

ATHLETICISM AND EMPIRE IN P. G. WODEHOUSE'S *THE WHITE FEATHER*

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To my parents, Anu, Neets and Rishabh

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In his analysis of the influence of sports in the public school education of the late Victorian and Edwardian ages, J. A. Mangan posits a link between the “inculcation of manliness” of the games ethic and the diffusion of these games in the colonial world by the erstwhile students of these public schools. A similar link between games and imperial manliness can be drawn in P. G. Wodehouse’s *The White Feather*. In the narrative, Sheen, the protagonist, journeys from cowardice to a boxing title, and thereby the text enacts the relationship between masculinity and empire, in which the defeated is the colonial other. Wodehouse’s argument legitimates an elite patriarchal norm by steadily curbing “slackness,” or disorder, which is read in terms of effeminacy, racial difference, class and radical politics. That said it is significant that the text contains elements that subvert this logic of imperial masculinity. The text grapples with inconsistencies within the games ethic and these inconsistencies signal a rupture in Wodehouse’s largely orthodox argument. Dunstable, a student of Wrykyn, the public school in the story,

represents this potential for subversion. His ambiguous morality serves to question the more or less stable moral versus immoral paradigm that the text valorizes.

## INTRODUCTION

The pedagogue with an academic mind and furrowed brow is not the schoolmaster of today, he is a warm creature of flesh and blood who loves exercise.

Paul Ford in Cookson, *Secondary Education*

The outcome of Waterloo would certainly have been the same without the existence of the Eton wall-game: the nature of the Empire would scarcely have been the same without the public school games ethic.

J. A. Mangan, *The Games Ethic And Imperialism*

In his study of the influence of sports in the Victorian and Edwardian public school systems, J. A. Mangan suggests that the diffusion of games in the colonial world by men who went to public schools and universities in this period is often a “moral enterprise” with “a profound purpose: the inculcation of ‘manliness’” (Mangan, *The Games Ethic and Imperialism* (17, 18). Furthermore, he draws a connection between the emphasis on sports and manliness in the public school and empire. Games, he says, “were the pre-eminent instrument for the training of a boy’s character . . . And by means of this [games] ethic the public schoolboy supposedly learnt *inter alia* the basic tools of imperial command: courage, endurance, assertion, control and self-control” (18). P. G. Wodehouse’s *The White Feather*, a Public School story published in 1907, follows Mangan’s logic that the British Empire is unthinkable without the games ethic of the Victorian and Edwardian Public School. In the course of Sheen’s<sup>1</sup> journey from cowardice to a boxing title, the text enacts the relationship between masculinity and the empire, where the defeated is the colonial other. However, the text also grapples with

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<sup>1</sup> Sheen is the protagonist. He is a student at Wryky, the public school in Wodehouse’s *The White Feather*.

inconsistencies within the games ethic and these inconsistencies signal a rupture in Wodehouse's largely orthodox argument in favour of an elite imperialistic patriarchal order.

*The White Feather* valorizes an elite masculine ideal of a nation where the victorious "hero" is also a political conservative and a part of the public school system. Wodehouse's argument legitimates this elite and patriarchal norm by steadily curbing "slackness," or disorder, which is read in terms of effeminacy, racial difference, class, and politics of the left. Over this slackness, the text superimposes a patriarchal ethic of honour, team spirit and morality, what Clowes<sup>2</sup> calls, "the old brigade," which is framed within context of colonization. Therefore the masculine norm that the text upholds is a victory over various versions of slackness: effeminacy, the lower classes, radical politics, selfishness, racial/colonial others, and Dunstable's<sup>3</sup> challenge to the "old brigade." The "old brigade" demands honour, and Dunstable, while he is masculine, is not attached to honour as Wodehouse defines the term. Wodehouse's argument for a healthy mind, body and nation (as opposed to a slack mind, body and nation) falls short of its promise in its encounter with Dunstable, who is neither an adherent of this norm, nor opposed to it. While the text easily controls slackness in the other areas through the binary of victory and defeat, it cannot impose that pattern on Dunstable because of his ambiguous position. For the argument to maintain itself as it nears its conclusion, it becomes important to negate Dunstable's potential for disruption. With all the other versions of slackness, the

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<sup>2</sup> Clowes is an ex-student of Wrykyn, who is visiting as part of the university football team sent to play the school. As he discusses the bad state of the school football team, he sighs dramatically and calls for a return of the boys of the old brigade. Clowes is only half jesting, and in the story, Wodehouse goes on to recuperate the old brigade values very much in earnest.

<sup>3</sup> Dunstable is a student at Wrykyn.

pattern of negation or containment is defeat; but since Dunstable's ambiguity makes a direct negation difficult, the text counters his problematic presence by eliminating him from the second part of the narrative.

ATHLETICISM AND IMPERIALISM IN P. G. WODEHOUSE'S *THE WHITE FEATHER*

Athleticism in Public Schools

In the last decades of the nineteenth century and in the early twentieth century, the discourses on education and the public schools were concerned with debates about intellectualism, masculinity and empire. The key debate was staged between the supporters of the curriculum as the primary goal of schools and the supporters of physical education, namely team games. The spokesmen who put greater emphasis on the intellect included Matthew Arnold, S. P. B. Mais and E. H. Culley, who steadily criticized the overwhelming emphasis of sports in the public school system. Ranged against them were philathletes who were headmasters of public schools, such as Hely Hutchinson Almond (Loretto, 1862-1903), C. Norwood (Harrow, 1926-34), M. J. Rendall (Winchester, 1911-24), and Edmond Warre (Eton, 1884-1905). As Mangan argues in his excellent historical analysis of public school education, the latter group envisioned masculinity and team sports as a means of nation/empire building, and conflated intellectualism with passivity and effeminacy. James Eli Adams' points out that "If masculinity defines a fundamentally ascetic regimen, if manhood must be forged through being 'batter'd with the shocks of doom,' then the feminine balms of home may seem to enervate rather than support men" (10). In the context of the public schools, the pedagogue with the furrowed brow who spent most of his time in study, it was argued, signaled an erosion of athleticism and health. This enervation called for self-discipline, to renew the vigor

exhausted by excessive study, and the concomitant need in Public Schools for the ideals of athleticism advocated by headmasters such as Almond. In *The Games Ethic and Imperialism*, Mangan points out that H. H. Almond was interested in “a new generation of men not characterized by literary accomplishment or varnish of culture, but disciplined and strong.” Mangan goes on to say that Almond

wallowed in a vocabulary of violence, strength, struggle, sacrifice, heroics and hardiness. His language comprised a conscious attempt to paint in words an image of a neo-Spartan imperial warrior, untroubled by doubt, firm in conviction, strong in mind and muscle. It was a Darwinian rhetoric . . . The imagery is that of the new crusader, strong in the Lord and the power of His might, marching confidently to the outposts of Empire in a righteous cause – the guiding of the world’s destiny. (26, 27)

In Loretto, the public school under his command, and in his quest for imperial dominance, Almond proposed fitness tests for the Indian Civil Services, since “it is not the scholar or mathematician, but the man of nerve, endurance, high courage, and animal spirits, who may avert disaster in any future mutiny” (28). In the privileged public school arena this imperial potential was located in team games such as cricket and football. Mangan cites the *Bristol Mercury* to make the connection between race and sports: “a race between the victors in the Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race and in the Yale and Harvard contest would not only draw spectators but also strengthen the links of Saxon unity as nothing else can. [John Astley Cooper’s] objective is . . . to develop the sentiment of the Anglo-Saxon race through its common passion for sports” (54). To actualize the imperial potential, it was essential to support athleticism, and in this context, intellectual work is enervating. Sheen, the protagonist of *The White Feather*, is slack at the beginning because he represents intellectual work rather than athleticism, and his progress towards pugilistic glory is accompanied by an increase in his self-confidence and sense of well being.

Wodehouse responded to the current debate in favour of physical prowess: “It is bad to specialize at games at the expense of [academic] work, but of the two courses the latter is probably less injurious. One gains at least health by it” (63). However, it is significant that Wodehouse tempers his love for athleticism with the need to win scholarships. He writes, “the happy mean was the thing for which to strive. And for the future, [Sheen] meant to aim for it” (63). It is important for Wodehouse to temper his emphasis on athleticism with intelligence or skill, even though he primarily supports the former – important because intelligence is the main difference between Sheen, on the one hand, and Peteiro and Revidus on the other. As the commentary during Aldershot makes evident, Peteiro is a mere slogger at boxing while Sheen, who is not as strong as Peteiro, wins because he is skilled. Similarly, Albert Revidus is merely a rabble-rouser and, although he supports the radical candidate in the elections, he does so on the basis of muscle power rather than because of any supporting political rationale. Drummond<sup>1</sup> and Sheen, who are “more intelligent,” work well as heroes in opposition to Revidus and Peteiro. So the Wodehousian framework admits the merits of Gotford winners, but does so all the more when the student is also in the first fifteen or the first eleven.<sup>2</sup> Sheen, for instance, who was in the unique position of a Gotford winner with no one to congratulate him, found celebration only with his victory at Aldershot. The rhetoric used to celebrate

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<sup>1</sup> Linton, Drummond, Dunstable and Stanning are some of the other important characters in the book, all students at Wrykyn. Drummond is important because he is one of Sheen’s two role models in his aspiration for an athletic and imperialist masculinity. Albert Revidus is a lower class bully who supports the rival radical candidate, Pedder, in the elections. The school, Wrykyn, supports the conservative candidate, Bruce. Peteiro is the half-caste who is sent home to England to be educated.

<sup>2</sup> The Gotford is a prestigious scholarship. The first fifteen and first eleven are the school football and cricket teams, respectively. These are the teams that represent the school at the inter-school level. There are other teams within the school, for instance the house teams and also the second and third fifteens and elevens.

winner at Seymour's (the house Sheen belongs to) points to the valorization of athletics at the expense of intellectualism. The use of the phrase "well played" as a general metaphor for "well done" is a case in point.

There was a pleasant custom at Seymour's of applauding at tea any Seymourite who had won distinction, and so shed a reflected glory on the house. The head of the house would observe, "Well played, So-and-So!" and the rest of the house would express their emotion in the way that seemed best to them, to the subsequent exultation of the local crockery merchant, who had generally to supply at least a dozen fresh cups and plates to the house after one of these occasions. When it was for getting his first eleven or first fifteen cap that the lucky man was being cheered, the total of creakages sometimes ran into the twenties. (112)

In another Wodehouse School Story, *The Head of Kay's*, the housemaster, Mr. Kay is not a philathlete. His lack of interest in his team's fortunes on the cricket pitch is linked to the disorder in his house. Mr. Kay commands no respect from his students because of his "pettiness" in refusing to celebrate or even recognize the victories of his house in cricket and football. *The Head of Kay's* ends with his dismissal and with a philathlete's accession to the position. All is well in this story since it ends with a sportsman at the helm of the house. In the same story, in contrast to Mr. Kay, Mr. Blackburn of Blackburn's is an enthusiastic supporter of football and commands his students' respect because he is a sportsman. He knows, therefore, it is implied, the value of trust and the right spirit to be at the helm of a Public School house. In the same vein, Seymour's, in *The White Feather*, is a good house because its head, Mr. Seymour is a philathlete who, in the spirit of sportsmanship, celebrates occasions of glory by saying, "well played!" The resemblance between Blackburn's and Seymour's is not coincidental, where an emphasis on sports is ultimately also a rejection of intellectualism, because intelligence of the bookish order signifies effeminacy. The effects of such intellectualism are clearly visible in Sheen, a coward who lets people take advantage of him. Among other things,

Wodehouse makes his argument for athleticism by portraying Sheen's shame at his lack of confidence

### Disorder and Empire

*The White Feather* takes as its starting point, disorder, attributed to a general "slackness" in school and compounded by the politically radical elements in town. Eventually, in its efforts to cleanse the school (and implicitly the nation) of "slackness," the text works towards the "old brigade" values, which imply the love of athletics, order and team spirit; Albert Revidus, a member of the lower class, symbolizes the political-radical disruptive element; and Sheen of Wrykyn, the Public School in question, represents a passivity and cowardice at the onset of the narrative. As the story evolves, the disorder is rectified: Albert Revidus' candidate is defeated by the conservative Bruce, and Sheen, who is initially submissive and avoids games, becomes a Public School boxing champion. Other disorders are also rectified. Stanning, the selfish student at Wrykyn representing a threat to the "old brigade" values, is exposed for a fraud. Peteiro, who is the colonial other, a "half-caste" sent to England to be educated, is defeated at boxing by Drummond and also later, by a reformed Sheen. The conceptualization of disorder in these terms underlines Wodehouse's valorization of an orthodox upper class, white, masculine and English ideal. This privileging of order and discipline over disorder needs to be understood within the context of imperialism. In *Dominance Without Hegemony*, Ranajit Guha links the vastly popular Samuel Smiles' emphasis on duty and obedience to the dominant bourgeois need to avert such "negative consequences" as the "Nihilists in Germany and Russia, and the fire and destruction of the Communists' war in Paris," and the suffragette movement nearer home (41). Guha points out that in a deviation

from obedience and duty Smiles saw the tragic decline of “the old principle that the world must be ruled by kind and earnest guardianship.” However, there was still a place in the world where the “old principle” was very much alive and guardianship was earnestly, if not altogether kindly, exercised. That was India under the British rule. (41)

*The White Feather*'s nostalgic longing for the “old brigade” values, in the tradition of Smiles' search for the “old principle,” ends with the arrival of the old principle following the defeat of Peteiro, who is merely a slogger (though powerful), at the hands of a now strong-willed and clever Sheen. In the process, the text rectifies disorder to establish order; “slackness” and “effeminacy” (marked by Sheen's soft and flabby mind and body) in favour of strength of will and a tight and muscular body; and radical politics in favour of “discipline and order,” and a particular version of masculinity and conservative politics. Guha situates Smiles's “old principle” in colonial India; in Wodehouse, the “old principle” is upheld when Sheen defeats Peteiro at Boxing. Discipline is crucial to the discourses of masculinity, the latter being, in James Eli Adams' words, “an incessant self-regulation.”

Over the course of the century, however, commentators increasingly distinguished between a masculine self-discipline, which they represented as an ongoing regimen of aggressive self-mastery, and a feminine self-denial, which they represented as a spontaneous and essentially static surrender of the will to external authority. (Adams 8)

In an effort to establish Sheen's aggressive self-mastery, the textual containment works through a series of exclusions: a passive Sheen is stifled at the beginning of the story, but his increasing propensity to discipline and strength of body and mind makes him legitimate, and finally, the hero. In the process, Albert Revidus, Stanning and Peteiro are eventually silenced in the service of order and discipline. Sheen defeats Stanning, because Stanning is jealous and divisive as his self-interest takes over his team spirit. Drummond defeats Revidus because he represents radical politics in a text that favours

the conservative right, and both Drummond and Sheen defeat Peteiro because he satisfies the role of the colonial other – in Wodehouse’s words, he is a “nigger” and a “savage” (99).

### Sheen

Sheen is a “feminine boy”<sup>3</sup> who becomes an expert pugilist at the end of the story. He is passive in his dislike for team games and his lack of self-confidence becomes a matter of shame. The crisis in Sheen’s life is the result of his “funking,” when he is too scared to defend his schoolfellows from Albert Revidus’ marauding gang. Even as most of the school imposes shame on Sheen by cutting him, Sheen is himself ashamed of his cowardice and feebleness. Sheen, who begins by thinking of improving on his flabby mind and body by steady exercise,<sup>4</sup> reaches a point following the “funking” where this exercise is imposed on him in terms of honour and discipline.

We are introduced to Sheen in his study, and aptly so because domesticity is Sheen’s hobby. “On the afternoon following the Oxford A match, Sheen, of Seymour’s, was sitting over the gas-stove in his study with a Thucydides. He had been staying in that day with a cold. He was always staying in. Everyone has his hobby. That was Sheen’s” (Wodehouse 18). The second chapter, where Sheen enters the narrative, is titled “Sheen At Home,” and as he decides to step out of his domestic space, the titles become more

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<sup>3</sup> I take this phrase from Norman Gale’s verse. It is apt because it describes Sheen well.  
 “What is the world is the use of a creature  
 All flabbily bent on avoiding the Pitch,  
 Who wanders about, with a sob in each feature  
 Divising a headache, inventing a stitch?  
 There surely would be a quick end to my joy  
 If possessed by that monster – a feminine boy” (*Athleticism* 189).

<sup>4</sup> “[Sheen’s] brain felt heavy and flabby. He realized dimly that this was because he took too little exercise, and he made a resolution to diminish his hours of work per diem by one, and to devote that one to fives” (Wodehouse 20).

active. So, when Sheen's study is invaded by Dunstable and Linton, we are still at "Sheen Receives Visitors and Advice," but this changes subsequently to "Sheen Begins His Education," "Sheen's Progress" and Sheen Goes to Aldershot." The chapter titles make the same journey that the text makes, from a passive domesticity to an active foray into public space.

Sheen's journey from a passive domestic space to the public boxing ring suggests James Eli Adams' point that masculinity and domesticity are incompatible.<sup>5</sup> Not only must Sheen alienate himself from his "hobby" of reading in his study, the logic of Wodehouse's argument compels Sheen to step into the public sphere to "perform" his masculinity.<sup>6</sup> Wodehouse's introductory comments about Sheen place him firmly within the category of the domesticity in two significant ways: Sheen is not a team-sports person and he works exclusively for the Gotford scholarship.<sup>7</sup> While the Gotford is, in itself, an active and ambitious pursuit, it is passive in opposition to sports. Wodehouse mentions

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<sup>5</sup> "If masculinity defines a fundamentally ascetic regimen, if manhood must be forged through being "batter'd with the shocks of doom," then the feminine balms of home may seem to enervate rather than support men. This logic is one important, albeit largely tacit, rationale for the Victorian public school: the "manliness" of a Charles Kingsley is a virtue that cannot be acquired at home. Less often observed is the more subversive possibility that manhood cannot be *sustained* within domesticity, since the ideal is incompatible with ease" (Adams 9, 10).

<sup>6</sup> As Adams argues, there is the "intractable element of theatricality in all masculine self-fashioning, which inevitably makes appeal to an audience, real or imagined" (11).

<sup>7</sup> "Nobody at Wrykyn, even at Seymour's, seemed to know Sheen very well, with the exception of Drummond; and those who troubled to think of the matter at all rather wondered what Drummond saw in him. To the superficial observer the two had nothing in common. Drummond was good at games—he was in the first fifteen and the second eleven, and had won the Feather Weights at Aldershot—and seemed to have no interests outside them. Sheen, on the other hand, played fives for the house, and that was all. He was bad at cricket, and he had given up football by special arrangement with Allardyce, on the plea that he wanted all his time for work. He was in for an in-school scholarship, the Gotford. Allardyce, though professing small sympathy with such a degraded ambition, had given him a special dispensation, and since then Sheen had retired from public life even more than he had done hitherto. The examination for the Gotford was to come off towards the end of the term." (Wodehouse18, 19)

the study in opposition to the cricket and football field, and the description of Sheen in his study is followed by Sheen's disgust at his flabbiness in mind and body. "[Sheen's] brain felt heavy and flabby. He realized dimly that this was because he took too little exercise, and he made a resolution to diminish his hours of work per diem by one, and to devote that one to fives" (20).

The introductory description is followed by three visits: Stanning visits Sheen first and laments his physical shape and his choice of Drummond over Stanning. The authorial voice comments at this point that Sheen is painfully afraid of giving offence, "the keynote of Sheen's character was a fear of giving offence. Within limits this is not a reprehensible trait in a person's character, but Sheen overdid it, and it frequently complicated his affairs" (19). In effect, Sheen's masculinity suffers because, in keeping with Adams' point, masculinity is unsustainable, in this context, within the confines of the study. This quality is evident in the second visit when Dunstable and Linton invade his study for food. Instead of asking them to leave, Sheen offers them food. The moral of the story, as Drummond later makes clear to Sheen, is that the public schoolboy needs to be on guard against a tendency towards a slack and feeble disposition.

But look here, it's rot. You *must* keep your end up in a place like this, or everybody in the house'll be ragging you . . . Look here Sheen, you really must pull yourself together. I'm not ragging. You'll have a beastly time if you're so feeble. I hope you won't be sick with me for saying it, but I can't help that. It's all for your own good. And it's really pure slackness that's the cause of it all. (28)

Drummond visits him third. The exchange implies that Drummond, who has little interest outside of cricket, football and boxing, is healthier in his attitude to the house than Sheen – Drummond's interest in sports is the reason for his healthy adjustment and for the fact that he is an able administrator. The three visits underline the problems with Sheen's passive submission, which is implicitly a product of slackness. In opposition stand four

dominant and aggressive alternatives for Sheen to emulate: Drummond, Linton, Stanning and Dunstable.

Sheen follows Drummond through his transformation, and the parallels between the two point to the desirability of an honourable male authoritative figure. Only Drummond, among the four boys, is honourable at this stage in the narrative. Stanning is in the black books of the authorities,<sup>8</sup> and Dunstable and Linton are unscrupulous at this point. However, Drummond is the only legitimate presence in the study – he was invited by Sheen. Also, he notices the problem with Sheen and tries to advise him on the demerits of the situation, making him the only person among the visitors who really cares for Sheen.

Additionally, Drummond's ability as a leader is impressive – he is capable of taking care of the entire floor and does not need help with maintaining discipline. As a mark of Sheen's success at emulating Drummond, Sheen, who is second in command, is required to fill in for Drummond at a point when he (Sheen) has made tremendous improvements as a boxer. In an exhibition that parallels Drummond's excellent capabilities, Sheen, who would otherwise not be able to maintain discipline, makes effective use of the swagger stick. But this comes later in this story; in the beginning Sheen typifies the intellectual and effeminate stereotype that headmasters such as Almond worked to expel from public schools.

It is significant that while Wodehouse favours physical prowess, he links it to mental activity of a particular kind. As an example, Joe Bevan, the boxing instructor and

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<sup>8</sup> This is the introductory comment on Stanning, and his friend Attell: "There are certain members of every public school, just as there are certain members of every college at the universities, who are "marked men". They have never been detected in any glaring breach of the rules, and their manner towards the powers that be is, as a rule, suave, even deferential. Yet it is one of the things which everybody knows, that they are in the black books of the authorities, and that sooner or later, in the picturesque phrase of the New Yorker, they will "get it in the neck". To this class Stanning and Attell belonged (Wodehouse 18, 19).

one of the best boxers in England, is also extremely fond of Shakespeare. Bevan is the antithesis of the “savage” pugilist in his intelligence and sensitivity to his students’ needs. Like Drummond and later Sheen, Bevan is an intelligent boxer. Wodehouse needs to make this distinction between the intelligent boxer and the pure slogger in order to create that distinction between Peteiro, who is a “savage” and a “slogger,” and Sheen and Drummond, who are intelligent and agile. Implicit is the anxiety that the “savage” will introduce disorder within the ordered ranks of the “old brigade,” which is why it is important to defeat Peteiro not once but twice, at the hands of both Drummond and Sheen. Stanning, who funks just as he is to go to Aldershot because of Peteiro, is not of the caliber to shoulder the responsibility of the nation, while Sheen, who is eager by this point to shoulder the responsibility, makes for the perfect candidate for imperial leadership. The race bias is unmistakable in this distinction where the “oriental” boy is used to make the point of English supremacy.

Reverend J. E. C. Weldon, the headmaster of Harrow from 1881 to 1895, was conscious of the duties of Harrow and its service to the Empire. Of “Oriental” boys in the English Public School, Weldon argued that such boys could be introduced to the “knowledge of Christian life by welcoming a limited number of Oriental boys to a full comity with their English school fellows” (Mangan, *The Games Ethic and Imperialism* 42). In his book *Forty Years on*, Weldon writes of an instance of a fight in school where he ‘naturally’ excused a boy for hitting an Egyptian fellow student because the latter had “said something bad about the British race” (38). Both these remarks reveal the discourse surrounding the Oriental boy in a public school; a discourse Wodehouse was aware of and responded to through Peteiro.

Peteiro is a “half-caste,” “savage,” “nigger” and is situated within the range of colours from “ebony to light yellow.” While the presence of this “half-caste” serves the function of spreading “sweetness and light” to the otherwise savage world, defeating this “savage” in boxing as a result of cleverness, if not strength, merely reinforces the superiority of the European intellect. Notably, the adjectives used to delineate Peteiro’s character illustrate the danger he poses to the ideology of discipline defined by a masculine, rational, disciplined and British imperial intelligence. Peteiro’s intuitive strength is, in this text, the problem both Drummond and Sheen counter in their path to this discipline. Peteiro’s introduction is clearly indicative of the ideology of the racial/colonial other that he bears:

He was a sturdy youth with a dark, rather forbidding face, in which the acute observer might have read signs of the savage. He was of the breed which is vaguely described at public schools as “nigger”, a term covering every variety of shade from ebony to light lemon. As a matter of fact he was a half-caste, sent home to England to be educated. (99)

It was Peteiro that Drummond defeated the previous year. In a telling parallel, Sheen defeats Peteiro, capturing the ideal masculinity represented by Drummond and actively instituted by Rendall, Warre, Norwood and other masters in the schools of the period. Wodehouse draws the distinction between the savage “nigger” and the intelligent Anglo Saxon very clearly in his description of the boxing match at Aldershot.

Sheen, who is witness to one of the preliminary Peteiro matches, feels his presence first in these terms: “a swarthy youth with the Ripton pink and green on his vest pushed past him and was entering the ring . . . So that was the famous Peteiro! Sheen admitted to himself that he looked tough” (131). The preliminary match is interesting because it is a precursor to the rhetoric of the final between Sheen and Peteiro. The Pauline, “fought on with undiminished pluck but the Riptonian was too strong for him, and the third round

was a rout . . . Peteiro crowded in a lot of work with both hands, and scored a popular victory” (131). If these lines suggest the sheer physical power of Peteiro, the fight with Sheen confirms it and goes on to suggest that Peteiro is not much more than physical.

There was no doubt that Drummond’s antagonist from the previous year was formidable. Yet Sheen believed himself to be the cleverer of the two. At any rate, Peteiro had given no signs of possessing much cunning. To all appearances he was a tough, go-ahead fighter, with a right which would drill a hole in a steel plate. Had he sufficient skill to baffle his (Sheen’s) strong tactics? (131, 132).

Wodehouse has a stake in making the case for the happy mean, because it allows him to set Peteiro against Sheen at the end so as to exclude the former from the ideal masculine figure. As Mr. Spence (who looked after the Wrykyn cricket and gymnasium) pointed out to Sheen, Peteiro is “just a plain slogger. That’s all. That’s why Drummond beat him last year in the Feather-Weights. In strength there was no comparison, but Drummond was just too clever for him and you will be the same, Sheen” (132). A look at the final round between Sheen and Peteiro confirms the distinction between them as that of the intelligent gentleman who plays well and the savage with pretensions to excellence, who is really only a slogger. Peteiro “forced the pace from the start,” he made a “savage swing,” came on with a “fierce rush,” and when Sheen side stepped and turned quickly, he found Peteiro “staggering past him, overbalanced by the force of his wasted blow.” Towards the end of the fight, even as Peteiro “rushed” and “dashed in,” Sheen realizes the ‘truth’ of Mr. Spence’s pronouncements. “It was all so beautifully simple. What a fool he had been to mix it up in the first round. If he only kept his head and stuck to out-fighting he could win with ease. The man couldn’t box. He was nothing more than a slogger” (138).

### Empire and Class

The Empire implies more than the defeat of the native: it also implies the othering of the lower classes, and of political radicals. In Guha's analysis, Samuel Smiles is anxious about the unsettling nature of communist movements as much as he is about the suffragettes. Wodehouse displays a similar anxiety when faced with Revidus and his politics. Discipline and order become important to superimpose a conservative bourgeois paradigm on the nation. This anxiety in Wodehouse is evident in his treatment of St. Jude's, the school in town, and Albert Revidus. Class is implicated in cricket, the game that represents the nation. In his historical analysis of the economics of public school games, Mangan argues that the development of sports requires money and schools that could afford it participated in the race for the best facilities. "It was the wealth of the upper classes which translated a value system into a set of actions by ensuring the purchase and maintenance of sufficient fields so that each member of a large school could find space to kick, chase and strike the ball" (99). It was the public school boy who would eventually take up the reigns of Empire, not one of the Judies, certainly!<sup>9</sup> So, while the Wrykinians played football, cricket and fives, the Judies "chase[d] one another about the playground, shrieking at the top of their voices" (Wodehouse 45). Scandal had it that the Judies played such games as marbles and touch-last while the boys of Wrykyn got ready to be the "statesmen and administrators of tomorrow. [Since] in their hands is the future of the British Empire" (Mangan, *The Games Ethic* 36).

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<sup>9</sup> "Judies" in *The White Feather* is a derogatory term for the boys of St. Jude's, a town school. The implication of this is that Wrykyn, the public school situated at the border of the town is the more privileged and St. Jude's is a school for the rowdy elements from the town.

Revidus marks the beginning of Sheen's movement towards the Empire, because Sheen's first foray into the public sphere is his encounter with Revidus. Because Wrykyn supported the conservative candidate, Albert Revidus, as the leader of the rowdy element and a supporter of the political radical, Pedder, shares Peteiro's predicament of being the target of both Drummond and Sheen. Revidus' rivalry with Drummond, in which the latter emerges victorious, is legendary. Sheen, on the other hand, is not up to Revidus' standards in the beginning of the narrative. The exchange between Sheen and Drummond following the "funking" incident is interesting because it paves the way for Sheen's transformation into the "Drummond figure." The incident takes place when Drummond and Sheen are on their way to Cook's for tea. Drummond notices a fight and also that there are some Wrykynians involved. As a team player, he does not hesitate to join the fight, but Sheen is overwhelmed by fear. When Sheen asked if there would be an objection to sixth formers participating in street brawls, "Drummond looked at him with open eyes" in obvious surprise (Wodehouse 34). Drummond barely paused to listen, " 'Come on,' said Drummond, beginning to run to the scene of action. Sheen paused for a moment irresolutely. Then he walked rapidly in the opposite direction" (34). This incident marks the turning point of the narrative because following it, Sheen, who is initially domestic and passive, is dishonoured actively by his fellow students for "funking." Faced with accusations by his fellow students and with his own sense of inadequacy, Sheen feels the need to be like Drummond.

No amount of argument could wipe away the truth. He had been afraid, and had shown it. And he had shown it when, in a sense, he was representing the school, when Wrykyn looked to him to help it keep its end up against the town. The more he reflected, the more he saw how far reaching were the consequences of that failure in the hour of need. He had disgraced himself. He had disgraced Seymour's. He had disgraced the school. He was an outcast. (35, 36)

In his introduction to the public realm in the service of rectifying his disgrace, Sheen encounters Revidus.<sup>10</sup> While Sheen's did not emerge victorious from this encounter, "he was feeling happier and more satisfied with himself than he had felt for years. He had been beaten, but he had fought his best, and not given in" (49). If Sheen's encounter with Revidus serves as an indicator of his emergence from the domestic domain, his encounter with Peteiro completes this journey to a particular construction of masculinity – a masculinity that inherits the Empire by conquering domestic problems as a stepping-stone. The narratives of the school and town run parallel to Sheen's, and as Sheen establishes order in his effeminate (and therefore disordered) narrative, the victory of the conservative candidate also reinforces political conservative order in town.

In the beginning, the reader is presented with two problems – Sheen's slackness and effeminacy and the town's rowdy-slack-disordered elements who are political radicals (led by Albert Revidus). At the end of the story, both problems are solved – Sheen, as we have seen, emerges victorious from his brand of slackness, and the town remains unruffled after a temporary slackness caused by the political radicals. The slackness is also reflected in the school sports, and as Allardyce points out, "The place seems absolutely rotten. It's bad enough losing all our matches, or nearly all. Did you hear that Ripton took thirty-seven points off us last term? And we only just managed to beat Greenburgh by a try to nil" (11). The town, school sports, Sheen, Stanning – slackness is the general problem that is solved in the text at different levels. Stanning is

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<sup>10</sup> "[Sheen's] heart was thumping furiously. He was in for it now, he felt. He had come down to town with this very situation in his mind. A wild idea of doing something to restore his self-respect and his credit in the eyes of the house had driven him to the High Street. But now that the crisis had actually arrived, he would have given much to have been in his stuffy again." (47)

what Wodehouse calls, “a marked man.”<sup>11</sup> To start with, he is the other choice presented to Sheen, the implication being that Sheen can develop into a “Drummond figure” or a “Stanning figure.”

Stanning is an important because he represents dishonour in stark opposition to Dunstable’s honour. It is Stanning who spearheads the general opposition to Sheen in school. For instance, he motivates Seymourites to raid Sheen’s study in the hopes that Sheen’s preparation for the Gotford will be set back. Stanning’s complete disregard for the team, his pure self-interest and the fact that he cuts school to smoke Turkish Cigars makes him an undesirable alternative. Whereas the “Drummond figure” will lead Sheen to the path of Empire, Stanning can only lead Sheen to privileging self-interest at the expense of the team. Thus Drummond maintains a respectful silence on the question of Sheen’s funking and Stanning makes it a point to spread the news through the school and proposes to “rag” Sheen’s study. While Stanning is rejected, among other things, for his cowardice in face of Peteiro, Drummond and Sheen both face Peteiro at Aldershot<sup>12</sup> in successive years and both emerge victorious from the encounter. It is not a coincidence that Drummond and Sheen are the ideals Wodehouse presents to the reader, at the cost of Stanning.

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<sup>11</sup> “[Stanning] pursued an even course of life, always rigidly obeying the eleventh commandment, “thou shalt not be found out”. This kept him from collisions with the authorities; while a ready tongue and an excellent knowledge of the art of boxing – he was, after Drummond, the best Light-Weight in the place— secured him at least tolerance at the hand of the school: and, as a matter of fact, though most of those who knew him disliked him, and particularly those who, like Drummond, were what Clowes had called the Old Brigade, he had, nevertheless, a tolerably large following. A first fifteen man, even in a bad year, can generally find boys anxious to be seen about with him” (19).

<sup>12</sup> Aldershot is the name of the public school championships, “the Mecca of the public school boxer.”

### Dunstable

Dunstable is not defeated in the same way as the others are – while Sheen and Drummond actively defeat the others in the interest of the “old principle,” they do not oppose Dunstable. Sheen needs Revidus, Stanning and Peteiro in opposition to fulfill his victory march, where all the three characters present oppositional stances that function as stepping stones for Sheen on his way to victory. Dunstable, who is from Wrykyn, is not the villain Stanning is or a hero like Drummond. Dunstable does not introduce instability into town politics like Revidus does; neither is he passive or a half-caste sent home to be educated. However, Dunstable’s self-absorption and refusal to stand for any ideological position, except for what is suitable to him, makes for good humour, but also makes his presence problematic. With his ambiguity, Dunstable represents the potential for disorder in the text. Therefore, to achieve the logic of the masculine, athletic and honourable Public School hero, who will ultimately lead the Empire, it is essential for Dunstable to disappear. Accordingly, towards the end of the Wodehouse text, Dunstable – who begins the narrative in a position of the supremely articulate and dominant character – has no voice. After the incident where he takes over Sheen’s boat, Dunstable is not mentioned again in the narrative. Instead, Linton, who is more silent and who displays more loyalty to the “old brigade” values, takes over from where Dunstable stops.

The “Old brigade” values are the same values Mangan associates with team sports and links to Nation building and Empire. Mangan argues that team spirit was considered essential for the Public School boy, and that team games exemplified the team-spirit and

dominance *and* deference. It was widely believed ... that [the inculcation of team games] promoted not simply initiative and self-reliance but also loyalty and obedience. It was, therefore a useful instrument of colonial purpose. At one and the same time it helped create the confidence to lead and the compulsion to follow. (18)

Dunstable studiously avoids the principles of order, discipline, team spirit and obedience. In short, he is neutral to the honour of the “old brigade” that the text ultimately upholds. In this respect, though he is not Drummond’s or Sheen’s ally, he is not dishonourable like Stanning. “Honour” and “dishonour” signify respectively an adherence to and an opposition to the ideal of athletic masculinity, an ideal that culminates in leadership of the nation and ultimately the empire. Morality and immorality are similarly divided, and Dunstable’s amorality is also his refusal to countenance either. His amorality helps explain why Dunstable is not placed in opposition on Peteiro the way Sheen and Drummond are, since it will disrupt the logic of Wodehouse’s argument for order and discipline. Sheen’s disgust at his own cowardice leads him to recuperate his lost honour by defeating Peteiro. Peteiro is not so much a character as means to achieve Sheen’s purpose and lend credence to the argument. After all, Peteiro does not speak; he is spoken of. Wodehouse informs the reader of Peteiro’s characteristics, all of which make a point about his racial status. The adjectives used to describe Peteiro are “nigger,” “savage,” and “slogger” (Wodehouse 99). Here, Peteiro stands for racial disorder, and Sheen’s purpose of establishing order is met with in his victory over Peteiro. On the other hand, Dunstable is not invested in order and in recuperating lost honour and does not therefore need to face Peteiro in order to define himself.

Significantly, in all the instances where Dunstable leads, the motivation is personal, and not team honour. Even as he has the confidence to lead, Dunstable lacks the commitment to follow. For instance, when Dunstable and Linton’s boat sinks, Dunstable proposes to take the other boat despite Linton’s compunctions about that boat’s owner, “‘But it belongs—what will the other fellow do?’ ‘I can’t help *his* troubles,’ said

Dunstable mildly, ‘having enough of my own. Coming?’” (Wodehouse 80, 81). He is undoubtedly masculine and assertive, but Dunstable’s selfishness and lack of team spirit are incompatible with the masculine ideal of the leader-in-training of the Nation and Empire. Team spirit and athleticism are the traits of such a leader, and Dunstable destabilizes this ideal not in being dishonourable, like Stanning, but by his refusal to acknowledge the “old principle.”

Dunstable is an uncomfortable fit in the entire scheme because of his reticence to make the choice between the honourable Drummond and the slack Stanning. Dunstable is a subversive presence because he is not dishonourable like Stanning, and also because there are significant parallels between him and Drummond. He is problematic in a text moving rapidly towards upholding the values of Clowes’ “old brigade,” which is why he is absent in the final part of the book. The difficulty he presents is not the same as the others (such as Peteiro, Revidus and Stanning), who are more easily defeated. Dunstable is neither completely outside nor completely inside the bourgeois conservative paradigm that the text upholds – or he is both in and out. While defeating him would mean defeating the parallels between him and Drummond, not defeating him would mean upholding the value of self-interest. Besides, his ambiguity would not allow him to stand for any fixed position at the end of the story where all the other positions are fixed and absolute. Dunstable is a figure that slips through the interstices of the argument, namely the “old brigade” values Wodehouse upholds. Inevitably, he has to be excluded to avert the difficulty he presents, and one way of doing this is by privileging his erstwhile counterpart, Linton.

Dunstable and Linton are friends – they are always together, and in their relationship, Dunstable has the dominant voice. He makes all the decisions between them in the narrative till the boat incident, following which he does not make an appearance in the story. The incident is important because at this point, Linton, who is otherwise content to let Dunstable make the decisions despite his moral compunctions, decides to make his own decisions in accordance with his conscience and gradually begins participating in Sheen’s victory. Dunstable and Linton represent one of the series of choices available, and as the narrative moves towards containing Dunstable’s voice, Linton survives the demands of the text. Linton is a part of the ideal of masculinity that the text purports to uphold and has the team spirit that Clowes and Allardyce nostalgically long for, “ ‘Where are the boys of the Old Brigade’ sighed Clowes. ‘I don’t know. I wish they were here,’ said Allardyce” (12).

Dunstable is manifestly problematic in his refusal to fit into the ideal paradigm – he haunts the system by escaping both sets of discourses – the honour of Sheen/ Drummond/ Linton and the dishonour of Stanning / Attell. It is necessary for the narrative to erase Dunstable’s presence in the later part of the book because he is too unstable and disordered a factor in the Wodehousian argument, which supports Almond’s “old brigade.” Dunstable’s emphasis on self-interest at the expense of inconvenience to another person is obvious in his introductory scene where he has no hesitation invading Sheen’s study for food. The following exchange takes place between Menzies, Linton and Dunstable. Menzies says,

“Do either of you chaps know Sheen at all?” “I don’t,” said Linton, “not to speak to.” “You can’t expect us to know all your shady friends,” said Dunstable. “Why?” He’s got tea on this evening. If you knew him well enough, you might borrow something from him. I met Herbert in the dinner-hour carrying in all sorts of things

to his study. Still, if you don't know him—" "Don't let a trifle of that sort stand in the way," said Dunstable. "Which is his study?" "Come on, Linton," said Dunstable. "Be a man, and lead the way. Go in as if he'd invited us. Ten to one he'll think he did, if you don't spoil the thing by laughing." "What, invite ourselves to tea?" asked Linton, beginning to grasp the idea. "That's it. Sheen's the sort of ass who won't do a thing. Anyhow it's worth trying. Smith in our house got a tea out of him that way last term. Coming, Menzies?" "Not much. I hope he kicks you out." "Come on, then, Linton. If Menzies cares to chuck away a square meal, let him." (25)

Dunstable and Linton follow this scene by actually making themselves comfortable in Sheen's study. Sheen's reaction to Dunstable in this scene is passive and accepting, typical of his behaviour prior to his transformation:

"Hope we are not late," said Dunstable. "You said somewhere about five. It's just struck. Shall we start?" He stooped, and took the kettle from the stove. "Don't you bother," he said to Sheen, who had watched this manoeuvre with an air of amazement, "I'll do all the dirty work." "But—" began Sheen. "That's all right," said Dunstable soothingly. "I like it." The intellectual pressure of the affair was too much for Sheen . . . It was plain that there was a misunderstanding somewhere, but he shrank from grappling with it. He did not want to hurt their feelings. It would be awkward enough if they discovered their mistake for themselves. So he exerted himself nervously to play the host, and the first twinge of remorse which Linton felt came when Sheen pressed upon him a bag of biscuits, which, he knew, could not have cost less than one and sixpence a pound. His heart warmed to one who could do such a thing in style. Dunstable, apparently, was worried by no scruples. He leaned back easily on his chair, and kept up a bright flow of conversation. (26)

The divide between Dunstable and Linton is evident in this conversation – Linton feels a sense of contrition that Dunstable unashamedly and unapologetically avoids. After the rout in Sheen's study, Linton says to Dunstable, "It was rather a shame . . . rushing him like that. I shouldn't wonder if he is quite a good sort, when one gets to know him."

Dunstable replies, "He must be a rotter to let himself be rushed. By Jove, I should like to see someone try that game on with me" (27). Here, by feeling the pricks of conscience, Linton begins to exhibit the need for honour that Dunstable simply brushes away.

However, even though self-interest motivates Dunstable, his conclusions parallel Drummond's – these parallels make Dunstable's character subversive. So, even as the

tone of Dunstable's comment is unsympathetic, it anticipates Drummond's position in his [Drummond's] conversation with Sheen:

Heavens! man, you must buck up a bit and keep awake, or you'll have an awful time. Of course, those chaps were simply trying it on. I had an idea that it might be that when I came in. why did you let them? Why didn't you scrag them? (27, 28)

Drummond and Dunstable both express similar sentiments, although Drummond is sensitive to Sheen while Dunstable is not. In another parallel instance, both Drummond and Dunstable convey similar sentiments following Sheen's finking. Drummond is honourable in his reticence to tell on Sheen while Dunstable, in his absolute amorality, does not care enough to condemn him. The "Old Brigade," with its burden of morality, is bound to condemn Sheen for his action. Indeed, Sheen, who later initiates the process of repairing the dishonour, condemns himself. Significantly, both Drummond and Dunstable stop Linton from making investigations into Sheen's behaviour. While Drummond refuses to divulge anything to Linton, Dunstable actively asks Linton not to pursue the issue, "What's the good of troubling about a man like Sheen? He was never any good, and this doesn't make him very much worse. Besides, he'll probably be sick enough on his own account. I know I should, if I'd done it. And, anyway, we don't know that he did do it" (38). Though Dunstable is not concerned about Sheen as he makes his point, his amorality allows him to escape Drummond's (and Sheen's) moral righteousness. Dunstable's reaction is directly contrary to Stanning's, who makes use of the moral righteousness of the other students at school to spread rumors about Sheen. So Stanning is as much prey to Drummond's morality, as are Sheen and Linton, if only to stand in opposition.

Drummond and later Sheen stand for the moral virtues that Welldon (headmaster of Harrow from 1881 to 1895) celebrates in his essay "Training of a Gentleman;" virtues

which includes such qualities "...as promptitude, resource, honour, cooperation and unslefishness" which "are the soul of English games" (Welldon 406). Dunstable's reaction to Revidus in the tea incident at Cook's makes clear the disjuncture between his behaviour and Welldon's desirable standard. Dunstable and Linton are in the process of tea-ing at Cook's (the local tea shop) when Barry and McTodd come in to inform them that Revidus has challenged them to a fight. Linton, Stanning and Barry are quick to react and want to go fight immediately. At this point, Dunstable takes over the decision-making and urges the others that there is no hurry.

"Wait a bit," he said. "No hurry. Let's finish tea at any rate. You'd better eat as much as you can now Linton. You may have no teeth left to do it afterwards," he added cheerfully . . . "Look here, I'm going out," said Linton. "Come on, Dunstable.

Dunstable continued his meal without hurry.

"What's the excitement?" he said. "There's plenty of time. Dear old Albert's not the sort of chap to go away when he's got us cornered here. The first principle of warfare is to get a good feed before you start."

. . . "A quarter of an hour passed.

Dunstable looked at the others.

Perhaps we might be moving out now," he said, getting up. "Ready?"

. . . "You goin' out, Mr Dunstable?" inquired Seargent Cook.

"Yes. Good bye. You'll see that we are decently buried won't you?

The garrison made its sortie. (Wodehouse 32)

The qualities Welldon lists do not accord with Dunstable's cavalier attitude towards fighting and upholding school honour. In the scene quoted above, he displays a complete indifference to "promptitude." Though he does not completely question the honour involved in fighting Revidus, he intends to do it at his convenience. This attitude stands out in opposition to Drummond, who is prompt in his reaction to the fight, and moreover,

exhibits surprise when Sheen raises objections to joining in. As Drummond spies a row, he reacts by identifying his team-mates, and then asks Sheen to join in with a sense of urgency that Dunstable lacks, “ Why, its some of our chaps! There’s a Seymour’s cap. Isn’t that McTodd? And, great Scott! there’s Barry. Come on, man!” (34).

The boat incident establishes Dunstable’s character in direct opposition to the “unselfishness” Welldon advocates. The same incident also defines the difference between Linton and Dunstable in very definite terms – Linton develops a sense of contrition at his actions, and Dunstable does not appear again following this scene. Linton, who is otherwise the dominated one in their relationship, becomes more vocal following this incident – this narrative runs parallel to the text’s definite privileging of the “old brigade” in the second half of the story because Linton’s conscience is linked to order and Dunstable’s lack of it suggests disorder. These changes are apparent in the scene where Dunstable and Linton emerge from the Blue Boar to find that their boat is sunk:

“There are more things in Heaven and Earth—” said Dunstable, wiping his hands. “If you ask me, I should say an enemy hath done this. A boat doesn’t sink on its own accord.”

“Albert!” said Linton. “The blackguard must have followed us up and done it while we were at tea.”

“That’s about it,” said Dunstable. “And now—how about getting home?”

“I suppose we’d better walk. We shall be hours late for lock-up.”

“You,” said Dunstable, “may walk of you are fond of exercise and aren’t in a hurry. Personally, I’m going back by river.”

“But—”

“That looks like a good enough boat over there. Anyhow, we must make it do. We must not be particular for once.”

“But it belongs—what will the other fellow do?”

“I can’t help *his* troubles,” said Dunstable mildly, “having enough of my own. Coming?” (80,81)

While Linton goes along with Dunstable at this point, his “old brigade” morality prevents him from ignoring the issue, and when Sheen confronts him, he makes the transition from Dunstable to Sheen.

The two polarities of the text, namely order and disorder, are the patterns that the argument constantly negotiates. In this process of negotiation, Wodehouse manages to contain slackness for the most part. Of these polarities, Stanning does not adhere to order because he is neither unselfish nor cooperative. On the other hand, Drummond and Sheen fit the requirements of the disciplined public school boy in training to lead the Nation and Empire. Dunstable is selfish and non-cooperative like Stanning, but is not slack in the same sense. He also exhibits interesting parallels with Drummond, which make it difficult to place him in either context. Dunstable’s moral ambiguity is slack in a text that actively stamps out slackness. *The White Feather* is interesting because of Dunstable’s ambiguity and subversive potential. While the text tries to present a simple and absolute ideal of the nation, it is in fact an ideal that is challenged even within the text.

## CONCLUSION

The practice of “championing” is crucial to the construction of this national identity. Sheen champions his values of honourable masculinity in the public arena of Aldershot, the mecca of the Public School boxer, no less. The confidence with which Sheen defeats Peteiro at Aldershot is ultimately the performance of his masculinity in the public sphere. Sheen’s journey from submissiveness to the championship title is a performance that requires the presence of the villains (Stanning, Revidus, Peteiro), the heroes (Joe Bevan, Drummond) and supporters (Bruce, Linton). It is a performance that relies on Sheen to establish the ideal citizen for a nation with an empire to control. Dunstable’s presence is a challenge to this notion of the ideal dominating citizen, who is, at the same time, bound by the conditions of honour and the “old brigade” values strongly enough to be led. Thus Sheen’s performance cannot survive Dunstable’s unsettlingly slack presence because the latter does not respect the need for order and discipline, even though he belongs to the dominant group. *The White Feather* needs him as much as it needs Revidus, Stanning and Peteiro, as a position to be rejected in the course of Sheen’s performance, precisely because Dunstable is ambiguous. However, his ambiguity also gives him the capacity to subvert the central logic of the text. As a result of this ambiguity, Dunstable disturbs Wodehouse’s argument for athleticism as a means of recuperating the slack nation. While the bulk of the text is compelled to make the argument for a strong and imperialistic nation, it cannot fit Dunstable into that argument

without having to fundamentally alter the meaning of honour and the team spirit, even the ideal of the nation.

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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Bharati Kasibhatla was born in Raipur, Chattisgarh (then M. P.), India. She is a resident of Bombay, where she completed her Bachelor's in English at Jai Hind College. She went on to earn her Master's from the University of Bombay. Bharati has fond memories of the 90's in the heart of that fantastic metropolis, when she walked everyday to Churchgate from VT, and met some great people on the way. She has been fortunate to continue the tradition of meeting people in Gainesville, though she bikes now.