

# RE-READINGS

## VOLUME II



An Extravagant Supplement to the  
*Green Bag, An Entertaining Journal of Law*

2017

The first edition of this book is  
limited to 700 copies,  
of which this is one.

# RE-READINGS, VOLUME II

GOOD WRITING YOU HAVE PROBABLY READ BEFORE  
AND WILL ENJOY READING AGAIN

*featuring the work of*

W.S. Gilbert

Kenneth Grahame

Dashiell Hammett

Langston Hughes

Dorothy Parker

Trumbull Stickney

Ida Tarbell

*introduced & arranged by*

Ross E. Davies

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ISBN 13: 978-1-933658-17-9

ISBN 10: 1-933658-17-7

Library of Congress Control Number: 2017946797

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The quote on the back cover of this volume is from Michael Dirda's "Freelance" column in the March 28, 2014 issue of the *Times Literary Supplement*.

# Contents

Introduction: The Coda .....	1
<i>Ross E. Davies</i>	
The History of the Standard Oil Company .....	6
<i>Ida M. Tarbell</i>	
Reformers: A Hymn of Hate.....	47
<i>Dorothy Parker</i>	
The Major-General's Song.....	55
<i>W.S. Gilbert</i>	
The Road Home .....	60
<i>Dashiell Hammett</i>	
The Negro Speaks of Rivers .....	67
<i>Langston Hughes</i>	
The Wind in the Willows .....	70
<i>Kenneth Grahame</i>	
Fragment IX.....	90
<i>Trumbull Stickney</i>	
Credits, Old Introduction, Suggestions, Etc. ....	93



# Introduction: The Coda

Ross E. Davies

You've probably read parts of this book before. You will — I hope and predict — enjoy re-reading them and reading the rest.

Last year's *Re-readings* opened with an "Introduction" full of cautions, explanations, disclaimers, and excuses that apply just as well this time around. It is reprinted in tiny type near the back of this book. Please treat it as you would the safety notices on a stepladder.

• • •

And now to current business: the coda. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* — in an entry that "has not yet been fully updated (first published 1891)" — it is a musical term meaning,

A passage of more or less independent character introduced after the completion of the essential parts of a movement, so as to form a more definite and satisfactory conclusion.

Sometime between Victoria's reign and today, the coda picked up a related definition. It is now one of a bunch of words and phrases — others include stinger, tag, credit cookie, post-credits scene, and monk's reward —

that mean, according to *MediaStinger*, “An extra scene, picture, or audio clip during and/or after the credits of a movie or video game.” Or, as *TVTropes* puts it,

It’s often used as a type of Easter Egg for people who stick around for the credits when most people ha[ve] left the theater/changed the channel. Sometimes a comedy will include outtakes. Sometimes the outtakes can be better than the movie.

This is often used to provide some kind of Sequel Hook, but may also be there just as a final gift to the audience, such as a comedy giving one final joke and punchline to the audience, or a dramatic work showing that maybe the guy who made a Heroic Sacrifice is Not Quite Dead.

Generally speaking, then, the coda has become a nifty but unnecessary add-on to some larger audio, video, or audio-visual work. And while codas have been around for a long time, some of the best coda-work ever is being done by moderns. Consider, for example, the *Doctor Strange* (2016) credits, which include a coda featuring Thor and the bottomless magical mug of beer.

So why hasn’t the coda drifted into the world of the printed (or published) word? There may be good reasons. Consider, for starters, the good alternatives that have been around since time out of mind — epilogues and afterwords and appendixes and the like. Then there is the ease of making little follow-ups — short-story sequels to novels, articles updating books, new final chapters in second editions, and so on. And the fixed costs for re-



starting the writing process to produce a new chapter or short story are quite low, at least when compared to the high costs to reassemble the teams and gear needed to make a little audio-visual supplement — which will inspire a film or game producer to get everything done at one time, and deter that producer from bringing everyone and everything together again later to do more. Differences between markets for short written works and those for short audio-visual works might matter as well, though downloadable content (DLC) for videogames seems like a sturdily established line of business now. Sharper minds will think of other reasons.

Surely, though, there is such a thing as too many codas, too many Easter Eggs. Yes, they are fun in movie credits, exciting in videogame DLCs, inspiring in biography epilogues, and entertaining in short-story sequels. But what if someone pelted you with an Easter Egg after every scene in a movie or after every paragraph in a book? You would, I suspect, be distracted, then irritated, then exhausted, then overwhelmed.

You can have that experience right now, today, in the talking footnotes — footnotes filled with narrative and argument, as well as citations to authorities — in articles written by great legal scholars, edited by smart law students, and published in weighty law reviews housed at highly-ranked law schools (and in many other fine law journals as well). These footnotes are signs of the rising zombie apocalypse of modern legal scholarship. They are everywhere — at the end, in some articles, of every para-

graph (or even every sentence). And they are growing — nowadays many would qualify as their own little free-standing “extra scene” essays.

It’s not that Easter Eggs in footnotes are all bad — indeed, “[s]ometimes the outtakes [or footnotes] can be better than the movie [or the article]” — it’s that they are badly placed. They should be set aside, where they can be read as the asides they are.

Could making law reviews more like movies — by finally introducing the coda to the published word — make for more readable (and thus more useful) legal scholarship? What would happen to a law-review article if the nifty but unnecessary add-ons in its talking footnotes were treated as what they were: Easter Eggs fit for a coda? And what if important and necessary insights and information buried in those footnotes were moved into the text? If that happened, readers could opt to skip Easter Eggs as unnecessary (like walking out at the end of a movie, rather than sitting through the credits), or read and enjoy them for what they were, without expectation of deep insight (and without faulting authors or editors for the irrelevance or triviality of the content). Maybe it’s worth a bit of experimentation.

Thanks to David Gossett, Anna Ivey, Greg Jacob, and Sarah Nash for correcting some of my errors and making other improvements. Thanks also to Robert A. James for suggesting Trumbull Stickney’s poem, and to other readers to be named later who’ve suggested works that will appear in future volumes.

