A Culture in Change: The Development of Masculinity through P.G. Wodehouse's Psmith Series

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To Mum and Dad: my faithful encouragers

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Abstract

P. G. Wodehouse offers a serious and sustained critique of English society using the game of cricket as he follows the lives of two memorable characters, Mike Jackson and Rupert Psmith. Yet Wodehouse has frequently been accused of existing as too innocent of a bystander to understand the underpinnings of society, let alone to offer a critique. For example, Christopher Hitchens in a review of a Wodehouse biography by Robert McCrum states, "Wodehouse was a rather beefy, hearty chap, with a lifelong interest in the sporting subculture of the English boarding school and a highly developed instinct for the main chance. . . . He was so self-absorbed that he was duped into collaboration with the Nazis and had to plead the 'bloody fool' defense" (266). Despite this and other degradations of Wodehouse's ability and character, the question arises: how could one so self-absorbed and unaware of the culture, aptly capture the eccentricities of so many characters? An initial answer might be that by offering a critique laced with humor, Wodehouse offers an insightful picture of English society that is doubly effective because of its tactfulness.

Chapter One: Introduction: The World of P. G. Wodehouse and His Cultural Critique of Edwardian Society

Sir Pelham Grenville Wodehouse, better known to his friends as Plum and to his readers as simply Wodehouse, captures the eccentricities and humor of Edwardian and post-Edwardian England through the characters and plots of his over ninety books. While many may not know the name of Wodehouse, they are familiar with references to Jeeves,[1] the insurmountable valet of Bertram Wooster. The Jeeves and Wooster stories are among the best-loved of Wodehouse's works and were made into the popular television series *Jeeves and Wooster* from 1990-1993 through Granada and ITV networks. While this series is among Wodehouse's best-loved, his numerous other publications deserve attention, especially his series centered on the characters of Mike Jackson and Rupert Psmith. Perhaps because the Psmith stories comprise one of Wodehouse's first series, the characters can easily be traced to reflect Wodehouse and his school friends. The writing of *Mike* in 1909, later renamed *Mike and Psmith*,[2] launched the true writing career of Wodehouse, as he sought to leave the drudgery he found his work in the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank to be. Sophie Ratcliffe, who compiled and edited a book entitled *P. G. Wodehouse: A Life in Letters*, explains that "Wodehouse, like Mike, was just one of thousands of nobodies lost in the maze of early Edwardian bureaucracy," for "the writing of this period is full of such figures – anonymous clerks in their ill-fitting frock coats, clutching their bowler hats and dreams" (51-2). Ratcliffe also shows that "[t]hough he [Wodehouse] detested the work, he

1. Several biographers and critics have traced the history of the character Jeeves to a Warwickshire county cricket player. This cricket player, whom Wodehouse used as the model for his character, became one of the many fatal casualties of the Great War. The fact that Jeeves is based on a cricket player and that this cricket player, though he died young, lives on through Wodehouse's writings plays interestingly into the idea of symbiotic relationships between sports, especially cricket, and the British identity which will be discussed at length later in this project.
2. The series editor for the Psmith series published as The Collector's Wodehouse provides interesting background on this first novel containing both Mike and Psmith: "The publishing history of *Mike and Psmith* is unusually complex for Wodehouse. In 1909 he published a long novel called *Mike*. in 1935 the second part of this novel was published on its own as *Enter Psmith*. In 1953, the two parts were rewritten as separate novels and reissued in the UK as *Mike at Wrykyn* and *Mike and Psmith*" (Peter Washington).

enjoyed playing in the bank's rugby and cricket teams and life at the bank was, for Wodehouse, not entirely wasted" (51). This interesting explanation of Wodehouse's attitude towards work at the bank helps to show why sports play such an important role in his characters' lives. As will later be discussed at length in this thesis, Mike follows this same pattern as he searches for his masculine identity, and Psmith provides the balance as he searches for his identity outside of traditional sports. Wodehouse's works, while highly entertaining, have not often been considered serious literature worthy of in-depth critique, in part because of their light subject matter, including sports. However, those who dismiss Wodehouse and his humor as being purely for the sake of entertainment fail to take into account the important roles that humor and sport culture hold in society as a whole. As Wodehouse enjoyed life through sports and writing, so his characters seek to enjoy life and define themselves as functioning members of Edwardian society through recreation and hobbies.

P. G. Wodehouse offers a serious and sustained critique of English society using the game of cricket as he follows the lives of two memorable characters, Mike Jackson and Rupert Psmith. Yet Wodehouse has frequently been accused of existing as too innocent of a bystander to understand the underpinnings of society, let alone to offer a critique. For example, Christopher Hitchens in a review of a Wodehouse biography by Robert McCrum states, "Wodehouse was a rather beefy, hearty chap, with a lifelong interest in the sporting subculture of the English boarding school and a highly developed instinct for the main chance. . . . He was so self-absorbed that he was duped into collaboration with the Nazis and had to plead the 'bloody fool' defense" (266). Despite this and other degradations of Wodehouse's ability and character, the question arises: how could one so self-absorbed and unaware of the culture, aptly capture the eccentricities of so many characters? An initial answer might be that by offering a critique laced

with humor, Wodehouse offers an insightful picture of English society that is doubly effective because of its tactfulness. Fittingly, tact and appearance serve as key themes in the books as well: while his characters are generally an exaggerated caricature of people he already knew, Wodehouse uses them to display those characteristics which make his readership laugh at themselves while simultaneously questioning how they now appear to others. This idea of appearance, or how one wishes to be perceived as opposed to how one is perceived, travels through Wodehouse's Psmith series and often determines the actions of the characters. Therefore, for a critic such as Hitchens to critique Wodehouse as unable to understand the ramifications of actions and appearances seems to be a misunderstanding of both the man and his works. Another common critical argument against the seriousness of Wodehouse's fiction is the assertion that he attempts to create an idealistic world or even to revert to a romanticized version of the English culture—an especially blameworthy move given that he wrote at a time of great political and economic upheaval.[3] Ratcliffe again explains part of Wodehouse's mindset through her critique of Wodehouse's philosophy:

> Given Wodehouse's lack of any real involvement in the major political events of the twentieth century, it is often asked whether there is any political aspect to his writing – indeed critics may ask how to negotiate an oeuvre that seems to resist politics so determinedly. . . . Wodehouse's work, however, can be seen as more than simply escapist, providing us, as it does, with the notion of an alternative universe. (8)

Here Wodehouse's idealized world can be read in light of Sidney's view of the importance of

3. *Mike and Psmith* was written 1909, *Psmith in the City* 1910, *Psmith Journalist* 1915, and *Leave it to Psmith* 1923. During the time of this series' publications, the *Titanic* sank (1912) WWI was fought (1914-1918) and Prohibition began in the United States (1920). Yet none of these monumental events ever appears in Wodehouse's series. The characters live in an idealized world of consistent peace, interrupted only by accidents created by themselves.

poetry: "For these third [referring to painters who can express what they do not actually see] be they which most properly do imitate to teach and delight, and to imitate borrow nothing of what is, hath been, or shall be; but range, only reined with learned discretion, into the divine consideration of what may be and should be."[4] Wodehouse then does as Sidney declares a poet should do: he does not describe what *is*, but what *should be*.

For Wodehouse, this peaceful world of what *should be* plays out in the world of an English cricket game, then later—and in analogous fashion—in the worlds of the office, the city, and the domestic sphere. For the English, cricket is a game of quintessential rituals and practices that express long-standing and deeply ingrained cultural values. These practices provide a sense of comfort, a sense that even with the world constantly changing, this tradition never changes: in the world of cricket, there is order and a sense of mutual understanding. Jack Williams in his book *Cricket and England: A Cultural and Social History of the Inter-war Years,* declares, "Cricket was celebrated as far more than a game. The social groups with economic and political power esteemed cricket as an expression of a distinctively English sense of moral worth and cricket had a key role in how they imagined themselves and their fitness to exercise authority" (xiii). Another historian, Ronald Pearsall, accurately portrayed the power of the game of cricket:

> Amateurs and professionals in football, gentlemen and players in cricket. Cricket pervaded the whole fabric of Edwardian life, and although it was never followed with the intensity of football by the industrial working classes, they found pleasure in watching the giants of the age. One of the few areas in which

4. Taken from page 26 of Sydney's *Defence of Poetry*, I use Sydney, not as a critical framework, but as a means of contextualizing my argument. Throughout his defense, Sydney argues that art should both teach and delight, an action which I will argue that Wodehouse does well throughout his works, especially the Psmith series, for his characters, while immensely humorous, are attempting to navigate the intricacies of their cultures; therefore, Wodehouse both delights his audience through the characters and plots, and he teaches them the struggle that can and ultimately should ensue when searching for identity within a strict cultural code.

> Edwardian democracy operated was village cricket, where for the space of a few hours class distinctions were brushed aside and there was no dishonour in the squire being eclipsed by the blacksmith. In the great country houses cricket was a feature of the leisured life, with full-time groundsmen committed to maintaining pitches equal to that of the Oval and pavilions that vied with those on country grounds. (221)

Fittingly, then, Wodehouse uses cricket as the vehicle for his critique of the ways that the English people negotiate and establish both their identity and their social roles. Masculine identity, in particular, is the issue with which both Mike and Psmith struggle as they identify their roles in society.

In order to establish a framework for masculine identity and social roles, the majority of my primary and secondary texts relate to the cultural aspects of sports, and my main source of criticism is cultural coinciding with historical criticism. This critical framework allows me to discover the cultural and ideological underpinnings of Wodehouse's works. His works are considered popular reading and are not, according to many, meant to have any deeper meaning beyond delight and enjoyment. However, uncovering the social traditions, customs, and focus of Wodehouse's world allows me to discover the deeper meaning of Wodehouse's works. Although I do not use Sedgwick's work in direct connection with my argument, I am mindful of her concept of "homosociality" which is useful in framing an understanding of non-sexual male-on-male relationships in Wodehouse's writings. John Tosh and Michael Roper have both also deeply researched masculine identity in the Victorian and Edwardian era. Their critical research has played an important part in understanding the seeming nonchalant approach that Wodehouse takes to the masculine role in society.

Not only do the historical and cultural sources play an important role in my criticism, but a firm understanding of the biographical context is imperative as well. Wodehouse's life interestingly parallels that of his character Mike through two books of the series. As the series progresses, however, the focus shifts from Mike to Psmith, and Psmith becomes the masculine ideal that Wodehouse never truly becomes in his own life. By focusing on the biographical aspect of these texts, I am better able to show the possible reasons for Wodehouse's light expression of cultural customs and their effects on the characters. Instead of dwelling on the darker side of the culture, Wodehouse focuses on finding humor in all situations. This humor then becomes a precedent for his characters and his plots. In order to follow the plots and characters carefully, and adequately support the ideas which are presented, I follow the practice of close reading, using the original texts themselves to comment on other portions of the text. By discovering what Wodehouse means through the text itself, I am better able to apply the commentary on historical and cultural aspects surrounding sports in literature and culture. Therefore by following the idea of masculine identity biographically, historically, and culturally, I am able to see that Wodehouse could have had a greater social critique intention for his works than just entertainment.

Wodehouse's entry point to his larger social critique is his humorous commentary on the importance that the English upper middle-class, gentry-class, and aristocratic characters place on cricket and organized games, but it extends beyond this sphere because readers can identify with his characters and plotlines via his humor. The stories generally have larger than life characters, yet we can see ourselves reflected and laugh at the eccentricities that we all possess. There is generally a character struggling to find his place in society and delving into the complexities of social hierarchy as he struggles properly to order himself. For Wodehouse, cricket thus serves as

a metaphor for the British class system. Ronald Pearsall in his work *Edwardian Life and Leisure* also shows the way that cricket dramatizes the frustrations in the Edwardian society caused by the fact that sometimes even those who were familiar with the social order did not seem to know how to navigate it, saying, "The rules of the game were frequently involved and intricate, and some were so obscure that they perplexed even the upper echelons of society" (71). It is these same rules that Psmith attempts to navigate through his eccentric personality and battles in his social spheres.

These rules are developed through games or sport, which is defined by Dr. Mark Foreman in "Stabbing Seles: Fans and Fair Play" as "goal-directed activities" (166). Foreman follows Bernard Suits's definition of sports and shows that "[i]t's the stability of sport that separates it from fads like flagpole sitting or goldfish swallowing. Suits is clear that this is not a question of longevity as much as the institutionalizing of a sport with the development, educational clinics, history, the recognition of experts, and a stable body of literature" (168). Following patterns evident on the cricket field, Wodehouse's characters will view different areas of their life as goal-directed and therefore seek a final, positive outcome whether through jobs or marriage. Therefore, as the characters pursue work and marriage, they also pursue them within a specific set of rules, seeking a specific, positive outcome, similar to the way one pursues a sport. According to Bernard Suits in "The Elements of Sport," "people play games not only because ordinary life does not provide enough opportunities for doing such and such, but also . . . because ordinary life does not provide any opportunities at all for doing such and such. Games are . . . new things to do because they require the overcoming of (by ordinary standards) *unnecessary* obstacles" (15). Defining different elements of life as sport, then, allows the characters to pursue a goal, overcome obstacles, and establish a positive masculine identity within a set of known

rules.

As befits characters who represent social types, the main protagonists are interchangeable in this series, despite the themed title of Psmith. Mike is the character who appears first, and the reader becomes attached to his youthful and vibrant spirit. He initially attends an English public school, where his main intent is to play on the cricket team and be the best cricket player in the history of the school. The desire to play cricket was something instilled in Mike since he was a child, and he has watched his older brothers distinguish themselves through the sport at their respective schools. This importance of the sport relates to its status as a sort of rite of manhood and a clear marker of class and familial identity. Indeed, without the game of cricket and without sport culture, the identity of the characters in these books is lost, just as within society as a whole, symbolic rituals and structures help to establish identity and relationships.

This symbiotic relationship between ritual and identity relates to the search in the Edwardian era for what defined masculinity and thereby provided men with identity. If Mike's interactions on the cricket field and beyond bring him closer to nature and more able to physically express his masculinity, then Psmith's focus on the aesthetic aspects of life and manifesting his masculinity through the appearance of wealth defines his view of masculinity. This relationship evolves throughout the series. Mike, facing a decline in economic circumstances, eventually learns to focus on the practical side of life, realizing that work, wealth, and marriage are key components of accepted masculine identity just as much as cricket; likewise, the once independently wealthy Psmith realizes that the physical exertion of work and marriage also are necessary to obtain a traditionally accepted masculine identity. Their relationship, as they realize these similar aspects of masculinity yet at different times and through different circumstances, becomes symbiotic on a personal level, for one without the

other would be unbalanced. Beyond this, the relationship of Mike and Psmith mirrors larger cultural patterns as the middle and lower classes become the symbols of the power of hard work and family life, while the gentry becomes a symbol of the power of non-laborious work, and accrued wealth.

On Wodehouse's cricket field, both the upper and lower classes meet, common laboring and landed gentleman. Pearsall declares that "[c]lass distinctions were as clearly defined on the running track, the cricket pitch and on the football field as in the outside world"; however, "Cricket was the sport everyone could participate in without loss of dignity" (217, 223-24). Both the lower class and upper class learn aspects of the game and how to play intelligently. In this pattern, the players' identity relies on the collective for its formation, far more than simply on a personal definition of identity or individual sense of self. Yet again, Wodehouse shows this process of identity formation taking varied and complex forms. I argue that Wodehouse uses the character of Mike to represent those who rely on their ability to fit into a particular existing cultural form for identity, for Mike's identity is found in the way he approaches and masters the game of cricket, the official pastime of mother England. On the other hand, Wodehouse uses the character of Psmith to represent those whose identity is more fluid and negotiable, derived from the most exciting enterprise of the moment. For example, in *Psmith in the City*, when Psmith too must go to the bank to work, he, unlike Mike who is devastated at the prospect because it removes him from the cricket field, decides to redefine himself in that role and find enjoyment in it. When he first steps into the bank, Psmith declares, "I am now a member of this bank. Its interests are my interests. Psmith, the individual, ceases to exist, and there springs into being Psmith, the cog in the wheel of the New Asiatic Bank" (177). The relationship between Mike and Psmith, and their search for masculine identity plays out on the cricket field, and the other

sports-like realms which will be discussed later, and illustrates Wodehouse's humorous critique of British culture, which in the Edwardian era and following World War I must learn to redefine itself.

Chapter 2: *Mike and Psmith*: The Identifying Battlefield of the English Public School

Eras of history have each produced their peculiarities, but the British Victorian and Edwardian eras are especially remembered for their strict, formulaic society rules and fascination with peaceful colonization and creating better manufacturing without at home rebellions. P. G. Wodehouse, who was born in 1881, grew to adulthood through the end of the Victorian era and began his writing career at the beginning of the Edwardian era. The structures of that era (aristocratic observances, ritual tea, impressive dinners, class distinctions), paired with the comical nature of the society, gave Wodehouse much room for social commentary. While this humorous insight into society was most likely not possessed by the majority of those in the aristocratic sphere, who believed in their traditions and structures as a bedrock of society, Wodehouse had an ability to show characters of the upper middle class and aristocracy in their own sphere, yet see humor in many of their extravagant rituals and traditional ideas. In his first books about Mike and Psmith, this commentary begins with what he would have at the time been most familiar, the English public school.

Wodehouse begins his humorously subversive critique of social structure and its idioms through his characters Mike and Psmith in the first book about both characters, titled unsurprisingly *Mike and Psmith*. These characters, though both considered middle class in a general sense, are viewed by each other and by some other characters in the book as being from different social classes. While never explicitly stated, the differences are more "felt" within the commentary and the actions of the characters. Upon first arriving at their new school, Sedleigh, the characters enter an interesting conversation which helps to establish their roles. Mike finds "[a] very long, thin youth, with a solemn face and immaculate clothes, was leaning against the mantelpiece. As Mike entered, he fumbled in his top left waistcoat pocket, produced an eyeglass

attached to a cord, and fixed it in his right eye. With the help of this aid to vision he inspected Mike in silence for a while" (20). This description of Psmith immediately sets him apart from Mike, the more casual sportsman. Their first conversation also shows that Psmith views himself as superior upon first glance, for he asks,

> "'Are you the Bully, the Pride of the School, or the Boy who is Led Astray and takes to Drink in Chapter Sixteen?'
>
> 'The last, for choice,' said Mike, 'but I've only just arrived, so I don't know.'
>
> 'The boy - what will he become? Are you new here, too, then?'
>
> 'Yes! Why, are you new?'
>
> 'Do I look as if I belonged here? I'm the latest import.'" (21)

Psmith, the latest import in fashion, ideas, and superior tastes, does not at first see anything different about Mike, so naturally assumes that Mike already belongs to this new school.

By contrast, Mike cares less for and pursues less the aesthetic aspects of life, and while he appreciates a life of ease, his passion is an active one, cricket. During the game of cricket, Mike is completely focused on gaining a century, the highest level point of scoring that a player can achieve, and showing his finesse on the field. All other aspects of life disappear. This idea of focusing on social or recreational activities as a way to escape or become identified with something is characteristic of the late Victorian and the Edwardian periods. Mike and Psmith's varying responses to recreation help to distinguish the initially assumed social class differences, for Mike views the recreation as an escape from the necessary work of the day, while Psmith does not have a necessity to work so he does not have the same need for escape or even desire the same need to escape into the world of recreation. Wodehouse continually uses the idea of recreation played out on the cricket field to play out greater social conflicts which could not be

openly or directly discussed in the Edwardian era. Wodehouse comments on the actions of some of the other scholars at Sedleigh:

> Mike's heart warmed to them. The little disturbance in the dormitory was a thing of the past, done with forgotten, contemporary with Julius Caesar. He felt that he, Stone and Robinson must learn to know and appreciate one another. There was, as a matter of fact, nothing much wrong with Stone and Robinson. They were just ordinary raggers of the type found at every public school, small and large. They were absolutely free from brain. They had a certain amount of muscle, and a vast store of animal spirits. They looked on school life purely as a vehicle for ragging. (71)

These young men were sent to earn a classical education, but seeing no need for the education and wishing instead to live a life of ease which their parents possessed as well, the majority of these young men viewed school as simply a means to enjoy games and try to be the one on top of the social standings. As the Edwardian era progressed, the popularity of sports progressed with it, and Wodehouse captures this popularity through the excitement of his characters. When Stone and Robinson discover Mike's love of cricket and ability to play,

> "They dashed out of the room. From down the passage Mike heard yells of '*Barnes!*', the closing of a door, and a murmur of excited conversation. Then footsteps returning down the passage. Barnes appeared, on his face the look of one who has seen visions.
>
> 'I say,' he said, 'is it true? Or is Stone rotting? About Wrykyn, I mean.'
>
> 'Yes, I was in the team.'

> Barnes was an enthusiastic cricketer. He studied his *Wisden*,[5] and he had an immense respect for Wrykyn cricket." (74)

These games or "friendlys" played between the houses of the schools gave the boys a chance to prove that they were something more than their academics and their pasts and whatever their professional futures might be. The ability to dominate on the cricket playing field symbolized the ability to establish their identities and their dominance over others at this point in their lives. In this, they represent a typical type of young Edwardian man, concerned more with finding his own place in the most basic of ways—sports.

While Mike's focus and identity are wrapped up in his cricket playing ability, Psmith finds his identity in being the commentator, the spectator, and in a sense, the patron of the sports. Wodehouse describes this difference between Mike and Psmith through the actions of the characters: "Psmith, who was with Mike, took charge of the affair with a languid grace which had maddened hundreds in its time, and which never failed to ruffle Mr. Downing.
'We are, above all, sir,' he said, 'a keen house. Drones are not welcomed by us. We are essentially versatile. Jackson, the archeologist of yesterday becomes the cricketer of today. It is the right spirit, sir," said Psmith earnestly. 'I like to see it.'" (77). This seemingly inconsequential conversation points to an interesting idea about Edwardian public life. Without family property and established money, one had to establish himself and make his own way as a higher member of society. Such is the course which Mike exemplifies through his cricket playing and establishing a name for himself in that sphere. Psmith, however, is confident in his social standing and does not see the need to actively or forcefully flaunt his position. Psmith instead quietly watches, and through his seeming indifference, shows the confidence of secure money.

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5. *Wisden Cricketer's Almanac* which is published annually in the United Kingdom and gives history, season results, players' biographies, and other helpful and interesting material pertaining to cricket.

This position is again signaled in the physical postures which these two boys frequently take up. Mike, having just completed a long day of work, "lay back in Psmith's deck-chair, felt that all he wanted was to go to bed and stay there for a week. . . . Psmith, leaning against the mantelpiece, discoursed in a desultory way on the day's happenings" (87). Mike relies on the comforts which Psmith can supply and does the difficult work in order to be privileged to enjoy those comforts. Psmith, on the other hand, has the leisure to continue standing, showing his superior status to Mike, and discourse on the events for he is not fatigued by the day, merely interested. Wodehouse uses this means of recreation and participation in said recreation to connect the money or lack thereof to social position.

Not only does Wodehouse use recreation to discuss social status, but he also uses recreation to examine education in the Edwardian culture. Since the Victorian and early Edwardian eras were characterized by relative peace in Britain, it has been stated that men needed a stimulus outside of the home, a stimulus that characterized male expectations and allowed them to release their "need for war" in a more peaceful situation, thus the rise of sports. Along with the relative peace of these eras arose the desire for male education and thence the formation of more grammar, public, and boarding schools. J. A. Mangan discusses the idea of manliness in his book *'Manufactured' Masculinity: Making Imperial Manliness, Morality, and Militarism*, arguing that as more civilized forms of schooling arose, sports took the place of some bullying, or perhaps redefined bullying and appeasement in their own terms, as the cricket bat replaced the implements of war, at least to some extent (34). Mike and Psmith corroborate and simultaneously dismiss this idea. Mike seeks that appeasement through the game of cricket, but Psmith seeks it through his clothes and social position. Why this difference in characters? Wodehouse, it seems, used these extremes in order to provide a more complete commentary on

the social structures with which he was familiar. Wodehouse's own experiences with social classes were very limited. He was raised in a home similar to that of his character Mike and, therefore, seems to understand this character more, but his use of Psmith seems to show what he actually desired and aspired to.

Psmith shows a more affluent aspect of society. He is the young gentleman who will become accustomed to being a member of clubs and societies and will see the fruits of labor without having to perform it. Mike does not share in Psmith's display of ease, though his dedication to labor is not complete, because his "work" comes on the cricket field—which many would also consider a leisure activity. Yet according to Mangan, sports were more than an activity, they were a means to identification with a dominant set of values and norms: "[P]hysical exercise (team games in particular) was indulged in considerably and compulsorily in the belief that it was a highly effective means of inculcating valuable instrumental and expressive goals – physical and moral courage, loyalty and cooperation and the ability both to command and obey – the famous ingredients of 'character training'" (60). The game of cricket becomes a sort of "rite of passage" from boyhood to manhood, but it is also an activity which is still acceptable during manhood as a means both of relaxing and of proving that one still has the prowess and finesse to play a good game—one that might be necessary to the nation.

This transition from boyhood to manhood was not without its series of difficult circumstances, and with these difficulties, Wodehouse establishes the need for trials in order to achieve a mature masculine identity. Without directly addressing the idea of war, Wodehouse shows how Edwardian school and recreation prepared boys for the ensuing Great War, and through different character descriptions, foreshadows the reality that some of these boys would one day have to lead the others under more serious circumstances. Mike and Psmith's main rival

at Sedleigh is a boy named Adair. The difference between Psmith and Adair is acute, for "Adair deserved more than a casual glance. He was that rare type, the natural leader. Many boys and men, if accident or the passage of time, places them in a position where they are expected to lead, can handle the job without disaster; but that is a very different thing from being a born leader" (48). Psmith too was a born leader, but of a different mold: while Psmith saw the idea and had others carry it out, Adair saw the idea and carried it out himself. Wodehouse states that men like Adair are rare; therefore, men who are good, natural leaders, are also rare—and at the time of writing these books, good leaders were desperately needed. As this book was originally published in 1909, the brutalities of WWI were about to commence. Wodehouse revised the book and reprinted it in 1935, which gave him the time to go back and revise the characters' situations and personalities with more historical context. However, Wodehouse never added anything about impending war, or in his later books the effects of the war. War is conveniently left out of all discussions and the result is humorous books that allow the reader to forget the horrors that were surrounding him or that would surround him soon.

Wodehouse instead uses the "peaceful" scenery of the cricket playing field to give his characters an opportunity to enact the manly assertion of battle. As Mangan declares, "Imperialism, militarism and athleticism in the last quarter of the nineteenth century became a revered secular trinity of the upper-middle-class school. A recent historian has written: By the end of the century it was not the public school system in general but the playing fields that were associated with the imperial battlefields.' [28] These lines from 'Carmen Marlburiense', a college song, bear local witness to this general phenomenon.

Be strong, Elevens, to bowl and shoot,

Be strong, O Regiment of the foot,

With ball of skin or lead or leather,

Stand for the Commonwealth together. (67)

Sports played an important role in the public school life because they prepared the young men for their future roles in a semi-combatant way, yet were different from the military academies and schools in which the boys could have been placed. Since at home in England there was mostly peace, men had to learn to deal with fighting in a different sphere. Mike and Psmith immediately are on the defensive when they come to the school and try to discover what group they belong to the most. Psmith likes to use the title Comrade before the last name of those in his group; therefore, he refers to Mike as Comrade Jackson and each boy similarly. This prefigures the entering socialist politics of the times—or more broadly, the desire for social change. However, the use of the terms and names are always humorous, and those using them or following that order in Wodehouse's books, are generally made to look ridiculous. This fits with the ambiguity of Wodehouse's own politics, which are difficult to know because he made so few direct statements.

Although Wodehouse's own politics are difficult to pin down, his use of Psmith to manipulate people to follow his will could be read as an obvious commentary on the government, which would use the emotions of young men and give them the desire to be a part of something more than themselves – the war. The main focus of this first book in the series is the game of cricket. Two entire chapters are devoted to the details of matches, and a considerable amount of the other chapters is devoted to different descriptions of the various games; Wodehouse also uses cricket terminology to describe the actions of the characters. A quality cricket player was famous throughout England for his skills at bowling or at the wicket, and depending on his quality of play, he could become a member of the MCC (Marylebone Cricket

Club which was also once the governing body for global cricket). This idea was not in Psmith's future, but his desire to see Mike become better known in the cricket circles arises in part because it would benefit him tremendously as well. Mangan shows that

> [t]he apologists for athleticism became increasingly sophisticated in argument, constructing a moral value-scale for games, but the central dogma remained the same. Thus when a contributor to the *Malburian* in 1873 discussed the relative value of football and cricket as vehicles of moral education in an essay on comparative athletics, he came to the happy conclusion that, although football was morally superior to cricket, both games encouraged patience, endurance, enthusiasm, fidelity to one's side, coolness and watchfulness. (68)

However, Psmith's strong opinions and "suggestions" cause Mike to consider his love of cricket more. With Mike persuaded to continue his cricket career, Psmith could claim the rights of having persuaded Mike and become his patron, making Mike his type of protégé. Both young men, however, have good intentions, and it is their desire to see the good in others and provide good for others, which makes Wodehouse's works more complicated than one would originally think. Although one could argue that Psmith's use of Mike sets up the potential for a symbolic revolution, in fact, it creates complementary companionship and peace: there is no ill will between Mike and Psmith despite the differences in ability and social status, for each follows the good in the other and desires to promote the good of those around them. Mike willingly embraces the plan which Psmith devises for him.

Despite the goodness of each character, and despite the ways in which they benefit each other, there is a constant search for correct placement, for the true identity in each. Cricket thus becomes a means of both identifying and preserving existing social structures. Wodehouse

shows through his observance of Edwardian traditions among his characters the conflict of social classes and the desire to achieve manhood. He shows the fight for preservation of tradition against the changing social structures through the integration of characters on the cricket playing field. In just a few years, the social structures would begin to disintegrate as WWI forced the young cricket players of all social levels to engage in a battle much greater than those found on the cricket field. Graham Dawson delves into the idea of identity and masculinity in his work *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* and shows how another theorist Carolyn Steedman views the identity search of early nineteenth-century British men:

> Pointing out that in nineteenth-century Britain the actual experience of soldiering was relatively rare, Steedman notes that being a soldier had become 'the very epitome of manhood'. Soldier's stories, she suggests, can best be understood as 'the most common metaphorical expression of a man's life'. In her account the soldier is considered as a symbolic as well as a literal figure: no longer the simple embodiment of innate male violence, but the inhabitant of an imaginative landscape where many kinds of psychic scenario may be staged. (21)

Identity was something with which Wodehouse himself would struggle throughout his life, so it is fitting that his characters also pursue their own true masculine identity. Identity here is not so much based on gender orientation or family orientation, but rather on social status, and work relations, and how one will identify with, resist, or fit into society throughout his life.

Coming at the end of the Victorian era and at the beginning of the Edwardian era, these books quietly delve into the questions of the role that the man played not just in the home, but in the public sphere as well. The young men in this first book do not represent the patriarchal

system that was especially in question. However, they do represent the questioning of that system as they strive to discover their own purpose and role in the school system.

Neither young man needs the presence of women at this point in order to discover his identity; therefore, each seeks his identity in different ways. For Mike (Comrade Jackson) the game of cricket becomes the method of identification and social placement. The book begins with Mike home for the holidays, with his sister Marjory and he discussing the latest cricket match and the importance of Mike to the cricket team at his school Wryken. Even his sister depends on his cricket prowess, for she plays with him and their other brothers when they are all home for the holidays. Cricket gives Mike a standing, not just with his other brothers who play as well, but with his sister, who depends on his playing to be able to show her affection for her siblings. Without cricket, Mike does not have anything to be noticed for in his family because his school reports effectively show his lack of ability or perhaps his lack of attention to his studies. On the cricket field he does wonderfully, but without cricket, he has nothing. His father, however, does not see the importance of the game to Mike and would rather see Mike put more interest into his studies; he thus sends him to Sedleigh where the cricket team is not good and hopefully will not be as tempting to Mike. Instead of causing Mike to focus more on his studies, though, the move to the new school only causes Mike to wish to play cricket more and he finds that without cricket, he lacks the interest in life and the interest to pursue anything for he believes that his value is only found on the cricket field. Mike's brothers are distinguished cricket players whose names could be followed in the paper; therefore, Mike feels the need to be able to play equally as well and become distinguished so that he too will have a higher standing in his own family. In this sense, the patriarchal ideas come to the forefront again and create the drive to be the best man in the family.

Despite—or perhaps because of—the political undercurrents, Wodehouse paints a picture of life without women present. His own life was not one in which women were widely present. His mother went back to China with his father after the boys started in the English boarding schools, and she never had much influence on his life. This lack of a mother figure seems to also cause a lack of female figures in his books, especially the Psmith series until the last book of the series. Wodehouse resolves this lack, though, not by seeking to heal it but by suggesting that a largely homosocial society is one worth exploring on its own terms.

In order to be accepted as a man in the family, Mike not only must pass the test of the cricket matches but he also needs to show his ability in the realm of academics to remain a part of the team. Yet playing at his school is a means to an end for Mike, invoking still more rites of passage. Achieving a good status in school cricket gives Mike a pass-card to play with the men: when he decides to not play with the school team, he seeks out a local team which is made up of grown men who are typically stronger players in their bowling and batting skills. Proving that he can play with these men also proves that he is advanced beyond the boyish stages of youth, for he not only plays with the men on the local team, but he understands them and talks with them about local happenings and the political world—an indication that he has undergone a shift from the boyish pranks at the school to the ability to carry himself in social positions. However, the maturation process is not quite complete, for he is continually swept back into the pranks at Sedleigh. Without wars and more serious affairs to cause boys to learn the seriousness of life and how to deal with different issues, the game of cricket acts as that bridge to maturation—but it is a bridge that can be crossed and re-crossed.

The eras during which this book was written and takes place were characterized by seeming peace in England. In order to help resolve the fear of war and the memories of war, and

in order for the young men to again find their place in the world, something had to take the place of war for those generations. Sports then became the main means of relieving aggression and teaching young men the means of offense and defense and the importance of winning and giving your all on the "battlefield." Instead of country against country, in the case of cricket, it became school against school, or county against county—"war" became a largely local phenomenon. Moreover, the outcomes differed: instead of the winning outcome in war benefitting many people, the main purpose of a cricket match was to gain a name personally and be recognized for personal achievements and success. By gaining a name personally, the young men were moved forward in life and given a greater advantage in business and possibly future sports careers. Cricket thus helped to make a space for individual identity within mass culture. It is thus fitting that these things are again achieved without the mention of women. Perhaps later in life a wife could be considered an achievement, but she would only be considered an achievement if she raised the man in his social status—if she contributed to his individual success.

Yet the turn toward individualism via cricket did not undo collective consciousness. Despite the idea of vulnerability which the Boer War produced and the worsening uprisings in Ireland, there was still a general and largely unquestioned confidence and belief that England was the greatest nation—never mind asking why she was or in what way she was. While it is possible to read cricket solely as a metaphor for war, Wodehouse's understanding of it is far more complex—it is a social ritual that serves various functions depending on context. It is also just what it seemed to be—a leisure activity and a national pastime. The young men of this time engaged in sports and leisure activities because they liked them. But their participation in these activities was significant, seen as patriotic, a way to truly support the country and raise young men who could carry on traditions and create a sphere of safety. Wodehouse, though, knows how

vulnerable the traditional safe haven of Britain truly is. While Mike and Psmith participate in these activities and show what they can do without the fear of any real harm to themselves or their families—their worst fear, in fact, is that they may have to eventually work for their living—they enjoy this safety as they are being trained to be "gentlemen," living off of the annuities settled on them by their fathers and benefitting from the history of labor which raised their families to the status of upper middle class. They do not have land and titles to further their riches, but they have the steady income of an empire, that from afar and out of mind, funds their relaxed lifestyle. With war the farthest thing from the characters' minds, it may not have been the farthest thing from Wodehouse's mind. Wodehouse is not usually described as having a political mind or one that really cared for the world events happening around him. Yet his uncanny ability to completely disregard those events, including the Great War, in his writing, shows a masterful ability less to ignore the outer world than to create a safe haven from it, a fictional world where the mishaps of his characters are laughable and never truly life-threatening. He creates an escape—not necessarily a resolution—for his characters and for himself as Mike and Psmith carry on and embrace their roles in society without concern and worry. Even if such concern would have been warranted, for Wodehouse, it is more important to preserve a sense of normalcy.

Chapter 3: *Psmith in the City*: Loss and Return of Identity in the Working World

As Wodehouse begins the second book of the Psmith series, *Psmith in the City*, the characters' struggle for identity has not lessened despite the change in their location. In fact, the change in location seems to be exacerbating this struggle to achieve a true identity. Mike and Psmith no longer find themselves searching for their place within the public school, especially on the cricket field, but they are now searching for their place within the great empire of the British workforce. Yet Wodehouse carries on the theme of sports as a sphere where the young men of the books are able to play out the structures and social issues of Edwardian life, as their work in the bank becomes the "sport" in which the characters must strategize and learn their positions. As the characters navigate this new sport, cricket becomes the previously conquered familiar territory to which they will run, for it is there that they understand and respect their positions. Ratcliffe explains that "Wodehouse, like Mike, was just one of thousands of nobodies lost in the maze of early Edwardian bureaucracy," for "the writing of this period is full of such figures – anonymous clerks in their ill-fitting frock coats, clutching their bowler hats and dreams" (51-52). Ratcliffe also shows that "[t]hough he [Wodehouse] detested the work, he enjoyed playing in the bank's rugby and cricket teams and life at the bank was, for Wodehouse, not entirely wasted" (51). This interesting explanation of Wodehouse's attitude towards work at the bank helps to show why sports play such an important role in his characters' lives as their identities become linked to this new identity revealing sport.

As Wodehouse continues the development of Mike and Psmith in *Psmith in the City*, he shows their developing manhood as they move from playing out larger social issues on the cricket field to doing the same in the realm of a regimented bank working atmosphere, where they must develop new political opinions. Michael Roper and John Tosh address the struggle for

men to find their identities during this time in their work *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain Since 1800*, "for seeing masculine and feminine identities not as distinct and separable constructs, but as parts of a political field whose relations are characterized by domination, subordination, collusion and resistance" (8). Despite both of the characters facing the same transition, Mike, with his underdeveloped identity, experiences greater difficulty adjusting to the working situation in which he never imagined he would have to function; this new situation makes him feel subordinate, frustrated, and forced into a position which he does not want. Yet this new situation gives Wodehouse the opportunity to strengthen his characters through personal growth.

Just as the game of cricket allows the characters to address greater Edwardian social issues on the playing field, Wodehouse uses the regimented structure of the New Asiatic Bank to address greater social customs—a process that proves challenging for his protagonists, especially Mike. Wodehouse titles the first chapter focusing on this change "A New Era Begins," for "[a]rriving at Paddington, Mike stood on the platform, waiting for his box to emerge from the luggage-van, with mixed feelings of gloom and excitement. The gloom was in the larger quantities, perhaps, but the excitement was there, too. It was the first time in his life that he had been entirely dependent on himself. He had crossed the Rubicon" (25). Even with the promise of freedom, the city seems oppressive compared to the fresh air and freedom of school life from which Mike has just emerged. As Mike begins to discover different sites in the city, his frustration continues, for he cannot discover his rightful place amidst the buildings, shadows, and stale air surrounding him. The cricket field represents freedom, while the surrounding buildings overwhelm and oppress: "Mike wandered out of the house. A few steps took him to the railings that bounded the College grounds. It was late August, and the evenings had begun to close in.

The cricket-field looked very cool and spacious in the dim light, with the school buildings looming vague and shadowy through the slight mist" (28-29). Ease and the beauty of nature are not present in the city as they are in the country on the cricket playing field. Yet the absence of such beauty creates opportunities for growth for Mike.

Wodehouse suggests that a young man matures through the darkness and harshness of the city more--or at least in different ways--than he does in pastoral regions; hence, he focuses on Mike's move to the city. The unfamiliarity of his lodgings, and the unfamiliarity of the inner city, where Mike works, creates an inward battle between readiness to achieve a new station in life and the fear of losing his identity. Mike's search for identity is not eased by his new job either, for "the City received Mike with the same aloofness with which the more western portion of London had welcomed him on the previous day" (30). In order to be identified as a man and accepted into mature society, Mike must demonstrate that he can follow the rules of social etiquette, and he must acquire a great sense of the importance of traditions, all without taking his place on a cricket field, but instead, in a new and uncomfortable sphere – the working world. In part, though, his challenge arises because the expectations of the professional world were broader and more far-reaching than that of the cricket field. According to Tosh and Roper, "certainly from the 1840s until the 1930s – the proper definition of 'manliness' as a code of conduct for men was a matter of keen interest to educators and social critics. Emphasis was variously placed on moral courage, sexual purity, athleticism and stoicism, by pundits who ranged from Thomas Arnold through Thomas Carlyle, Charles Kingsley and Thomas Hughes, to Robert Baden-Powell" (2). Wodehouse fits this pattern. Mike finds his identity compromised because he cannot find what his proper conduct should be within the city. Where does he turn for instruction, and if he cannot play cricket, how will he be able to assert himself as a man of the

world if he does not have a platform on which to demonstrate the traditional aspects of masculine identity?

Enter once again, Psmith. Mike reflects that "Psmith had a way of treating unpleasant situations as if he were merely playing at them for his own amusement. Psmith's attitude towards the slings and arrows of outrageous Fortune was to regard them with a bland smile, as if they were part of an entertainment got up for his express benefit" (25). Psmith's identity is not tied to the need for making money, nor is it tied to the exercises on the cricket field. For Wodehouse, Psmith begins to emerge as the man who is not dependent on others to *show* him his identity, but who is dependent on others to assist him in *learning* for himself, his own means to identity. By contrast, on reporting for his first day at the bank, Mike has to inquire what he is supposed to do and to whom to report. Never having worked before, the idea of "clocking in" or signing in is foreign to Mike, and as with any new employee, the strangeness of the scene holds him at bay for a moment: "Inside, the bank seemed to be in a state of some confusion. Men were moving about in an apparently irresolute manner. Nobody seemed actually to be working. As a matter of fact, the business of a bank does not start very early in the morning" (30). The regimented times and motions of the day are necessary to produce order and accomplish work. This is not a foreign idea or an outdated custom. And to Mike, coming from the ordered days of school, this would soon become simply another form of regimentation and order. "After a while things began to settle down. The stir and confusion gradually ceased. All down the length of the bank, figures could be seen, seated on stools and writing hieroglyphics in large letters" (31). Despite this regimentation, unfamiliarity with the scene and its customs renders Mike unsure of what to do. He came from a place where he was well-known and well-loved because of his cricket playing

skills, with his identity and nascent man-hood found in that life of sport, playing the game of cricket. Suddenly he finds himself at a loss and searching for a new identity.

Mike seems still to depend on Psmith even though they are not together because he constantly asserts that he believes Psmith would know how to act in certain situations much better than he. Therefore, Mike needs Psmith—even the mere idea of him—in order to help form his own identity. He does not seem to be able to form an identity apart from some other object. Psmith has created a singular character for himself, but Mike follows in the shadow of that character. When Mike first meets the bank manager, Wodehouse comments, "These reunions are very awkward. Mike was frankly unequal to the situation. Psmith, in his place, would have opened the conversation, and relaxed the tension with some remark on the weather or the state of the crops. Mike merely stood wrapped in silence, as in a garment" (32). At this juncture, Mike goes against the traditional idea that men seek power and complete control over their own identities at all times, instead depending on another man for his identity and for his decision making. Mike represents the idea of reverse male dominance discussed by Tosh and Roper: "The main limitation of patriarchal frameworks is that they are more adept at highlighting the changeability of public and institutional power structures than of masculinity. . . . Men are too easily seen as having a natural and undifferentiated proclivity for domination, because their subjective experiences are left unexplored (10). According to this theory, masculine proclivities are social constructs instead of natural inclinations. Mike and Psmith exemplify this theory for they do not seek to dominate each other, but rather each works for the good of the other.

As Mike continues his search for identity, he does not seem to find it in his work and he constantly wishes for a break and for an opportunity to see his friend. Wodehouse declares, "The gnawing loneliness had gone. 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. If all went well in the bank he might find that he had not drawn such a bad ticket after all" (54). Psmith arrives and with him, Mike's sense of importance slowly begins to return, for Mike does not find his identity in his work, but in his friend. Psmith's arrival is much different from Mike's as demonstrated through what Mike simply tells the bank manager simply when he first arrives,

> "'I've come,' was the best speech he could think of. It was not a good speech. It was too sinister. He felt that even as he said it. It was the sort of thing Mephistopheles would have said to Faust by way of opening conversation. And he was not sure, either, whether he ought to have added, 'Sir.' Apparently such subtleties of address were not necessary, for Mr. Bickersdyke did not start up and shout, 'This language to me!' or anything of that kind. He merely said, 'Oh! And who are you?'" (33)

It is at this moment that Mike realizes just how small he must seem to the other men working at the bank and how small he is in comparison not just to the city of London, but to the British Empire. This bank represents a necessary part of the great empire, but an impersonal, unfeeling, regulated machine. Enter Mike into this world, a world where identity no longer is formed through personal pursuits and desires but through what is ostensibly for the common good. The shape this work takes varies according to the context and people involved; for some, like Mike, work is supposedly a means to benefit the masses. With this work for the common good, though, comes the expansion of the empire of a few wealthy people—such as Psmith. Mike and Psmith's partnership is cemented as they enter into a series of friendships and partnerships with political

figures, who aim to further the good of the Empire by benefiting its masses through meaningful labor.

In fact, the bank is just a jumping off point for the other imperial work which the characters are being groomed to do. What that "work" is, though, remains mysterious. Wodehouse states, "The truth of the matter was that the New Asiatic Bank was over-staffed. There were too many men for the work. The London branch of the bank was really only a nursery. New men were constantly wanted in the Eastern branches, so they had to be put into the London branch to learn the business, whether there was any work for them to do or not" (97). In this environment, their identities seem to be stripped as they are taught only what they need to know to be a representative for the British Empire—and in fact, there is not all that much to learn since there simply is not enough work to go around. In a new place, supposedly, they will regain their personal identity, but only insofar as that personal identity promotes the greater good of the British Empire. While Mike is expected to overlook the dullness of his work because of the promise it holds for his life later, other men in similarly unfulfilling professional positions found their sense of identity elsewhere. Tosh and Roper declare that

> [T]he growing predominance of working-class men in skilled trades went hand in hand with the construction of masculinity through rites of apprenticeship, and a notion that the purpose of wage labour was the support of dependents in the home. So while at one level respectability might be viewed as an 'exclusionary principle', it must also be seen as the product of historically specific links between gender identity and the work culture. (12)

Mike finds it challenging to look to the Empire for his sense of identity, and the lack of dependents in the home could be one more reason that he struggles to find importance in his

work. He states his frustration with the unending monotony of the bank: "'What rot it all is!' went on Mike, sitting down again. 'What's the good of it all? You go and sweat all day at a desk, day after day, for about twopence a year. And when you're about eighty-five, you retire. It isn't living at all. It's simply being a bally vegetable'" (166). Mike's idea of patriotism does not create a sense of excitement in his work, and he has no home life to confer meaning on his labors. Instead, his heart and identity are not tied to his professional work at all, but to the sport which he has left momentarily behind – cricket.

By contrast, when Psmith enters the work scene, he handles the pressure much more easily, sliding immediately into an expected imperial role. When asked why he had come to the bank, Psmith gives an interesting commentary not just on his coming to the bank, but on the idea of work and the creation of an empire:

> 'I shall toil with all the accumulated energy of one who, up till now, has only known what work is like from hearsay. Whose is that form sitting on the steps of the bank in the morning, waiting eagerly for the place to open? It is the form of Psmith, the Worker. Whose is that haggard, drawn face which bends over a ledger long after the other toilers have sped blithely westwards to dine at Lyons' Popular Café? If is the face of Psmith, the Worker.'" (41)

This speech presents the idea of the worker being not an individual but simply another face, another coerced and forced worker that loses his identity for the sake of the greater good. Yet Psmith is content with who he is and he has the confidence to address this new situation in an almost humorous light. Moreover, when Psmith arrives, he supports both his own identity and Mike's as well: Mike now has the power of his friend to give him the needed identity he seems

to be missing, and Psmith's ability to lend identity to Mike seems to come from his already established sense of identity.

Psmith, however, is not working out of necessity, but simply to satisfy his father's curiosity and in order to please his father and to keep his ready supply of money coming. He explains:

> "'You haven't told me yet what on earth you're doing here,' said Mike. 'I thought you were going to the 'Varsity. Why the dickens are you in a bank? Your pater hasn't lost his money, has he?'
>
> 'No. There is still a tolerable supply of dubloons in the old oak chest. Mine is a painful story.'
>
> 'It always is,' said Mike.
>
> 'You are very right, Comrade Jackson. I am the victim of Fate'" (43).
>
> "And when my pater, after dinner the same night, played into his hands by mentioning that he thought I ought to plunge into a career of commerce, Comrade B. was, I gather, all over him. Offered to make a vacancy for me in the bank, and to take me on at once. My pater, feeling that this was the real hustle which he admired so much, had me in, stated his case, and said, in effect, "How do we go?" I intimated that Comrade Bickersdyke was my greatest chum on earth. So the thing was fixed up and here I am.'" (44-45)

Psmith does not see the seriousness of commerce and work as Mike does. His fortune is still secure, so this time of work is more a time of experimentation, discovering if he can survive or more likely, trying to see what fun he can have with this new adventure. Psmith's identity is not tied to his job or the work that he has there; rather, his identity is tied more closely to his social

circles, such as the clubs of which he is a part. By some definitions, Psmith's seeming ability to adjust to any situation and still retain his identity could place him at the unusual, yet desired state of accepted manhood, for Tosh and Roper state, "Despite the myths of omnipotent manhood which surround us, masculinity is never fully possessed, but must perpetually be achieved, asserted, and renegotiated" (18). Yet his mature adult masculinity is tied so intimately to his social status that it is impossible to separate them.

Surprisingly, though Psmith has an unusually high social status, he does not seem to be the only worker at the bank who is able to retain his identity. Wodehouse posits another indication that not all of the employees at the bank felt a loss of identity:

> Then there was no doubt that it was an interesting little community, that of the New Asiatic Bank. The curiously amateurish nature of the institution lent a certain air of lightheartedness to the place. It was not like one of those banks whose London office is their main office, where stern business is everything and a man becomes more a mere machine for getting through a certain amount of routine work. The employees of the New Asiatic Bank, having plenty of time on their hands, were able to retain their individuality. They had leisure to think of other things besides their work. Indeed, they had so much leisure that it is a wonder they thought of their work at all. (130)

These descriptions put Mike at odds with his fellow workers, for he is unable to find contentment in the city and through comradeship at work. His identity is still not tied to anything in this new place. Mike's inability to adjust to the bank system and find his identity in this new place could also be linked to a sense of fear of the unknown, and in that blank unknown, a fear of being required to go somewhere and do something else that he does not find pertains to him or helps to

cement his identity. Mr. Bannister, Mike's colleague introduces Mike to the bank system in almost one breath, and it is this introduction that also seems to serve as a negative influence on Mike's opinion of the workforce, especially the British banking system:

> 'I pity you going into the Postage. There's one thing, though. If you can stick it for about a month, you'll get through all right. Men are always leaving for the East, and then you get shunted on into another department, and the next new man goes into the Postage. That's the best of this place. It's not like one of those banks where you stay in London all your life. You only have three years here, and then you get your orders, and go to one of the branches in the East, where you're the dickens of a big pot straight away, with a big screw and a dozen native Johnnies under you. Bit of all right, that.' (34)

Despite this positive outlook presented to him, Mike does not find comfort or necessity in his work at the bank. Mike has leisure time at work, but because he does not believe that he is doing something important, he does not enjoy the extra time. He would rather be spending his extra time playing cricket where he feels free and as if he is contributing to the common good of something, even just the good of a small group of men. In the bank, his assignment in the post office creates the feeling that he is simply a piece of mail in the bank's system as well, and he will be moved before long to a new bank, most likely in the Far East. This prospect is not any more appealing to Mike, for he cannot determine how he would be contributing to the greater good, nor does it give him a better defined sense of masculinity than cricketing, which he already possesses.

Through this seeming substitution by the Empire of the idea of professional masculinity for the idea of athletic masculinity which Mike already possesses, Wodehouse discovers one of

the problems of the British Empire – false expectations. Thinking of long days spent only in the employ of a bank, unable to see the good which his services are doing himself, let alone the British empire, Mike's view of working life becomes quite depressing. Wodehouse declares,

> There are some people who take naturally to a life of commerce. Mike was not one of these. To him the restraint of the business was irksome. He had been used to an open-air life, and a life, in its way, of excitement. He gathered that he would not be free till five o'clock, and that on the following day he would come at ten and go at five, and the same every day, except Saturdays and Sundays, all the year round, with a ten days' holiday. The monotony of the prospect appalled him. He was not old enough to know what a narcotic is Habit, and that one can become attached to and interested in the most unpromising jobs. He worked away dismally at his letters till he had finished them. Then there was nothing to do except sit and wait for more. (37)

If in the bank Mike needs Psmith to have a sense of himself, outside of it, he seems to be a more stable—and obviously masculine—character, at least when he can play cricket. The references back to cricket and Mike's longing to play cricket allow the reader to conclude that sports are the foundation for Mike's identity; indeed, only in the world of sports he seems free to be himself. As the weather begins to warm, the desire for his own previous identity once more begins to resurface:

> [I]t was now late spring: the sun shone cheerfully on the City; and cricket was in the air. And that was the trouble. In the dark days, when everything was fog and slush, Mike had been contented enough to spend his mornings and afternoons in the bank, and go about with Psmith at night. Under such conditions, London is the

> best place to be, and the warmth and light of the bank were pleasant. But now things had changed. The place had become a prison. With all the energy of one who had been born and bred in the country, Mike hated having to stay indoors on days when all the air was full of approaching summer. There were mornings when it was almost more than he could do to push open the swing-doors, and go out of the fresh air into the stuffy atmosphere of the bank. (164)

This desire to play cricket and be reunited with that activity which gives him a sense of identity propels Mike's actions throughout the book, as he seeks actively to escape the oppressive masculinity of the professional sphere in Edwardian Britain. In the bank, Mike lacks all the facts of identity that he had once enjoyed as an athlete: he does not have anyone to support with his job, he finds no enjoyment in his employment, and the one thing in which he revels is denied him by his work hours. Despite these tensions, however, Wodehouse also does not seem to provide an answer for these issues. Mike's masculinity finds its natural outlet on the cricket field, but he—like other young professionals—is forced to conform to a stunted definition of identity that displaces masculine fulfillment to the eastern reaches of the Empire or hearth and home.

The political arena was another area which Edwardian England offered to men as a means of establishing their masculine identity, and Wodehouse uses it as another means for Mike to possibly discover his identity. As I have previously argued, without the difficulties of war to help them grow and learn more, the characters in Wodehouse's books need different sets of difficulties in order to help them achieve traditional manhood, and in the arena of politics, as in business, Psmith excels. Wodehouse's description of Psmith's strategies and tactics makes clear that politics substitute for a battlefield: "Anything in the nature of a rash and hasty move was wholly foreign to Psmith's tactics. He had the patience which is the chief quality of the

successful general. He was content to secure his base before making any offensive movement" (63). Psmith's affability and seeming ease with his own identity allow him to pursue more serious avenues and delve into the realm of politics, not for the pursuance of a job but simply for another adventure. While for some characters, political activities may work to stabilize masculine identity, for the already confident Psmith, they are yet another game that he can choose to win or lose simply for his own amusement. When speaking to his employer Mr. Bickersdyke, Psmith reveals his political views, "'Our politics differ in some respects, I fear – I incline to the Socialist view – but nevertheless I shall listen to your remarks with great interest, great interest'" (66). At times Psmith seems serious in his pursuit of the socialist cause; however, his ultimate aim is not to establish an identity for himself through the political world, but instead to cause an aggravation for his employer.

The more vulnerable Mike, on the other hand, expresses reluctance at addressing or promoting political views, just as he has previously expressed reluctance to embrace the professional culture of the bank. When Psmith and Mike go to a socialist political rally in the park Wodehouse explains that

> Mike looked alarmed.
>
> 'Look here,' he said, 'I say, if you *are* going to play the goat, for goodness' sake don't go lugging me into it. I've got heaps of troubles without that."
>
> Psmith waved the objection aside.
>
> 'You,' he said, 'will be one of the large, and, I hope, interested audience. Nothing more. But it is quite possible that the spirit may not move me. I may not feel inspired to speak. I am not one of those who love speaking for speaking's sake. If I have no message for the many-headed, I shall remain silent.'

> ‘Then I hope the dickens you won’t have,’ said Mike. Of all things he hated most being conspicuous before a crowd – except at cricket, which was a different thing – and he had an uneasy feeling that Psmith would rather like it than otherwise. (102)

Mike’s anxieties about socialist politics are reasonable. Socialism on a grand political scale at this time would have been an emerging idea. For one whose identity is still not entirely steadfast, the tenets of socialism could spur on great fears about the loss of self. If Mike feels that he lacks identity in the banking work world, he knows that he could once again lose his identity through the “common good” of the socialist political party. Despite this fear, Psmith convinces Mike to go hear Mr. Waller, their fellow employee, speak at a socialist political rally in the park. The ensuing humorous escapade does not serve to bolster Mike’s confidence in the new political ideas:

> When Mr. Waller got up to speak on platform number three, his audience consisted at first only of Psmith, Mike, and a fox-terrier. Gradually, however, he attracted others. After wavering for a while, the crowd finally decided that he was worth hearing. He had a method of his own. Lacking the natural gifts which marked Comrade Prebble out as an entertainer, he made up for this by his activity. Where his colleagues stood comparatively still, Mr. Waller behaved with the vivacity generally supposed to belong only to peas on shovels and cats on hot bricks. He 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 was the sort of thing the crowd had come to see. Comrade Wotherspoon found himself

> deserted, and even Comrade Prebble's shortcomings in the ways of palate were insufficient to keep his flock together. The entire strength of the audience gathered in front of the third platform. (104-5)

The people are not necessarily interested in the political ideas of Waller, but they enjoy his antics. There seems to be genuine power in action regardless of whether or not those actions are profitable. The crowd thinks as a unit, and not to any apparent purpose.

Wodehouse did not have definite political views of his own, so when he describes the different ideas of these specific groups, he also does so in a humorous and largely unideological manner. Organized politics was not a serious matter to Wodehouse, and in fact, when his characters take political matters seriously, he portrays their actions as merely humorous and outlandish. His summary of political meetings suggests the disjointed and often humorous experiences of politics:

> All political meetings are very much alike. Somebody gets up and introduces the speaker of the evening, and then the speaker of the evening says at great length what he thinks of the scandalous manner in which the Government is behaving or the iniquitous goings-on of the Opposition. From time to time confederates in the audience rise and ask carefully rehearsed questions, and are answered fully and satisfactorily by the orator. When a genuine heckler interrupts, the orator either ignores him, or says haughtily that he can find him arguments but cannot find him brains. Or, occasionally, when the question is an easy one, he answers it. A quietly conducted political meeting is one of England's most delightful indoor games. When the meeting is rowdy, the audience has more fun, but the speaker a good deal less. (72)

In this, though, he resisted the dominant trend of Edwardian culture, which tended to see meaning—especially for men—in the political arena. Tosh and Roper discuss the importance of masculinity at these political rallies, for "'Manful assertions' – whether of verbal command, political power or physical violence – have been the traditional stuff of history" (1). Despite his reluctance to be caught up in the socialist cause but also unable to allow his energy full vent with a lack of cricket to play, Mike finds the political rally to be a perfect field on which to assert the pent-up energy—and masculinity—that have been hoarded during his time at the bank, in a memorable episode of heroic physical violence. Wodehouse states,

> A group of young men of the loafer class who stood near Mike were especially fertile in comment. Psmith's eyes were on the speaker; but Mike was watching this group closely. Suddenly he saw one of them, a thick-set youth wearing a cloth cap and no collar, stoop.
>
> When he rose again there was a stone in his hand.
>
> The sight acted on Mike like a spur. Vague rage against nobody in particular had been simmering in him for half an hour. Now it concentrated itself on the cloth-capped one.
>
> Mr. Waller paused momentarily before renewing his harangue. The man in the cloth cap raised his hand. There was a swirl in the crowd, and the first thing that Psmith saw as he turned was Mike seizing the would-be marksman round the neck and hurling to the ground, after the manner of a forward at football tackling an opponent during a line-out from touch. (106)

Where Mike does not find identity or the ability to assert his masculinity at the bank, he finds identity and the ability to assert his masculinity in a moment of crisis, when a heroic display of strength is needed.

But why does a political rally allow Mike to solidify his masculine identity while a professional job does not? Wodehouse seems to suggest that it is because politics, like sports, can stand in for a real battle, while a regimented, secured, and controlled environment like the bank cannot. The "battle" in which they found themselves involved, however, is not one of their own making. They fight on behalf of another party, in protection of something, that they, especially Mike, do not fully understand. As Mr. Waller gives his speech at the Socialist political rally in the park, Mike stops four young men from throwing rocks at his immediate superior in the bank and from the intention to save Mr. Waller ensues an uneven fight. Mike merely acts like a hero when he feels it is warranted. This blind fighting throws an interesting perspective on the Great War in which young men like Mike and Psmith would be called to fight in just a few years. On the one hand, the idea is strongly present that there was not a clear idea of what they were fighting for or whom they were fighting. On the other hand, such conflicts play a role in establishing the identities of Britain's young men, so they gloried in the results despite their ambiguity, just like Psmith glories in the triumph of the day at the park. As Psmith and Mike escape from the scene, Psmith makes a clear connection between their scuffle and war: "'Subject for a historical picture,' said Psmith. 'Wounded leaving the field after the Battle of Clapham Common. How are your injuries, Comrade Jackson?'" (114).

The initially positive outcome of Mike's fight is quickly tempered by Wodehouse's—and Mike's and Psmith's—reflection on the limits of success, and even the danger, in the political arena. The first of these is that while there may be excitement with the new political changes,

there are also possible dangers of specific political ideas. As men mature, so do their politics, but history remains intact. Psmith offers an enlightening commentary on the sometimes damaging results of changing politics: "'As far as I can glean from Comrade Waller,' said Psmith, 'about twenty years ago, when he and Comrade Bickersdyke worked hand-in-hand as fellow clerks at the New Asiatic, they were both members of the Tulse Hill Parliament, that powerful institution. At that time Comrade Bickersdyke was as fruity a Socialist as Comrade Waller is now'" (127). Psmith goes on to explain that Bickersdyke's politics changed because his desire for money caused him to change his favorable outlook on Socialism. The danger of past political intrigues catching up with one and harming one's current reputation continues through Psmith's explanation for "'that, you see, is where the dim and rusty past begins to get mixed up with the live, vivid present. . . . I rather fancy the light-hearted electors of Kenningford, from what I have seen of their rather acute sense of humour, would be, as it were, all over it. It would be very, very trying for Comrade Bickersdyke if these speeches of his were to get about'" (128). The political milieu surrounding the characters Mike and Psmith allows them, despite the confusion, to learn some caution in their political dealings and to appreciate the conquests that they do make in that realm. Furthermore, Psmith's speech, delivered immediately after Mike's triumph on the "battlefield," tempers his celebration.

After the "battle" in the park, Psmith declares, "'How pleasant . . . after strife is rest. We shouldn't have appreciated this simple cup of tea had our sensibilities remained unstirred this afternoon. We can now sit at our ease, like warriors after the fray, till the time comes for setting out to Comrade Waller's once more'" (115). Psmith, whose identity is already secure, finds celebration and relaxation both easy and natural. He has been amused by the political rally, and his goal is accomplished. Mike, however, still forming his identity, now finds that he cannot

fully celebrate the formation of his masculine identity based on a political mishap, simply because he sees how unstable politics can be. Wodehouse describes Mike's reaction after the fight:

> Mr. Waller looked with interest at Mike, who shuffled and felt awkward. He was hoping that Psmith would say nothing about the reason of his engaging Bill in combat. He had an uneasy feeling that Mr. Waller's gratitude would be effusive and over-powering, and he did not wish to pose as the brave young hero. There are moments when one does not feel equal to the *role*. Fortunately, before Mr. Waller had time to ask any further questions, the supper-bell sounded, and they went into the dining-room. (117)

Even if the political field does not allow Mike fully to flesh out his identity, there have still been gains. Through this scene, there begins to be evident an emerging identity for Mike, for at least now he can see what he does *not* wish to be known for. More than this, he finds some sense of meaning in defending someone from an unprovoked attack. With these gains but still seeking his true identity, Mike will be moved to make a decisive action about his future which will cause him to come face to face with what he desires to be his identity and his stamp of masculinity.

Through the combined institutions of work in the bank and emerging politics, mainly socialism, Mike begins to establish his identity through the assistance of Psmith, and Psmith begins to solidify his own identity and independence through these new experiences. Through these humorous experiences, Wodehouse moves Mike from one method of teaching manhood to another method – the school moves to the bank – with both fulfilling largely the same function:

> [T]here was a good deal of the public school about the New Asiatic Bank. The heads of departments were not quite so autocratic as masters, and one was treated

> more on a grown-up scale, as man to man; but, nevertheless, there remained a distinct flavor of a school republic. Most of the men in the bank, with the exception of certain hard-headed Scotch youths drafted in from other establishments in the City, were old public school men. Mike found two Old Wrykynians in the first week. Neither was well known to him. They had left in his second year in the team. But it was pleasant to have them about, and to feel that they had been educated at the right place. (90)

Despite this comparison, however, as we have seen, Mike does not find the same sense of identity within the bank atmosphere as he did at school, even when his connections at the bank help him to enter the political fray and find some limited sense of meaning and purpose in defending someone from an unjust attack. The difference between the two fields for Mike is, of course, the differing extent to which they enable him to play cricket—the only activity that Mike finds truly meaningful. Although "the New Asiatic Bank, like most London banks, was keen on sport, and happened to possess a cricket team which could make a good game with most of the second-rank clubs" (Wodehouse 90), this is not enough for Mike. He wants not to work at a bank with a cricket team for an extra leisure activity, but simply to play cricket all the time, especially when the weather becomes nice.

Mike's desire to reestablish his sense of identity through cricket drives him to a breaking point in his relationship with the bank. Thus, when Mike's brother calls to ask Mike if he will fill in for a missing player on a local team one afternoon,

> For the space of, perhaps, one minute, Mike thought.
>
> 'Well?' said Joe's voice.

> The sudden vision of Lord's ground, all green and cool in the morning sunlight, was too much for Mike's resolution, sapped as it was by days of restlessness. The feeling surged over him that whatever happened afterwards, the joy of the match in perfect weather on a perfect wicket would make it worth while. What did it matter what happened afterwards?
>
> 'All right, Joe,' he said. 'I'll hop into a cab now, and go and get my things.'
>
> 'Good man,' said Joe, hugely relieved. (169)

As a result of Mike's decision to play cricket rather than report to the office, Mike and Psmith both quit their jobs, though through his arguments, Psmith makes it sound more like the bank should be thanking him for the work done rather than that the bank should be letting him and Mike go for missing work. Despite these discrepancies, and despite the loss of his livelihood, Mike for the first time feels free and confident: "Mike's mind roamed into the future. Cambridge first, and then an open-air life of the sort he had always dreamed of. The Problem of Life seemed to him to be solved. He looked on down the years, and he could see no troubles there of any kind whatsoever." (201).

At the same time that Mike desires this life of ease, he also does not wish to be completely idle, for his ease comes through the simultaneous desire to be active in the cricket world and social sphere—he wants to reconfigure the leisure activity of cricket, so that it becomes both his labor and his livelihood. While many would consider Mike's work at the bank as the antidote for idleness, Mike found his work at the bank to be the epitome of idleness, which made his work unproductive and frustrating, and he wished to turn his cricket playing into his work, for while playing cricket, Mike does not feel idle or unproductive. Mangan quotes Norma Clarke as she gives an interesting historical parallel to this desire in her article "Thomas Carlyle

and the Man of Letters as Hero," in which she traces the Victorian tendency to align idleness more with lacking a sense of purpose or meaning than with sheer laziness or inactivity: "[S]trenuousness did not succeed in vanquishing idleness. Rather, idleness undermined strenuousness, turning it into a marginalized form of 'gliding about', and unproductive self-torture. In failing to get a good grip on 'the game of life,' Thomas Carlyle judged himself at risk of failing to be sufficiently manly" (26). Mike's identity begins to emerge at the end of the book as he sees his life stretch forward in the fulfilling work sphere of sports. Mike's ability to embrace a version of his identity in which cricket becomes his career suggests that despite his failures in the bank and on the political field, he has attained a sense of masculine identity after all. Wodehouse brings the characters through many interesting circumstances testing their ability to cope with the changes in life in order to establish their true identity, not through a socialized masculinity, but through their own volitional interpretation of that masculinity.

Chapter 4: *Psmith, Journalist*: Journalism as Sport and Psmith's Developing Identity

In the "Preface" to *Psmith, Journalist*, Wodehouse does something that he has not done in any of the previous books – he states that some of the following stories will be based on true events. This is the only book in the series which takes place in New York City, so perhaps this explanation is for his British audience who may have found the incidents to be quite unbelievable when viewed in light of their more austere, traditionally calm society. Whatever the reason for the explanation, Wodehouse seems to have a more obvious political agenda for this book. This slightly new focus, though, corresponds to the new setting without changing the underlying current of the series, which is sports. The object regarded as sport in this book is the business of journalism. Underneath the entire story still runs the current of cricket, for it is this foundational sport which brings Mike and Psmith to New York City, and Psmith will live by his maxim that "one crowded hour of glorious life is worth an age without a name, and he would have no name as long as he clung to his present position" (38).

This book in the Psmith series contains more serious, or as serious as Wodehouse can be, plot developments. The subject matter is initially relatively light as Psmith takes over a New York newspaper on his own, though it centers finally on the deplorable living conditions of the lower class in New York City. The shift in focus from Mike and British cricket lawns seems somewhat abrupt, but Wodehouse has a plan to carry through the identity of each of his characters in this new setting. As established in the previous chapter, Mike finds his identity in the sport of cricket, where he believes that he belongs and can be used, and Psmith, it seems, has already established his identity in the ability to carry confidence into any situation. However, Wodehouse has a different identity-building path for Psmith, and that path is through a new place, a new job, and the advent of actual life-threatening events which cause Psmith more fully

to develop as a character. As I have discussed in previous chapters, the lack of trials which the young men of the Edwardian privileged classes faced forced them to build character and identity in different spheres. Enter New York City, a new profession, and set of people who do not understand class distinctions in the same fashion which Psmith does. His character will be tested, and Wodehouse will continue to show that the young men of this era needed an outlet for their masculinity or another way in which to test their ideas about masculinity. What defined masculinity, and secondarily, how young men might achieve the masculine ideal without some sort of trial or lesson, is the question which Wodehouse subtly addresses and allows Psmith to navigate throughout this volume.

As Wodehouse develops the masculine identity of Psmith, he places the character in New York City, a new place which causes Psmith's masculine identity to develop not only outside of his comfortable social realm, but outside of his comfortable cultural realm. The sphere in which Psmith will now play out the social customs and structures of Edwardian life is the "sport" of journalism. Wodehouse declares that "[i]n New York one may find every class of paper which the imagination can conceive. Every grade of society is catered for. . . . Everybody reads in New York, and reads all the time. The New Yorker peruses his favourite paper while he is being jammed into a crowded compartment on the subway or leaping like an antelope into a moving street car" (11). In a place where individualism is stressed and expressed as the means of making a way for one's self, Wodehouse presents an interesting contrast in the first few lines of this third book. Psmith is about to join the race of people who are known for their individualism, yet the previous statement augments the idea that they are all simultaneously one in the sphere of reading. As Psmith enters this new realm as an already independent, identity-aware man, his ideas of identity, especially his idea of masculine identity, may be forced to change.

Wodehouse introduces another character into this realm of masculine identity who creates a foil for Psmith -- Billy Windsor. Windsor faces similar difficulties as Psmith in New York City in determining his masculine identity. Coming from the back woods of Kentucky where he had to rely on his quick thinking and survival skills, in New York, he feels reduced to one of many common men who simply go about their daily tasks to receive a salary sufficient to live on, but not a living in which they are able to express who they truly are. Trying to determine his worth as a man and as an editor places Windsor in difficulty, for "[h]e despised the work with all his heart, and the salary was infinitesimal. But it was regular, and for a while Billy felt that a regular salary was the greatest thing on earth. But he still dreamed of winning through to a post on one of the big New York dailies, where there was something doing and a man would have a chance of showing what was in him" (17). Windsor's idea of masculinity is based on his ability not just to have the means to eke out an existence, but to thrive, to live better than the previous generation. Self-betterment can only be achieved, though, when one is being himself and able to express opinions and desires freely. Michael Roper addresses the opinion that masculinity is subjective and individual in his work "Between Manliness and Masculinity: the 'War Generation' and the Psychology of Fear in Britain, 1914-1950," stating that the focus of his own studies "is not primarily on masculinity as a matter of cultural representations, but on self-perceptions and emotional sensibilities, that is, on subjectivity" (345-6). Anticipating this line of scholarly inquiry, Wodehouse develops his characters' masculine identities not through common cultural forms but through their desire for personal identity.

The highly personal nature of identity can also be seen through the names given to the characters. Windsor, an aristocratic name directly linked to royalty (the House of Windsor) ironically belongs to the man who hails from the tough backwoods of Kentucky. Psmith,

however, who lives a life of ease built on the fortunes of his father, possesses a common name to which he added a silent "p" and therefore lives under a false identity. Yet this false identity is the one to which he strives to cling as a presentation of his masculine identity.

With this focus on the importance of names as markers of individualism, Wodehouse then places those characters in an unfamiliar setting to each and develops his characters' identities in and against their physical surroundings. Thus he begins with Psmith's somewhat naïve view of New York, expressed in his wish to see each part: "'It is my aim to see New York in all its phases. If a certain amount of harmless revelry can be whacked out of Fourth Avenue, we must dash there with the vim of highly-trained smell-dogs'" (29). The possibility of danger is not foremost in Psmith's mind, but Wodehouse seems more aware of the ambiguities of New York. He seems to possess both a censuring and commending view of New York, both in its actions and appearances. A short description illustrates this: "The Astor Hotel faces on to Times Square. A few paces to the right of the main entrance the Times Building towers to the sky; and at the foot of this the stream of traffic breaks, forming two channels. To the right of the building is Seventh Avenue, quiet, dark, and dull. To the left is Broadway, the Great White Way, the longest, straightest, brightest, wickedest street in the world" (81). This description provides an interesting commentary on Edwardian America[6]. The fanciest hotel in the city lies alongside a "dark" and "dull" avenue. Similarly, the lights of Broadway, the seeming glamour, the possibilities of stardom lived on the same street of crushed hopes, deceitful business dealings, and seedy musicals. Wodehouse would have been well informed on his subject, for much of his

6. The British Edwardian Age closely paralleled the American Gilded Age. I have here termed what would be the end of the Gilded Age as Edwardian America to establish the similar time frame. The era parallels and the title the "Gilded Age" is, I believe, significant in this discussion. During this time, new inventions and improvements in life look beautiful and prosperous; however, the brilliance merely covered (gilded) the poverty and prevalent political, economic, and social frustrations during that time. This gilding is what Psmith comes to recognize while in New York City and also tries to eradicate by creating authentic change. However, his inner struggle to conform to an accepted masculine identity is covered (gilded) in his fancy false name and his impeccable clothes. For this short portion, I also reference Joel Shrock's book *The Gilded Age* for a more in-depth history of that American era.

work in America revolved around Broadway and writing lyrics for the likes of Kern, Gershwin, and Porter. Jeffrey Eric Jenkins provides some historical context for this era in his review of Broadway:

> As the nascent century evolved, it was not long before 'Broadway' became shorthand for the locus of cultural production as other theater artists employed it more frequently in production titles and as subject matter. Since 1900, at least 80 Broadway productions have included the term in their titles—a relatively small percentage, to be sure—but beyond the title the "idea" recurs frequently as theater artists reflexively celebrate the sporting world, the theatrical lifestyle, and the lives of artists. (191)

This Broadway "ideal" is the New York which Psmith encounters, and in its vernal state in his mind, he seeks to find his true masculine identity by embracing each aspect and becoming a part of the never ending movement.

Despite Psmith's ideal perceptions of New York and plans to become a powerful and popular member of that society, he is soon faced with the disillusionment of reality. In describing how he feels about New York to Mike, Psmith shows a lack of appreciation for a town which does not meet his standards:

> 'We find a town very like London. A quiet, self-respecting town, admirable to the apostle of social reform, but disappointing to one who, like myself, arrives with a brush and a little bucket of red paint, all eager for a treat. I have been here a week, and I have not seen a single citizen clubbed by a policeman. No negroes dance cake-walks in the street. No cow-boy has let off his revolver at random in

> Broadway. The cables flash the message across the ocean, 'Psmith is losing his illusion.' (22)

With Psmith's realization of the vast difference between London culture and New York culture, Psmith must once again restructure his view of his identity based on this new reality. At first, Psmith decides that New York is really no different from London; however, Psmith's discovery shows that they are really quite different, for in New York, away from the social mores of Edwardian England, he is not experiencing the same growth and knowledge of who he is personally as he has in London. As Psmith learns that the fables about America are not true and reality begins to loom, the disappointment which this reality creates must be dissipated by some action. Enter the world of journalism – the "sport" which will help Psmith regain his masculine identity, and in order to find that identity, he slips from the Psmith of the gentry class to the typical working-man Smith.

Meanwhile, in the time shortly before Psmith begins his journalistic career, Mike is still playing cricket and depending on that sport for his identity, for that is how he is identified in America: "Mike had come to America with a team of the MCC[7] which was touring the cricket-playing section of the United States" (22). Psmith, on the other hand, does not derive the same sort of pleasure or identity stability from playing cricket, so in a reversal of previous patterns, "Psmith had accompanied him in a private capacity. . . . Psmith, who had played cricket in a rather desultory way at the University, had not risen to these heights. He had merely taken the opportunity of Mike's visit to the other side to accompany him. Cambridge had proved pleasant to Psmith, but a trifle quiet. He had welcomed the chance of getting a change of scene" (22). Psmith is not concerned at this moment with building a reputation for himself or creating an

[7]. Marelybone Cricket Club: popular and famous London cricket club which was once also the governing body of global cricket.

identity, for he is content to learn from the new place, but not to separate himself or to establish a new meaning as to why he lives the way he does. Despite Psmith's desire to be his own man, then, he initially attempts to depend on Mike to produce in him a feeling of independence and identity—an attempt which fails quickly, mostly because Mike is too busy. Wodehouse allows us a glimpse into Psmith's processing of this situation:

> The cricket so far had been of the picnic order, but it was very pleasant; and there was no limit to the hospitality with which the visitors were treated. It was this more than anything which had caused Psmith's grave disapproval of things American. He was not a member of the team, so that the advantages of the hospitality did not reach him. He had all the disadvantages. He saw far too little of Mike. When he wished to consult his confidential secretary and advisor on some aspect of Life, that invaluable official was generally absent at dinner with the rest of the team. To-night was one of the rare occasions when Mike could get away. Psmith was becoming bored. New York is a better city than London to be alone in, but it is never pleasant to be alone in any big city. (23)

Despite Psmith's independent identity, then, he still depends on Mike and the other characters to help him navigate the different avenues of his identity. Placed in America—which represents the reverse of England and everything comfortable he has known--Psmith must learn to define his masculinity in a different way as well.

In order to help develop this new masculine identity, Psmith develops a new attitude toward the work he is about to begin in journalism: "'Commerce, many considered, was the line I should take; and doubtless, had I stuck to that walk in life, I should have become a financial magnate. But something seemed to whisper to me, even in the midst of my triumphs in the New

Asiatic Bank, that there were other fields. For the moment it seems to me that I have found the job for which nature specially designed me. At last I have Scope'" (41). This idea of coming upon the job he was meant for seems to be augmented by the idea that he has also found a job in which he can show that he has power. Douglas Schrock and Michael Schwalbe establish this idea of a masculine tendency to show domination in the workforce through their study of male relations: "Learning to signify a masculine self entails learning how to adjust to audiences and situations and learning how one's other identities bear on the acceptability of a performance" (282). Psmith, therefore, is learning how his identity develops when compared with others and placed in work environments where there is some competition to prove superiority.

While money or class was often a great identifier of masculinity in England because it allowed a man to be a part of clubs and politics, in America, there is a different definition of masculinity and one that typically deals with the man's more natural proclivities such as fighting and understanding the darker nature of men. Given that, Psmith's reliance on Mike proves problematic, for while Mike seems to have the masculinity which places him closer to nature, he does not possess this American ideal of masculinity. Therefore, Wodehouse uses Mike not to model masculinity for Psmith, but to provide him with a realistic and stable voice as he navigates and tries to balance the American ideal masculinity with the English Edwardian ideal of masculinity. When Mike learns of Psmith's desire to go into journalism, for example, Wodehouse states, "Mike roared with laughter. 'It's the rummiest business I ever struck,' he said. 'I'm jolly glad it's not my paper. It's pretty lucky for you two lunatics that the propietor's in Europe.' Psmith regarded him with pained surprise" (42). Mike tries to explain the madness of the two "proprietors" plan to fire all of the current writers and begin a new style of newspaper, but Psmith does not see the illogicality of the situation, thinking instead that this new paper is

simply a new adventure for him to pursue, especially once Mike goes away with the cricket team to travel. For Psmith, reality is something that he has the ability to change and make whatever he desires. He purposefully chooses how he will view people and their actions, and typically he changes those actions to something good. While some—such as Mike—may call this approach naïve, it allows Psmith to carry on with seeming ease and contentment no matter what situation he may be facing.

Despite the seeming ease which Psmith brings to each new situation, he is unable to completely avoid conflict. Just as his associations with Mike and Windsor involve Psmith in their quarrels, so also does his entry into the "sport" of journalism—even though he does so to right social wrongs—create a high level of conflict in his professional life. The first order of business that Psmith sets himself to as a proprietor is the restructuring of the team, which involves firing much of the staff all in the name of producing better journalism. Psmith, however, is not deterred by the lack of respect or the frustration which is voiced about the way he handles the paper:

> As Psmith entered, every eye was turned upon him. To an outside spectator he would have seemed rather like a very well-dressed Daniel introduced into a den of singularly irritable lions. Five pairs of eyes were smouldering with a long-nursed resentment. Five brows were corrugated with wrathful lines. Such, however, was the simple majesty of Psmith's demeanour that for a moment there was dead silence. Not a word was spoken as he paced, wrapped in thought, to the editorial chair. Stillness brooded over the room as he carefully dusted that piece of furniture, and, having done so to his satisfaction, hitched up the knees of his trousers and sank gracefully into a sitting position. (50)

Psmith commands himself with the ease of a monarch or a magistrate as he shows full mastery of the situation by his purposeful movements and silent entrance. As he dusts off the chair, it seems that he does this action for longer than usual – dusting off the old regime while simultaneously giving himself time to consider the best course of action.

Through this "sport" of journalism, Psmith becomes the coach as he strives to give Windsor the necessary encouragement:

> 'You yearn for scope. What exactly are your ambitions?'
>
> 'I want to get a job on one of the big dailies. I don't see how I'm going to fix it, though, at the present rate.'
>
> Psmith rose, and tapped him earnestly on the chest. 'Comrade Windsor, you have touched the spot. You are wasting the golden hours of your youth. You must move. You must hustle. You must make Windsor of *Cosy Moments* a name to conjure with. You must boost this sheet up till New York rings with your exploits. On the present line that is impossible. You must strike out a line for yourself. You must show the world that even *Cosy Moments* cannot keep a good man down.' (37)

Psmith helps Windsor make a plan for achieving his own ambitions, and in doing so, he firms up his own social role as coach, mentor, and patron.

The title of the paper which Psmith takes over lends much significance to his actions and locates them firmly within the domestic realm and the gendered roles that come with it. *Cosy Moments*, a synecdoche for home life, causes the "sport" of journalism to be equated with the "sport" of home life, and from Psmith and Windsor's perspective, that home life must ironically have as its leading story boxing. The idea of a social life at home for men was complicated by

rigid gender qualifications and societal rules. Tosh states, "In one sense the cult of the home was strikingly at odds with the directions which industrial society was taking in the nineteenth century. Hobsbawm has called the middle-class family 'the most mysterious institution of the age.' Bourgeois society, he says, resisted freedom, opportunity, the cash nexus and the pursuit of individual profit; yet the family, as a collective unit based on reciprocity and strictly ascribed roles denied all of these principles" (6). The man at home in his "cosy moments" becomes trapped, and his desire for more often resulted in violence as represented through the boxing parallel. Psmith's journalism defuses the conflicts on the home front by providing an outlet that is itself a site of conflict—the boxing ring—and in so doing firms up his own masculine role as peacemaker among warring men.

This column on boxing also allows Psmith to champion the causes of the oppressed and pursue his role as a peacemaker in a larger sense – both the man at home and the masses he publicly sees struggling. Like Psmith, Windsor also believes in championing the causes of the oppressed, as a conversation with Psmith about a struggling but talented young boxer reveals:

> 'He's in the championship class, and here he has been pottering about New York for a month without being able to get a fight. It's always the way in this rotten East,' continued Billy, warming up as was his custom when discussing a case of oppression and injustice. 'It's all graft here. You've got to let half a dozen brutes dip into every dollar you earn, or you don't get a chance. If the kid had a manager, he'd get all the fights he wanted. And the manager would get nearly all the money. I've told him that we will back him up.'
>
> 'You have hit it, Comrade Windsor.' said Psmith with enthusiasm. '*Cosy Moments* shall be Comrade Brady's manager. We will give him a much-needed

> boost up in our columns. A sporting section is what the paper requires more than anything.' (57-58)

Psmith focuses on the raw aspects of journalism in order to draw in the numbers of readers who are quick to become passionate about a subject. By giving the boxer's unadulterated words, Psmith represents a man closer to the sphere of the readers and one with whom they can more easily connect. Wodehouse expresses the boxer's sentiments through the unedited publication of his comments when he states, "Psmith extended the hospitality of page four of *Cosy Moments* to Kid Brady, and the latter leaped at the chance. He was grateful to Psmith for not editing his contributions. Other pugilists, contributing to other papers, groaned under the supervision of a member of the staff who cut their bet passages and altered the rest into Addisonian English. The readers of *Cosy Moments* got Kid Brady raw" (64). It is this raw representation which Psmith wishes to stress as the most important for producing quality journalism, for he wants to gather the sympathy of the readers through the truthfulness of the stories.

Through the newspaper's controversial boxing column and personal editorial columns, Wodehouse continues to establish Psmith's search for a true masculine identity, and Wodehouse must give Psmith some sort of trial that will test his traditional masculine formation. Therefore, Wodehouse begins in the twelfth chapter to establish an intriguing, sinister sort of plot with Psmith and Windsor being accosted by a man on Broadway who tries to make them follow him by falsely flattering Windsor about his father and his past. Through this exchange between the characters, Wodehouse also introduces a difference between America and England. Where in England, Psmith and Mike did not become involved in the "darker" side of London life, in America the divide does not seem to be as extreme, and Psmith is unable to get away from the unpredictability of New York. Wodehouse goes on to state that:

> The events of the evening had been a revelation to Psmith. He had not realised before the extent of the ramifications of New York's underworld. That members of the gangs should crop up in the Astor roof-garden and in gorgeous raiment in the middle of Broadway was a surprise. When Billy Windsor had mentioned the gangs, he had formed a mental picture of low-browed hooligans, keeping carefully to their own quarter of the town. This picture had been correct, as far as it went, but it had not gone far enough. The bulk of the gangs of New York are of the hooligan class, and are rarely met with outside their natural boundaries. But each gang has its more prosperous members, gentlemen, who, like the man of the Astor roof-garden, support life by more delicate and genteel methods than the rest. The main body rely for their incomes, except at election-time, on such primitive feats as robbing intoxicated pedestrians. The aristocracy of the gangs soar higher. (86)

This revelation about the gangs for Psmith is also an indictment of his ability to accurately judge someone. In London, he depends on his ability to judge people and know their personalities in order to discover their weaknesses and thereby be able to, in a sense, control them. When Psmith is able to control the different characters, he is also able to better know his own masculine identity and find his sense of purpose. Yet the rigid social categories of London do not transfer to New York, and therefore, without this ability to discern the proper personalities of the underworld of New York, Psmith begins to sense a lack of his own masculine identity.

The difficult and dangerous circumstances surrounding Psmith's journalistic career allow Psmith to build his masculine identity, for when describing himself in a conversation with Windsor, he declares himself to be "'Another of these strong silent men. The world is full of us.

These are the perils of the journalistic life'" (75). Yet Psmith's assessment of himself and others as "strong silent types" carries a risk; reality may not match up to Psmith's desires. Throughout this dialogue, which concerns a potentially dangerous character they have met, Psmith does not see the danger imposed by this man described. He instead directs the discomfort caused by the stranger's appearance to the state of his clothes. Relying solely on the personal appearance of the man to show his character or lack thereof rather than a fuller assessment, Psmith's attempts to shape reality to his own ideas and practices fails. Ironically, Psmith does not even read the cues he gets: although Psmith equates his own always immaculate dress, an item which Wodehouse never fails to mention, with his own goodness, he does not equate sloppy dress with corruption. With his desire to always see the good of the other man, Psmith misses many cues as to their more negligent behavior and actions. After talking to a stranger at a restaurant and believing that he was a friendly, helpful man, Psmith realizes that the man has stolen his watch:

> 'Guess I'll be pushing along. I've a date to keep. Glad to have met you. Glad to have met you, Mr. Smith. Pardon me, you have an insect on your coat.' He flicked at Psmith's coat with a quick movement. Psmith thanked him gravely.
>
> 'Good night,' concluded the stranger, moving off. . . . The stranger came up to their table, wearing a light overcoat over his dress clothes. From the pocket of this he produced a gold watch. 'Force of habit,' he said apologetically, handing it to Psmith. 'You'll pardon me. Good night, gentlemen, again.' (80)

It seems, then, that despite Psmith's desire to see the good in each person he meets, his quick feelings of kindness and acceptance are not always warranted by the reality in which he lives.

Psmith's identity comes to fuller fruition when he has the ability to be in the middle of interesting circumstances, typically facilitating peace. In this sort of scenario, Psmith's easy

sympathy and ability to see the good in others despite appearances helps him to understand reality better, and to establish some sense of personal control. Upon seeing an interesting incident in a restaurant, for instance, Psmith wants to be able to facilitate peace and cannot sit by and watch the event without being in the middle of it: "'Comrade Jackson,' said Psmith, rising, 'we must be in this'" (24). The question arises as to why Psmith feels it is necessary for him to be so involved in problems which are not his. A possible answer is that this desire in Psmith is Wodehouse's way of introducing the idea of peaceful relations instead of war. It is well known that Wodehouse did not carry specific political ties; therefore, Psmith's desire to be friends with people from all levels of society may indicate that his politics are far from being self-centered, but rather revolve around simply seeking to see the best in each person. For when he sees the good part of each person, then he is able to determine his own identity in relation to them, just as he does with Mike when he is present. Through the ability to involve himself in "benefactorial" duties, Psmith gives his life an identity and a purpose.

This desire to have another person or event which assists in the development of his identity continues throughout the story. About Billy Windsor Psmith declares, "'I am not half sure . . . that Comrade Windsor may not prove to be the genial spirit for whom I have been searching. . . . [I]t is imperative that I have some solid man to accompany me in my ramblings hither and thither'" (26-27). With Mike away, Psmith then takes control, in a way, of Windsor's life, and in much the same way that he once spoke for Mike, he now speaks for Windsor:

> 'Comrade Windsor, a man of alert and restless temperament, felt that change was essential if *Cosy Moments* was to lead public thought. Comrade Wilberfloss's methods were good in their way. I have no quarrel with Comrade Wilberfloss. But he did not lead public thought. He catered exclusively for children with water on

> the brain, and men and women with solid ivory skulls. Comrade Windsor, with a broader view, feels that there are other and larger publics. He refuses to content himself with ladling out a weekly dole of mental predigested breakfast food.' (67)

Psmith continually rattles on in this manner, speaking for those who have the ability to speak for themselves but nonetheless allow Psmith to express their "thoughts" for them. In this sense, Psmith's identity becomes fluid as he is able to transfer his opinions from one person to the next and establish their opinions for them. He also becomes adept at speaking for many different characters and explaining for them exactly what needs to be said. Psmith's ability to talk himself out of most situations contrasts with the way that the majority of his friends attempt to handle their situations for "There proceeded from Billy a noise not describable in words. It was partly a snort, partly a growl. It resembled more than anything else the preliminary snigging snarl a bull-dog emits before he joins battle. Billy's cow-boy blood was up. He was rapidly approaching the state of mind in which the men of the plains, finding speech unequal to the expression of their thoughts, reach for their guns" (68). Psmith and his friends complement one another, Psmith providing calculated actions, thoughts, and words and his friends the more natural, masculine reactions to events. He is farther removed from nature in both its peaceful and its dangerous manifestations; he has little sense of fear or knowledge of the fight or flight which his comrades seem to grasp thoroughly. At the same time, Psmith's lack of communion with nature reflects his lack of more brutal desires. While Mike and Windsor, both men close to nature, allow their natural instincts to guide them unapologetically into fighting situations, Psmith seems not to take the bait, and is able, through communication, to find his identity as a peacemaker time and time again.

Through the sport of journalism, which leads Psmith to the brutal sport of boxing, Wodehouse is able to once again give his characters an outlet apart from war, yet resembling the elements of war that assist in the creation of masculine identity. Psmith's boxing journalism, in fact, opens up larger venues in which he can instigate the conflict for which he will serve as a peacemaker, representing the interests of the under classes while also finding his own identity. This time, instead of a real battlefield or a boxing ring, there is a more metaphorical battle being fought over class relationships in New York City: Psmith's horror at the living conditions of the poorer classes in New York parallels what should have been the horror he feels for the living conditions of the poorer classes in England at this time. However, he never seems to refer to or even notice the terrible circumstances of living conditions in his home country. He is simply content with his life there, and this contentment leads to a complacency and blindness about the desperate circumstances at home. Through Psmith's apathy towards his own country, Wodehouse creates an interesting commentary on not just British society, but the blindness of most first-world societies, which tend to be unaware of what is happening in their own societies, even though they can see horrors elsewhere. Psmith cannot fight the wars at home simply because he does not see them, and he is consequently left to find his masculine selfhood abroad.

Psmith's newspaper then becomes a means of propaganda in moving the socialist ideas of bettering each man for a common good. These socialist political ideas have run throughout the series with at first their being just a means to look important in a school setting, then as a means of learning more about who both Mike and Psmith are as young men, to Psmith's current enactment of those Socialist proclivities. A newspaper for the People is what Psmith wishes to produce:

> [M]y idea is that *Cosy Moments* should become red-hot stuff. I could wish its tone to be such that the public will wonder why we do not print it on asbestos. We must chronicle all the live events of the day, murders, fires, and the like in a manner which will make our readers' spines thrill. Above all, we must be the guardians of the People's rights. We must be a search-light, showing up the dark spot in the souls of those who would endeavour in any way to do the PEOPLE in the eye. We must detect the wrong-doer, and deliver him such series of resentful biffs that he will abandon his little games and become a model citizen. (39)

Bettering the living conditions of the tenements is actually a noble top-priority task for Psmith as he tells Mike, "'I propose, Comrade Jackson,' said Psmith, 'if Comrade Windsor is agreeable, to make things as warm for the owner of this place as I jolly well know how. . . . We must endeavour to do what we can by means of kindly criticism in the paper'" (45). The reality of the difficulties involved with freeing those in danger in the tenement houses proves to be more than Psmith had at first supposed they would be. As Windsor explains to him:

> 'Then there's another thing. You can't get hold of the man who's really responsible, unless you're prepared to spend thousands ferreting out evidence. The land belongs in the first place to some corporation or other. They lease it to a lessee. When there's a fuss, they say they aren't responsible, it's up to the lessee. And he lies so low that you can't find out who he is. It's all just like the East. Everything in the East is as crooked as Pearl Street. If you want a square deal, you've got to come out Wyoming way.' (60)

With idealistic political views and desires, Psmith declares, "'*Cosy Moments* cannot be muzzled, in particular. I like it. It strikes the right note. It should stir the blood of a free and independent

people till they sit in platoons on the doorstep of our office waiting for the next number to appear'" (42). With this new embarkation of political ideals and identity searching, Wodehouse allows Psmith to discover that his masculine identity has yet to be formed through more difficult circumstances. However, Psmith does not search for a means to fight or a means to war; rather, he continues to desire that situations be dealt with in a peaceful manner.

Psmith meets with interesting characters and supporters as he moves from the realm of boxing to full-blown social commentary on the tenement housing situation in New York City. Working men and wealthy men gather to see the fights, and Psmith learns to navigate a very different culture from what he is used to. Wodehouse gives a humorous description of how the boxing world operated at this time in New York: "[A] wave of anti-pugilistic feeling swept over the New York authorities. Promoters of boxing contests found themselves, to their acute disgust, raided by the police. The industry began to languish. . . . And then some big-brained person suggested the club idea, which stands alone as an example of American dry humour. . . . All that happens now is exhibition sparring bouts between members of the club" (92-93). Despite the titles of these clubs, which Wodehouse declares shows the humor of Americans, the events witnessed there are completely different from in the gentlemen's clubs which Psmith is accustomed to frequenting in London. Inside the "athletic club," "The interior of the Highfield Athletic and Gymnastic Club was severely free from anything in the shape of luxury and ornament" (95). In this new unornamented realm, unadorned with the objects and markers of class status to which Psmith has been accustomed and which he uses to interpret the world around him, Psmith begins to realize the depth of difficulty and danger in which he has placed himself in trying to bring justice for the tenement dwellers. He has finally found himself in a sphere which he does not understand and which does not cater to his needs at any point.

Through seeking peace and equality in Socialist ideals, Psmith actually finds himself in greater danger and unrest. In chapter 16, entitled "The First Battle," Psmith, Windsor, and their boxing friend the Kid are accosted by members of a gang after the Kid wins his first significant fight. It is at this point that the world of gangs and boxing become obvious substitutes for the real war in which Psmith will never have to be involved yet which serves as a part of the necessary growth into masculine identity. After the scuffle ends and the gang dissipates, "Psmith rose to his feet and dusted his clothes ruefully. For the first time he realised the horrors of war. His hat had gone for ever. His trousers could never be the same again after their close acquaintance with the pavement" (113). Psmith's concern is not for his life, but for the seeming inconsequential and replaceable items such as his hat and his trousers—items that for him represent the privilege of his class status. While Psmith's concern with the accoutrements of his class-bound identity is understandable, it is also, Wodehouse shows, misplaced. Psmith's focus on his clothing rather than the conflict at hand shows Wodehouse's recognition of the frivolity and unpreparedness of the Edwardian generation to face the horror of war. While no generation is necessarily prepared for the grim reality that war brings, the lack of practical knowledge and action results for these characters in that struggle to achieve masculine identity. Characters such as Psmith, who have not had the privilege of learning through difficult circumstances, are especially unable to see effects past their own personal harm and safety, and their masculine identities are thus especially vulnerable. Despite Psmith's unpreparedness for war at home, he would soon begin to build his masculine identity through the hardships of journalistic war for when the perpetrating gang member is released, "So was victor turned into defeat, and Billy's jaw became squarer and his eye more full of the light of battle than ever. And there was need of a square jaw and a battle-lit

eye, for now began a period of guerilla warfare such as no New York paper had ever had to fight against" (119).

The ensuing battle does not just involve Psmith's work with the newspaper but the liberation of those living in the tenements—a people that he does not even know, yet he feels a pride in this deed. This idea of liberation of another people produces the interesting aspect of the nobility of war, and Psmith rises to this occasion. By heckling the tenement owner through the commandeered paper until the end of the book, Psmith proves that beneath his genial and seemingly ignorant façade, he actually has a very calculated plan. Waring, the tenement owner, agrees to the five thousand dollars that Psmith requests for the improvement of the tenements. As Waring writes the check, Wodehouse asserts that "Mr. Waring hesitated for a moment, then capitulated. Psmith watched, as he wrote, with an indulgent and fatherly eye" (217). While Psmith has found an area where he can champion the cause of others, he is not truly at peace until returned to the leisure of his home country – the calm after the storm – in the armistice of the war. With this noble deed on behalf of the poor, Psmith is able to truly establish his masculine identity as he defeats the owner of the tenements: something that no one else has been able to do. By rising to the different challenges presented before him, Psmith shows himself capable of living up to a masculine ideal, and occupying a masculine identity, and once he has done this, he can rest securely in his masculine and aristocratic—paternalistic—selfhood. Wodehouse ends the book with a telling line for Psmith's masculinity: "The *man* behind *Cosy Moments* slept" (221). Thus Psmith ends with the commendation of manhood, and the reader is left with the impression that the man's reward is a peaceful sleep.

After the school and the office, the masculine identity of Wodehouse's characters needed a different sphere in which to be tested, so a new country provided them with the ability to grow.

With the growth of the characters, especially Psmith, it is worth noting that Mike remains content with his cricket abilities and the identity that he has gathered from that sport. He falls asleep as Psmith recounts his stories back at Cambridge, and this indifference indicates a satisfaction with his own sphere in life. Lest the characters become complacent, however, Wodehouse follows them, especially Psmith, through one more sphere of proper Edwardian masculine identity in *Leave it to Psmith*.

Chapter Five: *Leave it to Psmith*: Masculine Identity Through Marriage

Following the successful school, work, and sports careers of Mike and Psmith, the fourth book in the series *Leave it to Psmith* begins to take a different focus on the more personal lives of Mike and Psmith outside of the traditionally comfortable sphere of sports. Wodehouse could have left the characters to the imaginations of the readers after the growth they experience during their last episodes, but there is still more for Psmith to learn through this last book. Mike is now married – showing a sort of culmination for the growth of his masculine identity in the Edwardian culture. Psmith, however, is beginning once again to redefine himself and discover his true identity. This book finds him without his previous fortune, dissatisfied with his current work situation, and striving to keep up his previous appearances. As a means to move Psmith towards his traditionally accepted masculine identity, Wodehouse presents a female character as a love interest into Psmith's life, which changes his identity once again and causes him to search out the meaning of masculinity in the realms of necessary work and feminine relations. Published almost ten years after the previous book, the Psmith series' finale occurs as World War I has concluded and the financial difficulties facing the British are beginning to mount. These difficulties are often hinted at, but they are never discussed directly, therefore, they give an urgency to the project of identity formation that Psmith undertakes. Just as the game of cricket, the work in the bank, and the work as a journalist all served to take the place of war and strengthen the characters Mike and Psmith toward a more solid formation of their identities, so does Psmith's new adventure as entrepreneur of his own personal service company firm up his masculine selfhood.

Psmith has removed himself from his true personal identity in multiple ways, as he wears the masks that jobs and education grant him; he simply does not know how to move on with life

outside of the influence and identity that money grants him. Due to the decline of stocks after World War I, the death of his father, and the lack of income that the parceled land or the stocks were bringing in for Psmith, he must truly find employment to support himself.[8] In the previous chapter we learned of Psmith's attempt to work and thereby also establish his own personal identity. However, he was living in a foreign country under a previously assumed name, so his identity is still tied to an imagination of himself. Though he seemed to be out of his comfortable sphere in New York City, Psmith was simply learning to be an aristocrat and occupy a role which he already possessed—patron to the underclasses. Now that Psmith is deprived of his money and consequently his social status, Wodehouse has placed him in a position where he must create a legitimate masculine identity of his own.

As both Mike and Psmith continue to try to find their way through the intricacies of self-identity, they find that their masculinity is tied not just to their ability to work, but to their ability to make a good living. Initially, though, Psmith seeks his identity in anything but his ability to provide for himself and a family. As we have seen, his codependent relationship with Mike is his first attempt at establishing a masculine selfhood. Though Mike does not expect any favors, Psmith seeks to find a way to help Mike while simultaneously helping himself. Psmith then shows his continual need for Mike in order to have a better sense of his own personal identity. Psmith also attempts to establish an identity by spelling his name in a unique fashion. Functioning with the idea that a better name will improve his circumstances, Psmith recounts his version of the origin of his name to the maid at Mike's house. He explains to the maid, "I should

8. Mike's wife Phyllis explains Psmith's situation when she is talking to her friend Eve about Mike's present economic worries. Mike had been the estate agent for Psmith's father, but "'We had hardly 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'" (47). Her explanation also helps to explain the frustrating circumstances which Psmith finds himself in. However, he is never shown grieving for his father, but instead, he is worried about Mike's financial state and his own financial state and how each can be improved.

explain to you that I started life without the initial letter, and my father always clung ruggedly to the plain Smith. But it seemed to me that there were so many Smiths in the world that a little variety might well be introduced" (39). He has not yet progressed past his desire for a new name. Searching for his identity, he still has not been able to settle himself in the world because his identity rests in something he is not—a Psmith with a "P"—and people that he is not, like Mike or later Windsor. Yet Psmith's boarding school self-definition and relationships with Mike and others are enabled by his social standing. Without his father and the money that he relied on before, he finally becomes capable of redefining himself and living a life that establishes him with his own masculine identity.

As the relationship with Mike grows more distant, the other layers of Psmith's false identity begin to peel away. Losing the constant connection to Mike initially forces Psmith to seek elsewhere to garner approbation and eventually identity. Mike's wife believes that he trusts everything about Psmith, for she tells Eve, "Mike worships him. . . . He's a perfect darling" (55). What she does not account for, however, is the fact that all the places that Mike has known Psmith he has been acting under his assumed name and keeping up an appearance that he believes must be maintained in order to forge his identity. After the difficulty of splitting up the land and losing his money, Psmith's uncle gives him a good job. However in order to establish his own personal identity, Psmith resigns from the position and decides to "strike out" on his own as he explains to Mike, "'I have no doubt that he supposed he was doing me a good turn by starting me in his fish business, but even what little experience I have had of it has convinced me that it is not my proper sphere'" (41). This move is not necessarily one which would have been advisable given his circumstances and relative lack of professional experience, but Psmith

believes that there is more for him outside of the fish business in which his uncle has provided a job for him. He goes on to say,

> 'I am not . . . an unreasonable man. I realize that humanity must be supplied with fish. I am not averse from a bit of fish myself. But to be professionally connected with a firm that handles the material in the raw is not my idea of a large life-work. Remind me to tell you some time what it feels like to sling yourself out of bed at four a. m. and go down to toil in Billingsgate Market. No, there is money in fish – my uncle has made a pot of it – but what I feel is that there must be other walks in life for a bright young man. I chuck it to-night.' (42)

He is now free from the name restrictions, family fortunes, and requirements placed on him by his father and his uncle; therefore, he has the ability to create for himself his own identity.

Psmith's desire to be free to pursue his own line of work and the search for masculine identity coincide, for he now feels independent and able to perform something heroic or worthy of note. While waiting for an imagined amazing fulfillment of the work advertisement he places in the newspaper, Psmith visits his London clubs where out of one of the windows he sees Phyllis's young friend Eve, who has been caught in the rain. He is seeking to do something heroic, something that identifies him within the masculine realm, and he sees one way he can do this is by assisting a "damsel in distress." He actually fulfills the typical traditional ideal of being a gentleman as is evidenced by his care of Eve, a young woman he has never met before: "Being, however, both ready-witted and chivalrous, he perceived that this was no time for idle speculation. His not to reason why'[9] his obvious duty was to take steps to assist Beauty in distress" (58). This desire to assist distressed beauty is an interesting development since in the

9. This obvious reference to Alfred, Lord Tennyson's "Charge of the Light Brigade" – "Theirs not to make reply, / Theirs not to reason why, / Theirs but to do and die: / Into the valley of Death / Rode the six hundred" – shows the

previous book, Psmith assisted in the rebuilding of a section of tenement houses, and he also wishes to be able to fix up the area that Mike lives in now. The wording of the statement seems to align Eve, a flesh and blood woman, with the rebuilding of distressed spaces that he has already conquered. Therefore, whether Psmith sees a house which needs aesthetic improvement, a friend who needs a better job, or a young woman in need of an umbrella, each of these becomes a way for him to develop his masculine identity through some sort of action. By seeing people and objects as possible beautiful things that can be improved, Psmith seeks some sort of glory for himself, the name of someone who has done a great deed, or changed the world in some way. In these ideas, Psmith was going against his Edwardian upbringing which largely left the poor to fend for themselves and continually blamed the greater state system for the deplorable conditions of the poor, and simultaneously did nothing for their relief.[10]

Without war to make a hero out of him, Psmith must find that drama and that ability to nobly succeed in some way—and holding an umbrella for Eve does not fully satisfy him for long. One way that he chooses is acting as the poet Ralston McTodd; the approval and the fame he seeks is delivered to him in the simple worship of Miss Peavey, who upon seeing him for the first time exclaims, "'Oh, Mr McTodd, you can hardly appreciate how I feel, meeting you. It is like the realization of some golden dream of childhood'" (119). There is power in this statement, for Psmith suddenly, though under false pretenses, feels that he has become the realization of a dream – the hero incarnate. Yet although this sense of satisfaction proves false, his reaction to it shows that he has made some progress. Psmith still seeks Mike's approval, though he also ignores Mike's judgmental attitude, instead seeing everything he is about to do as lucrative and

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connection that Wodehouse makes between masculinity and war. Therefore, Psmith's chivalry takes the place of the hero in war.

10. For this discussion I reference Ronald Pearsall's book *Edwardian Life and Leisure* calling special attention to the chapter titled, "Edwardian Life" where Pearsall clearly represents the distinct classes and why those distinctions prevailed.

unable to fail. Where does Psmith's capacity to imagine his own identity come from? And why has Psmith struggled as yet to find his true place—not an imaginary or false one—within society? Having the luxury of provision throughout his life, the idea of work to actually support himself, I believe, causes Psmith to panic, for he sees the comfortable, yet unfashionable way in which Mike and his wife live and he wants to be able to live in the same style that he has been accustomed to. Yet even if Psmith has not yet arrived at a solution to his problems of identity, his desire to distance himself from Mike's way of living suggests he is becoming more of an individual.

Psmith's besetting sin throughout the series is that he focuses on aesthetics rather than practicality, though in a sense, this provides him with a key to finding a legitimate self. When he is at school, he focuses on the comfortable appearance of the study and his clothes; when at work in the bank, he once again pays particular attention to the beauty of his dwelling and his clothes; when in New York City as a journalist, fastidious attention to his clothes once again sets him apart. Now back in England and trying to provide for himself, we find that he is still constantly concerned about his clothes, and the physical beauty of his surroundings is what either immediately attracts his attention or causes him to seek entertainment or employment elsewhere. When reflecting on the neighborhood that Mike and his wife Phyllis live in, Wodehouse presents a description so that the viewer can better sympathize with Psmith's viewpoint:

> The young man's judgment was one at which few people with an eye for beauty would have caviled. When the great revolution against London's ugliness really starts and yelling hordes of artists and architects, maddened beyond endurance, finally take the law into their own hands and rage through the city burning and

> destroying, Wallingford Stree, and West Kensington, will surely not escape the torch. (38-39)

He also displays the same focus on the aesthetic when remarking on his dress to Miss Clarkson of the employment agency: "'If one expects to find employment in these days of strenuous competition, one must be neatly and decently clad. Employers look askance at a baggy trouser – leg. A zippy waistcoat is more to them than an honest heart'" (71).

Fittingly, Psmith desires a job that will allow him to play a perpetual game of "dress up." He hatches a rather insane scheme to work for anyone, doing any job available, provided it has a glamorous and mysterious appeal, and he believes this scheme will provide for him in the way that he has always been provided for. Here, Wodehouse is perhaps making a comment on the state of Edwardian young men of the privileged class who were unaware of how the middle and lower classes existed. To those privileged young men, the idea of work appealed as a game, not as a means of supporting oneself. Now, however, after the war, the prospect of work is much more a reality and a necessity of which they cannot seem to rid themselves, so the struggle they face is finding work that accords with their habits and self-understanding. Psmith is among these young men who now must work to support themselves, his own father having lost money in market speculation and the estate having been sold. Psmith declares in his newspaper advertisement that he "Is Ready For Anything"; however, his inexperience with truly difficult work in which he is unable to act as himself has been limited. Despite his desire to branch out on his own, Psmith does not really seem to have a good grasp of what he should be doing, yet his schemes invariably take a unique and amusing shape. Some Edwardians, especially aristocrats, were known for their eccentricities in the realm of home life and work, so Psmith's desire to try something different simply is a fulfillment of this type. Ronald Pearsall in his history of the

Edwardian era represents the accepted idiosyncrasies of this era: "Licensed eccentrics were still at large in the great country houses of the aristocracy. When one of them slid with abandon down the whole length of the banisters, Sir George Sitwell reproved his son Osbert with the words, 'Don't laugh! These Great Men have their Little Idiosyncrasies'" (73). These idiosyncrasies, bought through wealth, provided an aristocratic excuse for not working. Psmith follows this pattern of thinking, for not wanting to have to work at a labor intensive job, Psmith "was essentially a young man who took life as it came, and the more inconsequently it came the better he liked it" (99). Therefore, the less work that was required of him, the better.

The job that Psmith begins—posing as a poet—does not actually allow him to use his own name; therefore, his identity still remains ambiguous, though he may be developing a stronger sense of his own character on the whole. Psmith's acting job allows him to find a place for his more artistic ideas; however, he still not only deceives the people he is staying with, but he also deceives himself by laying false hopes about the future. The deception also proves to be more difficult than he had previously anticipated. The thought of the difficulty of the job which he undertook does not fully impress him until he has already begun the more difficult transition into character impersonation and required work. Wodehouse still presents these difficulties in a humorous light, though, for while the prospect of working is exciting to Psmith, the reality of work does not register for him: "Psmith was beginning to lose the unruffled calm which made him such an impressive figure to the public eye. He had not taken into consideration the possibility that the object of his search might be deaf. It undoubtedly added to the embarrassment of the pursuit" (82). Again, despite the lapse in years between the publication of this work and World War I and the end of the sumptuous Edwardian era, Wodehouse quietly shows the continual disconnect of the privileged classes from the difficulty of work. Pearsall develops this

disconnect when he declares, “The poor, it was considered, were poor because they deserved to be, and were largely made up of idlers and scroungers who could get jobs if they were less work shy” (103). What is even more interesting about this statement is the fact that Psmith’s aversion to real or typical labor means that he inadvertently places himself within this work-shy group. Even though ill-conceived, Psmith’s attempts to once again navigate his place in the working world and to thereby establish his masculine identity, moves his project forward by giving him the connections and contexts within which he can forge a place for himself that allows him to make a meaningful impact.

While Psmith’s false identity as a poet presents confusion and does not allow him to fully present his true self, the desire to show a well-developed personal identity that prompts his disguise in the first place allows Psmith to move outside of his typically controlled comfort zone. Psmith finds that his failure to control his situation perfectly becomes an important part in his personal development as he is unable to fully impress all those that he desires to impress. Throughout the series, Psmith has an interesting way of approaching those with whom he makes friends, and Wodehouse describes Psmith’s choice in friends as peculiar: “Although his closest friend, Mike Jackson, was a young man of complete ordinariness, Psmith’s tastes when he sought companionship lay as a rule in the direction of the bizarre. He preferred his humanity eccentric” (78). Through the eccentricities of others, Psmith is able to gauge his own level of masculinity and eccentricity. This presentation of eccentricity can also be witnessed in the multiple clubs of which Psmith is a member. Being a member of these different clubs allows Psmith the ability to meet people of different classes and simultaneously attempt to discover his true personality, for “In the days of his prosperity, Psmith’s father, an enthusiastic clubman, had enrolled his son’s name on the list of several institutions: and now, although the lean years had

arrived, he was still a member of six. . . . These clubs ranged from the Drones, frankly frivolous, to the Senior Conservative, solidly worthy" (87). Therefore, Psmith has the luxury of being as ridiculous and free-spirited as he wishes or as subdued as his most conservative club mates. This environment also allows him to begin his process toward masculine identity by giving him a field of others from which to differentiate himself and by which to measure social developments: the "six thousand one hundred and eleven" members of the club "are bald, revered men, who look as if they are on their way to the City to preside at director's meetings or have dropped in after conferring with the Prime Minister at Downing Street as to the prospects at the coming by-election in the Little Wabsley Division" (88). Placing the vibrant Psmith in this austere atmosphere shows the changing fashions of England at this time. The frivolity of Edwardian England has ended because of the harsh reality that war and excessive taxation produced. However, Wodehouse keeps the changing situation humorous and focused on what is still going well in the society – the atmosphere of the social club where traditions continue. In order to truly establish Psmith's masculine identity, Wodehouse has to remove Psmith from his attachments to people like Mike and Windsor and place him in a larger social group like the clubs where he is forced to establish his own personal identity.

All of Psmith's attempts to find a masculine identity of his own come full circle in his final journey into complete selfhood: marriage. Uniting his series-long desires for close friendships, opportunities to engage in benevolent action, and eccentric companionships, marriage is for Psmith both a traditional and stabilizing relationship and a way of firming up his masculinity. Indeed, even early in the fourth book, well before Psmith enters the world of work or impersonates a poet, Wodehouse foreshadows that Psmith's masculine identity will be ultimately defined by his ability to become a husband and live a life of matrimonial bliss. Early

on, Psmith accosts the man whose umbrella he lends to Eve with a telling turn of phrase: "'Be brave, Comrade Walderwick! . . . Face this thing like a man'" (65). Though said in a joking manner, it is evident that masculinity is constantly at the forefront of Psmith's individual approach to life—and also to relationships with the opposite sex.

Also following previous patterns, Psmith finds in marriage a place to clearly exhibit control, and to be appreciated for his ability to control each situation in a calm manner. Eve—the beneficiary of the umbrella and Psmith's eventual wife—challenges Psmith to overcome his fear of not achieving the ideal masculine identity for she appreciates his different eccentricities as a way to meet challenges with flexibility. Whenever facing any sort of challenge or strange incident, Psmith thus decides that "[c]oncerning the future he declined to worry. It would, no doubt, contain its little difficulties, but he was prepared to meet them in the right spirit" (104). He also embraces the eccentricities of his life, which offers Eve something pleasurable and companionable outside of the duller ordinary marriage which she would most likely not have wanted or enjoyed. When accepting Psmith she declares, "'Cynthia advised me . . . if ever I married, to marry someone eccentric. She said it was such fun'" (279). Marriage for both Eve and Psmith is simply a continuation of the game of life that they are playing, another step on the road to maturity and self-identity. By removing the limits that come with stagnant traditionalism, and by admitting in its place eccentricities, they are free to continue the maturation process and experience the freedom within the traditional bonds of marriage, but in a way that is very much their own. Fittingly, then, Psmith's marriage to Eve produces many different feelings, among them the sense that he himself has truly assumed his masculine identity. When he tells Freddie of his upcoming marriage, he instructs him to "'Be a man, Comrade Threepwood, and bite the bullet. These things will happen to the best of us. Some day you will be thankful that this has

occurred. Purged in the holocaust of a mighty love, you will wander out into the sunset, a finer, broader man'" (293). Psmith has a habit of telling other young men to exhibit their masculinity through their actions, and by making this request, he is also showing his own inclination toward the traditional, chivalric, masculine ideal.

Psmith's acceptance of marriage is also an acceptance of the traditional sphere for the man. Initially, this seems almost like Pmsith's surrender to the ordinary—hardly the outcome he has sought throughout the series. To be fair, in marrying Psmith off, Wodehouse does locate him in a much more traditional role than he has yet occupied: in fact, he moves Psmith squarely into the masculine tradition that had always been presented to him as the ideal, a tradition impervious to redefinition. Yet when Psmith is with Eve, the idea of matrimony is appealing for he looks at her "with solemn admiration. 'Women are wonderful,' he said" (133). The power that Eve holds over Psmith is in her ability to attract him; however, Psmith seems to hold actual power over Eve and even though "Eve was a girl of high and haughty spirit, and as such strongly resented being appropriated and having her movements directed by one who, in spite of his specious claims, was almost a stranger. But somehow she found her companion's placid assumption of authority hard to resist" (116). Psmith has the ability to command attention and show power yet in a subtle, subversive manner. This manner, acquired over time and through different circumstances, allows him to have a strong personality which, while commanding, makes him more amiable to those around him. Eve's willingness to defer to Psmith's requests and eccentricities empowers him for he is able to exercise his masculine power over her. Thus, Psmith's acceptance of marriage is far from an attitude of surrender or acquiescence, for he selects Eve carefully and knows that her spirit will inspire him to greater things because she has a similar eccentric and adventure seeking personality. When Eve confronts Psmith as if he is the man that he is

impersonating, Wodehouse explains, “In supposing that Psmith was offended she was mistaken. Internally he was glowing with a renewed admiration for all those beautiful qualities in her which he had detected, before they had ever met, at several yards range across the street from the window of the Drones Club smoking-room” (145). Psmith’s ability to see the good qualities in almost every person strengthens his appreciation for them when he sees qualities which are genuinely admirable. Therefore, Eve presents a strength of character and wit which will match Psmith’s and give him a partner with whom he is an equal despite her willing acceptance of his leading. In this partnership, then, Psmith is able to find his masculine identity as defined through that Edwardian era as a husband and “master of the house.”

Psmith also seems to have an intriguing pull over Eve, as opposed to Freddie Threepwood who is also trying to win her over. The difference in their characters, however, is pronounced. Freddie has the desire to be independently wealthy and live a life of ease with Eve as his devoted wife, but his indolent upbringing and inability to act on his own renders him unappealing to Eve. Psmith also desires this life of ease and has experienced a frivolous childhood and youth; however, he has faced more difficult circumstances in life, including his escapades in New York and the loss of his father, which have served to not make him bitter against life, but to strengthen his character and show that he has the ability to discover his masculine identity. However, while still wishing to live independently wealthy, he is not above plots and schemes which might help him to achieve that freedom. He therefore has more personal drive and, unlike the Edwardians he is supposed to emulate, Psmith strives to create that independence instead of relying on the past. This attitude allows Psmith to be independent both within and without the home. After a serious crisis in which both Eve and Psmith could have been killed, Psmith remarks to Eve, “‘Your attitude was exactly right. . . . You afforded just the

moral support which a man needs in such a crisis'" (278). Both characters then fulfill their necessary roles and create for each other that sense of traditional security which they are looking for. By ultimately pursuing marriage, Psmith's masculine identity is traditionally established and his forward progress into personal identity ends.

"A finer, broader man" (293) indeed is what Psmith himself appears to be at the end of this series. He began with a self-assured air, but his journey to true self-confident manhood is long, and requires his involvement with the athlete Mike, bank work, socialist politics, journalism, and finally the solving of a mystery, before he is ready for marriage. Through all these various episodes, personas, and failed attempts at self-identity, Psmith has found himself by finding others: he has become more involved with those surrounding him, and he has also learned the power of persuasion—the power that ultimately earns him a wife. Psmith's journey is exemplary, if not typical, for a young man of his era: he is able to navigate the world after World War I because he has learned to adapt to different trades and to identify himself by different ideals outside of the sporting realm that all shared during their school days. John Arlott comments on the sport culture of England and simultaneously shows why Psmith eventually finds it necessary to reestablish his identity by different traditions: "It may be said that post-war realism reduced the sportsman-hero to his true stature as an ordinary human being, subject to, even deserving, criticism more irreverent than he had received from the Edwardians" (484). Unable to rely solely on sports for their identity and financial support, Mike and Psmith navigate post-war England establishing their masculine identity through stable work and marriage. By facing the difficulties of work and identity searching, Psmith in particular has battled his way through to masculine identity without the entity of actual war. While he feels the effects of the war, he is unencumbered by the actual necessity to fight and carries out his battle with identity

through daily activities. Wodehouse then shows that there is a necessity for some sort of crisis, something to fight against in order to have a stronger masculine identity. Through the crises which Psmith faces, he finds himself comfortably established in his masculine identity finally built on marriage and family life.

Conclusion: The Importance of Tradition and Social Custom to Identity

Through the traditional and eccentric lives of Mike and Psmith respectively, Wodehouse explores what masculinity should look like in Edwardian England. Despite the various opportunities for independence available to Mike and Psmith, their masculinity seems to be inevitably tied to the society and not to an independent identity that can be forged in isolation from others. Mike's masculine identity clearly ties to the larger society and its traditions, for he finds himself most content when playing the game of cricket where the social atmosphere is worked out on the cricket lawn. The eccentric Psmith, by contrast, seems at first to discover an independent masculine identity, but he still needs the structure of society from which to delineate his own masculine identity, and he finds this first through his relationships with Mike and Windsor, then through his affiliations with various clubs and professional identities, then finally through marriage.

The social world into which Mike and Psmith must learn to integrate, of course, comes with baggage: the damage done by a war to a generation of young men. Despite the relative peace of each character's life within the books, then, Wodehouse does establish what seems to be necessary conflict in their lives. Largely ignoring the World War taking place at the same time, Wodehouse shows that the characters still need to experience conflict in order to truly establish their masculine identity. Mike is able to do this through his heroics on the cricket field and without much anxiety or trouble completing the process. However, his journey to masculine identity is much easier than Psmith's because he is able to establish himself in the developing middle class. With Great Britain moving away from the times of landed gentry and aristocracy, Mike finds that his active character is used best in this now more traditional role of a middle class worker. Britain is moving forward and Mike is willing to change and move with it, making

his development into his own masculine identity easier; whereas, Psmith longs for the days of the landed gentry as he tries to establish his new masculine identity in the middle class sphere where Mike is thriving.

After much floundering, Psmith is able to establish his identity through finding a battle of his own to fight: offering his assistance to the world of struggling others that he considers below himself. Psmith's journey to his own established masculinity seems to be much longer and strenuous than Mike's, though Psmith often gives the impression that he is in control. Psmith needs other people and the social customs in order to truly establish his masculine identity because his measurement of himself always comes in comparison to the rest of society, whether that is socially, at school, work, or politically. Without ever wanting to be the underdog, Psmith strives to achieve something for the underdog -- that something which will simultaneously benefit himself with a better position in society or more peace of mind. No matter what the situation, Wodehouse establishes the importance of the social structure and traditions in order to produce the masculine identity sought in each character. Psmith's journey to masculine identity is harder than Mike's because Psmith's social type has evaporated. He must truly find a new place in the working sphere and thereby forge his masculine identity, and he does this without assistance from others; whereas, Mike had the assistance of Psmith to help him realize the masculine identity which he could establish through work.

Through these characters' journeys, Wodehouse obviously continues in the British conservative ideal that, change in a radical way is not progressive, for his characters carry out the traditional acts of marriage, Psmith is given a mode of service, and both Mike and Psmith seem to calmly settle into their proper social spheres. However, Wodehouse does not discount the struggle which these characters face in order to establish their proper role in society simultaneous

to their journey to masculine identity. Wodehouse understands that in order to achieve peace, the characters must face struggles and war-like situations to fully develop their personal characters. Despite the struggles that each character faces, Wodehouse also establishes peace through the complex character of Psmith. Since Mike is able to work as an estate agent and Psmith is able to work in a secretarial role which suits both his need to work and his aristocratic tendencies, Wodehouse suggests that culture can heal. After the battle is over, the scars continue to heal and relative peace can be established.

With the peace established at the end of each book in the series, Wodehouse's humor can then be seen as a peace-making strategy which allows his characters to grow and develop in relative safety. Unfortunately, Wodehouse's lighter tone has made his works seem less weighty than they actually are, for when seen in the proper context, his humor makes sense as a healing, peace-making strategy. Whether the desire was simply to forget the horrors of World War I or to establish the necessity of those horrors in order to frame a true masculine identity, Wodehouse's continuously humorous approach to all subjects can at first be misleading in its importance. Scholars continually fail to consider his works outside the realm of pleasure reading, but a more serious approach to these light-hearted works should begin to take place. Wodehouse uses his humor to seriously critique the Edwardian culture which his characters embody and their struggle with identity as they emerge from that Edwardian culture into the modern era, then to reestablish a sense of unity and peace after the conflict has been resolved. Dealing specifically with masculine identity and what was culturally necessary to be considered a true masculine figure has significant import for Wodehouse's works as his humor can often mask the serious implications of his works: implications of the necessity of traditions and the establishment of personal identity. When considered in the proper context of World War I, the seriousness of what

Wodehouse is trying to do becomes more evident for he needs the humor in order to show that peace, after the battle, is possible and can be achieved, through both traditional ways, such as Mike's marriage and dependable job and non-traditional ways, such as Psmith's more romanticized and bizarre courtship, marriage, and eventual job. While Psmith seems to be following the same traditional order as Mike, the way in which his identity is established takes a much more difficult path whereby Wodehouse establishes the need for humor in order to achieve peace.

Without denying the enjoyment produced from reading Wodehouse's humorous text, the power and popularity of his works must also be considered. Writing over ninety books full of unique characters and situations, Wodehouse used his humor to encapsulate the pain of England recovering from World War I and attempting to carry on its social traditions. He is able to show the power of tradition and social customs in establishing identity, for despite the changing ideas and modernization of society, the characters rely heavily on tradition for their identity. Thus Wodehouse has produced a cultural critique extending beyond Edwardian England showing the power that humor holds not just in the peaceful establishment of society, but also in the peaceful establishment of personal identity. After the initial struggle and battle, Wodehouse establishes that peace prevails, for through humor, the difficult circumstances become less overwhelming and instead are formative to one's true identity.

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