tales of Robin Hood and of King Arthur, and adopted the style of Malory's archaic language. This single echo is not proof that Wodehouse was familiar with Pyle's work, but it would be strange if he were not: Pyle was writing highly successful children's books at the same time Wodehouse was becoming successful himself in that genre, and Wodehouse's own *William Tell Told Again* (1904) was, like Pyle's earlier *Robin Hood*, a children's story with illustrations, told in occasionally archaic language about a medieval hero—one that was good with a

bow. If Wodehouse was unfamiliar with Pyle's popular books, these coincidences would be hard to explain.

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Wodehouse never returned to England. From 1947 until his death he lived in the US, taking dual British-American citizenship in 1955. He died in 1975, at the age of 93, in Southampton, New York. Wodehouse was born in Guildford, Surrey, the third son of Henry Ernest Wodehouse (1845–1929), a magistrate resident in the British colony of Hong Kong, and his wife, Eleanor (1861–1941), daughter of the Rev John Bathurst Deane. The Wodehouses, who traced their ancestry back to the 13th century, belonged to a cadet branch of the family of the earls of Kimberley. Between then and the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 he revisited America frequently.[58]. Wodehouse was in New York when the war began. P. G. Wodehouse and Tolstoi not bad. Not good, but not bad. No novelists any good except me." I consider that of all the dashed silly, drivelling ideas I ever heard in my puff this is the most blithering and futile. It won't work. Not a chance. And a moment later there was a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and the relative had crossed the threshold at fifty m.p.h. under her own steam. "In build and appearance, Tuppy somewhat resembles a bulldog, and his aspect now was that of one of these fine animals who has just been refused a slice of cake. The discovery of a toy duck in the soap dish, presumably the property of some former juvenile visitor, contributed not a little to this new and happier frame of mind. The first ever collected edition (Wodehouse had many publishers in his lifetime), the Everyman Wodehouse, will contain all the novels and stories, newly edited and reset from the first British edition. Printed on cream-wove, acid-free paper, sewn and bound in cloth, each Everyman volume is already recognized as the finest edition of the master ever published. "In these handsome volumes, with the pages that smell of real paper and those fine covers by Andrzej Klimowski, you find that the sparkle hasn't dimmed. They are a cause for regular celebration." JAMES NAUGHTIE. The 2016 prize was jointly awarded to Paul Murray's The Mark and the Void and Hannah Rothschild's The Improbability of Love. World of P.G. Wodehouse. Primary Menu. Welcome to Plumtopia. Reading Lists. P.G. Wodehouse reading list: the Jeeves and Wooster stories. Old associations are strong, and the fact that he was about my build and so could wear my socks and shirts drew us very close together. "Ukridge's Dog College in Ukridge. Uncle Fred. Pongo Twistleton's Uncle Fred is a dapper old gent with a twinkle in his eye and a penchant for adventure. Many of Wodehouse's stories first appeared in magazines such as The Strand (UK) and The Saturday Evening Post (US), but weren't always published in book form in the same order, or even under the same titles. If you read Wodehouse in order of book publication you will encounter spoilers, particularly in the Blandings series. PG Wodehouse at the animal sanctuary he sponsored on Long Island, New York in 1968. Photograph: Hulton Getty. PG Wodehouse at the animal sanctuary he sponsored on Long Island, New York in 1968. Photograph: Hulton Getty. Robert McCrum. Wodehouse began his literary career as a freelance journalist. All his life, he never lost a taste for deadlines, or the promise of a cheque. As a young man he was an avid contributor to the hundreds of magazines that festooned Edwardian news stands. There would be another 30 years of sublime comic invention, but the world he was describing was gone. England had changed and PGW's Edwardian valets, clubland nincompoops and lounge lizards could no longer be quite so innocent, or carefree, as when they were young and irresponsible.