

**The Stock English Comic Character in Selected Novels of  
P. G. Wodehouse.**

**Thesis presented in partial fulfillment for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy**

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## Chapter I

### P. G. Wodehouse: The Performing Flea

Sir Pelham Grenville Wodehouse (1881-1975) was one of the most popular British writers of comic fiction of the twentieth century. Honoured by Oxford with an honorary Doctorate in Literature in recognition for his outstanding contribution to the cause of English literature, Wodehouse who revolutionized the comic novel effortlessly juggled as many as four genres: novel, short story, lyrics and playwriting. A novelist of selected incidents whose narrative selectiveness allowed him to concentrate the readers' attention on human personality, he was concerned with both the incidents and their significance. Employing a riotous, multilayered prose style to create a world of bumbling aristocrats, masterful servants, strong young women and eminent loony doctors, Wodehouse, who was one of the most prolific novelists of the twentieth century, wrote ninety six novels and more than three hundred short-stories. Wodehouse who published his first novel *The Pothunters* in 1902 left his ninety sixth novel, *The Sunset at Blandings*, unfinished on his death on 14<sup>th</sup> February 1975.

Born prematurely on 15<sup>th</sup> October, 1881, at 1 Vale Place, Guildford, Surrey, to Eleanor (Deane) Wodehouse and Henry Ernest Wodehouse, a British Judge in

Hong Kong, Pelham Grenville Wodehouse was the third of their four sons. Expressing his dissatisfaction with his parents' choice of name for him, he wrote: "at the font, I remember protesting vigorously when the clergyman uttered the name, but he stuck to his point, 'be that as it may,' he said firmly, having waited for a lull, 'I name thee Pelham Grenville'" (preface to "Something Fresh"). He voiced his disapproval on the subject again in *Thank You, Jeeves*, where Bertie Wooster on hearing that Mr. Trotter, a fellow guest at Brinkley Court had been christened Lemuel Gengulphus and his uncle Tom Portalington exclaims, "golly, Jeeves, there's some raw work pulled at the font from time to time, is there not?" ("Thank You, Jeeves" 25). Within the family, Wodehouse's first name was abbreviated to 'Plum' which was also used by his wife and friends. Until the age of two, Wodehouse lived in Hong Kong with his parents, but in 1883 Eleanor took her three sons - Philip, Armine and Pelham Grenville back home to England, left them in charge of a governess and returned to Hong Kong. Thereafter the boys were raised by a succession of aunts and uncles - there were almost three dozen of them - and they figure more prominently in Wodehouse's fiction than mothers and fathers. This in turn led to Wodehouse's making a sustained use of aunts to harry and plan the lives of their nephews. When his ploy worked he carried on using them to great effect in his works.

In 1886, the Wodehouses placed their three boys at a school in Croydon till May 1894 when Wodehouse was admitted to Dulwich college as a boarder at Ivy Holme. Following his father Henry Ernest Wodehouse's retirement in 1896 and his setting

up a home at Dulwich, Wodehouse became a day-boy at the college. That same year when Wodehouse's parents moved to Stableford he returned to Dulwich as a boarder, this time at Elm Lawn. It was Elm Lawn that laid the foundation of his lifelong friendship with William 'Bill' Townend with whom he had shared first a little attic study and later a dormitory. While at Dulwich Wodehouse achieved success across a broad spectrum of sporting events, winning the *school colours* as a member of the first XV Rugby team and captaining the cricket XI for two years. Besides being the High Jump winner in 1900, he was also an excellent boxer but deteriorating eyesight put paid to his boxing ambitions. In college his syllabi included classical authors and poets whose works were to provide the basis for much of his superb dialogue, allusions and misquotations in years to come. Dulwich has to its credit several firsts in Wodehouse's budding literary career, it was here that he began writing comic poetry in Latin and Greek and showing the first glimpses of his famed humorous style in his efforts as one of the five editors of the *Alleynian*. It was again, while he was at Dulwich that Wodehouse wrote his first paid article "Some Aspects of Game Captaincy" for a competition sponsored by *The Public School Magazine*.

Just as Wodehouse was finishing his studies at Dulwich and dreaming of following his elder brother to Oxford, his father suffered a sunstroke and the family's return to England precipitated a financial crisis that put paid to his anticipated progression to the Oxford. In September 1900, to supplement his small disability pension Wodehouse's father Ernest Wodehouse secured him a job as a clerk with the Hong

Kong and Shanghai Bank. Wodehouse's artistic soul rebelled at the tedium and monotony of banking but unable to overcome his father's patent disapproval of his writings, he continued at the bank for two years, a stint which provided him with the raw material for one of his first adult novels *Psmith in the City*. Dividing his energies between his bank job in the day time and writing incessantly at night Wodehouse began selling stories about school life to boys' magazines. These initial stories were modeled on Dulwich which is presented as the fictional Wrykyn, although moved from the suburbs to the country. Gradually spreading his wings Wodehouse started contributing humorous stories to *Punch* and the *London Globe*, where he had a column called *By The Way* before gladly accepting the temporary job of writing a humorous newspaper column for the *Globe*. Finally, when compelled to choose between the bank and his chosen vocation he left the bank never to return. As Wodehouse began casting around for the right genre, he tried his hands at writing romantic stories, although most of his romances were not published he used this knowledge and experience to help his mature farce move along while at the same time deflating and poking fun at the conventions. For instance, in *The Inimitable Jeeves*, when on Jeeves' advice Bingo Little reads romantic novels to his uncle the unexpected fallout is his uncle's decision to marry the cook. But Wodehouse deflates the romance by ascribing the motivation for the marriage proposal to his uncle's desperation to keep a very good cook.

The nine volumes worth of school stories and six school novels that Wodehouse wrote between 1900-1913, which foreshadow his mature comic fiction, he both

nostalgically celebrates school life and mocks its rigidities and conventions. The stories of this period have been published in two collections titled *The Tales of St. Austin's* and *Tales of Wrykyn and Elsewhere*. It was also during this period that Wodehouse, under the pseudonym Basil Wyndham, wrote the blood-and-thunder school story serial *The Luck Stone*. Wodehouse's first novel was the school story *The Pothunters* which was originally serialized in the *Public School Magazine* which however abruptly ceased publication in March, 1902 and the entire second half of the book was condensed to a letter in the last issue wherein various aspects of the plot were explained.

Following his introduction to Herbert Westbrook early in 1903, Wodehouse moved to Emsworth where he rented Threepwood Cottage in Record Road. Wodehouse who played cricket with the boys at Emsworth Hall School and helped out with their drama productions has the Emsworth locale immortalized as characters in the *Blandings Castle Saga* by giving them place names from the locality like Lord Emsworth, Stockheath, Bosham, Warblington, Hayling and Havant and house names like Threepwood and Rogate. Similarly The Sanstead House School in *The Little Nugget* is based on Emsworth Hall school and in the short story *Something to Worry About*, there is a reference to the loss of the Emsworth oyster beds through pollution. Emsworth Museum has returned the favour by having a permanent feature on Wodehouse.

Dissatisfied with both the meager income from his school stories as well as their limited scope and with an eye on enlarging his readership and finances, Wodehouse decided to tap the larger American publishing market and the Broadway stage. Another attraction in the USA for him was his boyish admiration for Kid McCoy, the renowned American pugilist and their meeting at the White Plains training camp resulted in a series of short stories about Kid McCoy. The hearty reception that Wodehouse received in USA led to his criss-crossing the Atlantic for the next thirty five years and the creation of several immortal novels with an Anglo-American flavour. Ever the professional with an eye on the market, Wodehouse began to mix American and English characters juxtaposing the New World with the Old and in the process became a truly trans-Atlantic writer by creating a realistic yet absurd America for British readers and a farcical England for his American fans. Between 1906-1909 Wodehouse wrote six novels, *Love among The Chickens*, *Not George Washington*, *William Tale Told Again*, *Psmith Journalist* and *A Gentleman of Leisure*, in which he dealt with such germane issues of the day as internecine street gang wars, political corruption and pervasive bribery in the police force with such a close attention to the varieties of American dialect and ethnicity that they are considered as socio-political commentary of the America of those days.

Wodehouse who wrote the lyrics for thirty- three plays made his first foray into theatre when he wrote the lyrics *Put Me In My Little Cell* for the *Sergeant Brue* show which ran at the Strand and the Prince of Wales Theatres. Working with Seymour Hicks in association with Jerome Kern, he contributed topical encore verses for *The*

*Beauty of Bath* and followed this up with two more lyrics for *The Gay Gordons* before taking up the job of a resident lyricist at the *Gaiety*, gaining instant fame as a theatre reviewer and as a writer of books and lyrics for musical comedies. In just ten years he became the most active writer on Broadway with five shows performing simultaneously on Broadway for seventy five years, a record matched almost fifty years later by another English man Andrew Lloyd Webber. Wodehouse who worked with eminent composers like George Greshwin, Ivor Novello, Cole Porter, Irving Berlin, Ivan Caryll , Emmerich Kalman and Rudolf Friml also wrote several popular Broadway musicals in collaboration with Guy Bolton and Jerome Kern. Besides his greatest and most popular lyrics for *Show Boat*, he also wrote the lyrics for *Sally*, *Sitting Pretty*, *Anything Goes* and *Bring on the Girls*. Wodehouse also dabbled in writing plays as well as in adapting his stories, often in collaboration with writers like Ian Hay and Guy Bolton. In all he has to his credit twenty plays including his adaptations of Ference Molnar, Ladislus Fodor, Seigfried Geyer and Sacha Guitry. Some of the plays he helped produce are *A Damsel in Distress*; *Baa ,Baa*, *Black Sheep*; *Leave It to Psmith* and *Good Morning , Bill*.

The thirtieth of April, 1914, marked a critical turning point in Wodehouse's life when that day at The Little Church Around the Corner, on East 29th Street, New York, P.G. Wodehouse married Ethel Newton, a fellow English expatriate. Ethel Newton's daughter Leonara who was adored and adopted legally by Wodehouse had a significant impact on Wodehouse's life and career. Wodehouse who was in New York when World War I began in 1914 and rejected for military call-up owing to bad

eye sight took the opportunity to work as dramatic critic for the prestigious American monthly journal *Vanity Fair*. During his stint with *Vanity Fair*, Wodehouse wrote a number of articles using a variety of pseudonyms like J. Plum, Melrose Granger, P. Brooke-Haven, J. Walker Williams and C. P. West.

It was in 1915 that Wodehouse got his first breakthrough to real success with the publication of the first of his *Blandings Castle Saga* novels, *Something Fresh* which had earlier appeared in the form of a serial in the *Saturday Evening Post*. Full of his trademark farcical realism *Something Fresh* is a comic tale of love in which Wodehouse first introduced his now famous Blandings Castle, Freddie Threepwood and of course Lord Emsworth and his prize winning pig, the Empress of Blandings.

It would not be wrong to say that Wodehouse's major claim to fame rests on novels and short stories about Bertie Wooster and his unflappable valet Jeeves. Wodehouse had introduced Bertie Wooster and Jeeves in the short story *Extricating Young Gussie* which was first published in the *Saturday Evening Post* and later included in the collection *The Man With Two Left Feet*. A book of eight stories of which four were about Bertie Wooster and Jeeves, *My Man Jeeves*, appeared in 1919, followed in quick succession by three collections exclusively devoted to Bertie Wooster and Jeeves episodes in 1923, 1925 and 1930. The turning point of Wodehouse's literary career came in 1934 with the publication of his first *Bertie-Jeeves* novels, *Thank You, Jeeves* which catapulted all three of them to instant fame and was followed up the same year with *Right Ho, Jeeves*.

A favourite and successful technique of Wodehouse was to write several stories with the same setting and a common central character to give them a feeling of continuity as well as keep the following among his readers intact, leading readers to classify them as series – Blandings, Bertie-Jeeves, Uncle Fred or Ickenham, Oldest Member and Mr Mulliner. The keen golfer in him comes across clearly in the twenty nine golf stories narrated by the Oldest Member which were written by Wodehouse between 1919 and 1950 and were set in the backdrop of a golf-club. Similar to the Oldest Member golf stories, is Mr. Mulliner's pub stories in which Mr. Mulliner, a regular at Angler's Rest, a pub, regales his listeners with tales about extraordinary experiences of his relatives. In all there are about forty stories in the Mulliner series written between 1926 and 1937.

Wodehouse who was conferred the medallion of the international Mark Twain Society, on 26<sup>th</sup> June, 1936 , “in recognition of your outstanding and lasting contribution to the happiness of the world” (Phelps 200) was unconcerned by and shockingly wrong in his assessment of the implications of Hitler's repudiation of the Anglo-German Naval Agreement of 1935. With the Japanese invasion of China , the persecution of Jews in Germany and Stalin's latest purges at a peak , the world was indeed on the blink of a catastrophe and even Wodehouse's work could not continue to remain sublimely detached from contemporary realities. *The Code of the Woosters* or *The Silver Cow* as it was originally called, bears the imprint of the troubled times it was written in and topical references include Mussolini: “Even across the room one

could see that, when it came to self-confidence, Mussolini could have taken his correspondence course”(“The Code of the Woosters” 46) and of course there is Roderick Spode who Robert Mc Crum says “ is plainly modeled on Sir Oswald Mosley, the self-styled leader of the British Union of Fascists or Blackshirts...”(250) and who, according to Bertie Wooster is “the founder and head of the Saviours of Britain, a Fascist organization better known as the Black Shorts” (“The Code of the Woosters” 49).

*The Code of the Woosters* which takes off where *Right Ho, Jeeves* had ended was published simultaneously in Britain and America on 7<sup>th</sup> October 1938 and established his reputation as writer of comic novels for all time. It was followed by *Uncle Fred in the Springtime*. Uncle Fred who is one of Wodehouse’s most enduring heroes is also the star of *Uncle Dynamite* (1948), *Cocktail Time* (1958) and *Service With a Smile* (1962).

Nearly forty years after Wodehouse’s hopes of going to Oxford were dashed, he was awarded an honorary doctorate of literature at the annual Encaenia on Wednesday 21st June, 1939. Wodehouse was obviously delighted with the award “I am rather stunned by this ” , Wodehouse told his publisher , “ as I had no notion that my knockabout comedy entitled me to rank with the nibs”(qtd McCrum 258).The British press went to town over the decision conducting a lively analysis of the meaning and merit of Oxford’s decision. Summing up the national debate *The Times* declared “there is no question that in making P .G. Wodehouse a Doctor of Letters, the

university has done the right and proper thing. Everyone knows at least some of his many works and has felt all the better for the gaiety of his wit and the freshness of his style” (*The Times*, 22nd June, 1939). The Oxford doctorate closed one chapter in Wodehouse’s long life but a new and difficult one was just beginning.

With the expiry of Britain’s ultimatum to Germany, war was declared, in September 1939 but a blissfully unconcerned Wodehouse was at his home, Low Wood, in Le Touquet, putting the finishing touches to his latest novel *Quick Service*. The first World War had scarcely disrupted French civilian life outside the combat zone so even though the “Panzers of the Wehrmacht were massing on the Franco-Belgian border, some three hundred miles away and Rommel was making final preparation for his blitzkrieg”(McCrum 269), like the majority of Le Touquet residents the Wodehouses believed that they were safe behind the Maginot Line. Wodehouse’s absorption with his literary career continued uninterrupted. A collection of his Drones Club stories, *Eggs, Beans And Crumpets* were released on 26<sup>th</sup> April,1940, his novel *Quick Service* was being serialized by the *Saturday Evening Post* and *Life* wanted to commission a piece about his attitude to war in Europe, and Wodehouse himself was working on *Joy In The Morning*. On the other hand the war was heading towards its horrific climax and with Churchill’s passionate outburst “I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat...” (Taylor 475), a harsh, new and uncompromising note entered into British political discourse. The Wodehouses made two abortive attempts to leave Le Touquet and after 24 May,1940, were trapped behind enemy lines. “My own first meeting with the invaders took place in rather

unfortunate circumstances,” wrote Wodehouse in his *Apologia* “embarrassing is the *mot-juste*. I did not actually get shot, but I was bathed in confusion” (qtd McCrum 274). The German soldiers arrived at Low Wood and commandeered the Wodehouse’s stores, their cars and even their bicycle. And on 21st July 1940 Wodehouse and ‘all English men under the age of sixty were interned immediately” (McCrum 276). When Angus Thuermer, an Associated Press reporter stumbled on the fact that P. G. Wodehouse, “British civilian prisoner no. 796 ”(McCrum 291), was at Ilag VIII, he requested an interview which set the ball rolling on the worst phase of Wodehouse’s life “ rapidly building up to the crisis that became the defining moment of Wodehouse’s life ” (ibid 292) - the infamous Berlin broadcasts. Wodehouse described his internment in his infamous Berlin broadcast as:

Summing up my experience as a gaol bird, I would say that a prison is all right for a visit, but I wouldn’t live there, if you gave me the place. On my part, there was no mourning at the bar when I left Loos. I was glad to go. The last I saw of the old Alma Mater was the warder closing the door of the van and standing back with the French equivalent of ‘Right away’. He said ‘au revoir’ to me - which I thought a little tactless.

(2<sup>nd</sup> Berlin Broadcast, PAAA/German Foreign Office, Archive)

Making light of his horrific experiences in the Silesian prison camp in his first broadcast from Berlin, Wodehouse joked “they (the Nazis) took a look at me .... Got the right idea at last (and sent) us off to the local lunatic asylum” (qtd Mccrum288),

the Silesian prison camp was indeed a converted mental asylum. Wodehouse described his camp routine in his fifth Berlin broadcast as being governed by “rumours and potatoes” (ibid).

In America, Wodehouse’s words and his “genius in going on German radio ridiculing his captors” (Easdale 22) was appreciated. In Britain, on the other hand his broadcasts stirred a hornet’s nest. Alfred Duff Cooper, Minister of Information directed William Connor, a journalist who wrote under the pseudonym of Cassandra, to give a ten minute talk on BBC radio vilifying Wodehouse. The BBC vehemently objected to Cooper’s slanderous attack but wartime regulations compelled the BBC to carry the vituperative attack on Wodehouse. In a rush of misguided patriotism, Wodehouse’s books were taken off the library shelves and others took the opportunity of giving vent to their jealousy by attacking his literary reputation and in particular the award from Oxford. To add fuel to the brouhaha fire Harry W. Flannery, the American correspondent in Berlin of the Columbia Broadcasting System perceived a chance to attack Nazism by making Wodehouse out a traitor. When Iain Sproat finally managed to get the official papers on Wodehouse’s wartime conduct released they exonerated him.

In spite of his extreme circumstances “his comic vision was never silenced, *Money In The Bank* is neither *Don Quixote* nor *Pilgrim’s Progress* (both written in captivity), but it is irrefutably part of the Wodehousian vision” (McCrum 287). The novel, whose hero, George, sixth Viscount Uffenham “was recognizably based on

Wodehouse's dormitory-mate, Max Enke" (ibid 287), describes an England that, by 1941, was already extinct, but, like all his work, it transforms experience into a farcical simulacrum of reality. In August 1941 *Money In The Bank* was acquired by *The Saturday Evening Post* for \$40000 and work on *Joy In The Morning* "the supreme Jeeves novel of all time"( preface "Joy in the Morning") was also nearing completion. *The Full Moon*, a regular *Blandings Castle* novel, which underlines Wodehouse's remoteness from the war, and *Spring Fever* were written in quick succession. *Money In The Bank* was well received by the public and its sales were boosted by favourable reviews on the BBC by the distinguished and influential critic V. S. Pritchett. *Full Moon* also had good reviews in *The New York Times* and *The New York Sun* .Wodehouse began work on a new Jeeves novel *The Mating Season*, while still in Germany and completed it after his return to America in 1947. Carrying the faint but bitter traces of his war time troubles and post-war anxieties *The Mating Season* not only marks the end of Wodehouse's war time output it is also "perhaps the Wodehouse tale that is most exclusively concerned with romance and its distractions" (preface v "The Mating Season" ). As Wodehouse struggled to find his creative feet in post-war America he dabbled in a number of showbiz ventures which were not successful but in May 1948, *Spring Fever*, was well received both in UK and USA.

His semi autobiographical book, and *Bring On The Girl's* gives a brilliant picture of the Broadway in the 1920's, was co-authored with Guy Bolton and published in 1953. Cheerfully accepting Sean O' Casey's derogatory designation of him as

'English Literature's performing flea' with characteristic wit: "with Sean O' Casey's statement...I scarcely know how to deal. Thinking it over, I believe he meant to be complimentary, for all the performing fleas I have met have impressed me with their sterling artistry and that indefinable something which makes the good trouper"("Performing Flea" 254), he turned the tables fully by deciding to name his pen-portrait of himself '*Performing Flea*'. With an introduction and additional notes by W. Townend *Performing Flea : A Self Portrait in Letters* was published just a week later and hailed as "delicious entertainment"( *Times Literary Supplement*). Described as "a master class in literary technique" (McCrum 389) *Performing Flea* is considered as one of "the best books ever written on the craft of popular fiction"(ibid). That year also saw Penguin issue five of his titles simultaneously, *The Inimitable Jeeves; Right Ho, Jeeves; The Code of the Woosters; Leave it to Psmith* and *Big Money* "with a combined print-run of a million books this...introduced a whole new generation of younger and impecunious readers to the Master"( Phelps 234 ).

"Your becoming an American citizen makes up for our loss of T. S. Eliot and Henry James combined "(Sullivan, *Sullivan Papers*) wrote the humorist Frank Sullivan of the *New Yorker* to Wodehouse when he took the oath of allegiance and became an American citizen on 16th December 1955. Wodehouse celebrated the occasion with *America I Love You*, "a sort of autobiography" (McCrum 391).In it Wodehouse neatly sidestepped awkward personal issues including his war time broadcasts. In typical Wodehousian fashion *America I love You* was revised with an eye on the

English market and published in 1957 as *Over Seventy: An Autobiography with Digressions*. Before his final move to Remsenburg, Wodehouse finally agreed to Stephen Spender, the editor of *Encounter's* suggestion to have the scripts of his Berlin broadcasts public, the texts of which were published in the 1954 October and November issues of *Encounter*.

Throughout the 1950s Wodehouse's output which remained at the same level and of the same high quality, saw the publication of *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit* in 1954, *French Leave* in 1956; *Something Fishy* in 1957 and *Cocktail Time* (1958) in quick succession. *French Leave* a light-hearted Franco-American romantic comedy is based on a Guy Bolton plot and did not have any of the regular Wodehousian character. By Wodehouse's own admission *French Leave* was "rather an experiment" (McCrum 396) and attracted a rather vicious review in *The Observer*, sparking a debate on Wodehouse the novelist and concluding with Evelyn Waugh's celebrated statement "years and years ago... I was one of the regular reviewers on *The Observer*. We were far from dedicated, but we had certain old fashioned ideas of fair play. One of them was you did not abuse a book unless you had read it"(Waugh *Spectator* 24th Feb 1956).

While with *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit* Wodehouse reassured his fans that his world has survived unscathed and that Jeeves and Bertie are still in harness, *In Something Fishy* Wodehouse reverts to the America before the Wall Street crash of 1929.

*Cocktail Time* has Uncle Fred in sparkling form while many of the old favourites appear in another volume of short stories, *A Few Quick Ones*.

Wodehouse's eightieth birthday was marked by in England by Herbert Jenkins with the publication of *Ice in The Bedroom* and in America by Simon and Schuster with a new *Blandings Saga Castle* novel, *Service with a Smile*. These were followed up by Wodehouse with *Stiff Upper Lip*, *Jeeves*; *Frozen Assets*; *Galahad at Blandings*; *Do Butlers*, *Burgle Banks*; *A Pelican at Blandings* and *Company for Henry* besides continuing to write his regular column, *Our Man in America* for *Punch*. When the Bolton, Wodehouse and Kern musical *Leave It to Jane*, was revived in 1959 its nine hundred and twenty eight performances gave it the distinction of being one of the five longest running Broadway musicals in the history of the theatre (Phelps 239). The following year *Punch* too honoured Wodehouse by electing him to the *Punch Table* (ibid 239) but due to ill -health was unable to go to London for the traditional carving of initials on the table.

Laying claim to fresh territory Wodehouse conquered television with his very first introduction to it in 1965 when the BBC began their television series *The World of Wooster*, an adaptation of Wodehouse's Bertie Wooster stories, instantly catapulting Dennis Price as Jeeves and Jan Carmichael as Bertie to stardom. The year 1970 saw the publication of *The Girl in Blue* which "marked a return to form noted by almost all the critics" (McCrum 409).

Wodehouse's ninetieth birthday was marked in Britain by the publication of *Much Obligated Jeeves*, and lavish praise in newspapers led by John Le Carre' who saluted Wodehouse's "magic, his humour, his humanity, his sheer bubbling hilarity" (*Sunday Times* 10th Oct 1971) and concluded with *The Times* fulsome tribute: "to strike a comic vein thus far impervious to time and fashion is genius indeed...To the question where does he stand, the only answer is: apart" (*The Times* 15th Oct 1971). In the summer of 1974, Wodehouse excitedly reported "my big news is that they are putting me in Madame Taussaud's, which I have always looked on as the supreme honour" (qtd McCrum 414) and the final act of honour came with the inclusion of P.G. Wodehouse's name in the New Year's Honours List of 1975 and the award of a knighthood by the Queen.

*Pearls, Girls and Monty Bodkin* which was published a year after Wodehouse's ninetieth birthday had several characters from *The Luck of the Bodkins*, was followed up by *Bachelors Anonymous* in 1973 and his last *Bertie-Jeeves* novel *Aunts Aren't Gentlemen* in 1975. Faced with an end of the month deadline, Wodehouse took his unfinished *Blandings Castle* novel with him, when he reported to the Southampton Hospital, for tests in the second week of February, 1975. At 8 pm on 14<sup>th</sup> February, 1975, his doctor Bernard Berger came to see his famous patient and found him asleep in his armchair, pipe and tobacco pouch in hand, and the manuscript nearby. A second look told the doctor that another 'global howl' (McCrums 451) was about to begin, Dr. Sir Pelham Grenville Wodehouse was dead.

Wodehouse's work has attracted critical attention in the form of articles, essays, reviews, edited volumes and full length studies in books and Ph.D. dissertations. The P.G.Wodehouse Society (UK) which was formed in 1977 "exists to promote the enjoyment of the works of the greatest humourist of the twentieth century" (<http://w.w.w.eclipse.couk/wodehouse>). The Society publishes articles and archive materials in its quarterly magazine *Wooster Sauce* and a newsletter in the *By The Way* series which relates a single matter of Wodehousian interest. While the Russian Wodehouse Society maintains an extensive archive on Wodehouse the P. G. Wodehouse Society, USA, brings out a quarterly magazine *Plum Lines*. Considering the international stature of Wodehouse and the number of languages his works have been translated into, there have been relatively few critical works on his art and craft and none on him as a writer whose central focus was the use of stereotypes. The following literature survey will look at some of the interventions made by critics and commentators which are relevant to the present study.

A survey of the standard general guides to English Literature shows that they have nothing or next to nothing to say about Wodehouse. Silence prevails in Albert Baugh's *The Literary History of England*, David Daiches' four volume *A Critical History of English Literature*, F.W Bateson's *Guide to English Literature* and Martin Seymour-Smith's *Guide to Modern World Literature*, G.S.Frazer's *The Modern Writer and His World*, and Cyril Connolly's *Enemies of Promise*. The fleetingly notice taken of Wodehouse by the *Concise Cambridge History of English Literature*, has been somewhat compensated by a more detailed account in *The Oxford*

*Encyclopedia of British Literature*, Vol.5, only W.W. Robson's *Modern English Literature* gives Wodehouse credit as a substantive writer.

Considering the international stature of Wodehouse and the number of languages his works have been translated into, there have been relatively few critical works on his art and craft and none on him as a writer whose central focus was the use of stereotype characters and formulaic plots. The first biography on Wodehouse, *Wodehouse at Work*, Herbert and Jenkins, 1961, was by Richard Usborne, the founding father of Wodehouse studies in Britain. Though not an exercise in academic literary criticism but an evaluation with copious quotations of Wodehouse's short stories, novels and major characters it is the best non-technical overview of his works and was subsequently revised and updated in 1976 as *Wodehouse at Work To The End*.

R.B.D. French's *P G Wodehouse*, Oliver and Boyd, 1966, a slender study of a hundred and twenty pages, which had earlier appeared in the *Writers and Critics* series, is one of the first full-length studies of Wodehouse by a literary academic. Herbert Warren Wind's *The World of P G Wodehouse*, Hutchinson Inc.1971, based on a series of interviews that Wind had conducted at Wodehouse's home on Long Island, is a brief profile on Wodehouse. Thelma Cazalet-Keir ed *Homage to P.G.Wodehouse*, Barrie and Jenkins, 1973 has twelve essays and an excellent preface by Lord David Cecil who felt it was his duty as professor of English Literature "to praise good work and Mr Wodehouse's work is triumphantly good" (3)

The first biography published with Wodehouse's approval, in the United States, David Jasen's *PG Wodehouse: A Portrait of a Master*, Garnstone, 1974, is a treasure trove of original manuscript and interview material and can almost be considered a primary source. *The Comic Style of P G Wodehouse*, Archon Books, 1974, by Robert A. Hall Jr. is an academic's attempt to answer the question why Wodehouse is so funny. Here Hall analyses Wodehouse's humour in some detail and enhances our appreciation of a master craftsman.

Richard Usborne's *The Penguin Wodehouse Companion*, 1976, is a recombination of *Wodehouse at Work to the End* and *A Wodehouse Companion*. Also published in the same year was Usborne's *After Hours with P G Wodehouse*, an eclectic collection of essays on Wodehousian themes. Owen Dudley Edwards's *P G Wodehouse: A Critical and Historical Essay*, Brian, 1977, is an attempt to explore some of the ways in which historians should turn to Wodehouse to learn about the past. In the Appendix, Edwards examines in detail the penultimate chapter of *Leave it to Psmith*, as it appeared as a magazine serial and later in book form. Likewise Richard Usborne's *A Bibliography and Reader's Guide to the First Editions of P G Wodehouse*, 1979, gives a brief note of any textual differences between UK and US editions, and lists of characters and significant places in each book or story and is an indispensable reference work.

Maha Nand Sharma's *Wodehouse the Fictionist*, MeenakshiPrakashan,1980,analyses Wodehouse's humour from the separate perspectives of western and Indian aesthetic traditions. Sharma draws attention to the use of stereotypes, formulaic plots and manipulation of language for comic effects and to the play of the Bergsonian theory of comedy in Wodehouse's work. To Sharma Wodehouse "stands out as a fictionist who has combined the techniques of the past with some modern ones as a model for his successors" (Sharma 219).

Benny Green's *P G Wodehouse: A Literary Life*, Routledge,1981 is an interesting account of Wodehouse's life and theatrical as well as literary works. Iain Sproat's *Wodehouse at War*, Milner and Company,1981, is a very detailed examination of the circumstances surrounding the Berlin broadcasts and it includes official transcripts of the broadcasts by the German Foreign Office. In the same year came one of the most comprehensive bibliographies and a monumental work of scholarship, Eileen McIlvaine's *P G Wodehouse: A Comprehensive Bibliography and Checklist*. J H C Morris's *Thank You, Wodehouse*,1981, is an affectionate, if slightly tongue-in-cheek, attempt to answer such puzzles as Bertie Wooster's age, what college he attended at Oxford, and the location of Market Blandings. N T P Murphy's *In Search of Blandings* ,1981 is an interesting account, of the links between places and characters in the books and places and people that Wodehouse knew. His *A Wodehouse Handbook*,1986,expands the scope of his earlier book to cover the world in which Wodehouse lived and the way in which he used his experiences in his books.

Frances Donaldson's *P G Wodehouse: A Biography*, Weidenfield & Nicholson, 1982, was for a long time the best available biography and provides interesting insights into Wodehouse's humour. One of the most readable and entertaining biographies is Barry Phelps's *PG Wodehouse: Man and Myth*, Constable and Company, 1992, makes a very plausible case that Wodehouse was, by nature, a gregarious and sociable person and that the remote, aloof persona that he cultivated in later life was a way of dealing with the criticisms leveled against him for his Berlin broadcasts.

Kristin Thompson's *Wooster Proposes, Jeeves Disposes*, James H. Heinman Inc, 1992, is a detailed examination of the literary tradition in which the Jeeves and Wooster stories developed and the manner in which the characters evolved during Wodehouse's literary career. Thompson deals with such issues as writing the same story differently, generic transformations and the psychology of the stereotypic individual in the context of the techniques and preoccupations of Wodehouse in his work. Firmly situating Wodehouse as a comic prose writer Thompson brilliantly analyses his *Bertie-Jeeves Series* in the light of that tradition and the theories of comedy postulated by Bergson and Bakhtin.

A fascinating account of the collaboration of the trio of musical fame, or, as the book's sub-title describes them *The Men Who Made Musical Comedy* is Lee Davis's *Bolton and Wodehouse and Kern*, James H. Heinman Inc. 1993. Although Davis does give an account of the lives of all three men from birth to death, the bulk of his book

deals with the period between the two wars and is the most detailed account of an aspect of Wodehouse's career that is still surprisingly under-rated.

Barry Day's *P G Wodehouse: In His Own Words*, Hutchinson 2002, is presented as being Wodehouse's life told in his own words, but in truth is just a collection of quotation from his writings, loosely strung together in chronological order and interspersed with brief biographic. Roderick Easdale's *Novel Life of P G Wodehouse*, Superscript Ltd. 2004 is an overview on Wodehouse's life and times but it is not comprehensive either as a biography or as a work of criticism.

The latest of the biographies is Robert McCrum's *Wodehouse, A Life*, Norton, London and New York, 2004. In his book McCrum gives us a thorough analysis of both Wodehouse's life and his works besides providing a very perceptive insight on the development of his craft.

Cannadine David in "Another Last Victorian: P. G. Wodehouse and His World", *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 1978, talks of the milieu and world of Wodehouse's work. In his perceptive analysis of Wodehouse's works in general and *The Code of the Woosters* in particular Alexander Cockburn claims that Wodehouse's Bertie and Jeeves saga stands as the 'central achievement in the twentieth century literature' (*The Code of the Woosters* Introduction 5); while his article "The Natural Artificer" in the *New York Review of Books* sheds light on Wodehouse's craft and technique.

Richard Carlson's dissertation "An Analysis of P. G. Wodehouse's Team of Bertie Wooster and Jeeves" submitted at the Michigan State University makes a detailed study of the role of Bertie and Jeeves in Wodehouse's fictional world. In "Bertie Wooster and the Silly Ass Tradition", in *Wooster Sauce*, June, 2000, Jonathan Cecil writes about the traditions and use of stereotypes and their use by Wodehouse. "P. G. Wodehouse: Master of Farce" by Edward L. Galligan in *Sewanee Review*, looks into the farcical and comic aspects of Wodehouse's fiction. Laura Mooneyham discusses the "anomalous position of Wodehouse in twentieth century fiction," in her article "Comedy among the modernists" in the *Twentieth Century Literature*, 1994.

Wodehouse's language has drawn the attention of almost all commentators on him particularly Kristin Thompson, M.N. Sharma, Robert McCrum, and Roderick Easdale, apart from these there have been a good number of articles on this aspect of Wodehouse notably by Stephen Fry, Shashi Tharoor, Phillip Hensher and others on the Web. We also have Wodehouse bashers like A.A. Milne and Hugh Kenner who found it particularly galling that "in 1939 Oxford conferred on Psmith's creator the honorary doctorate it would not dream of offering Leopold Bloom" ( Phelps 102 ).

As is evident from the literature survey a substantial body of works on Wodehouse have focused on biographical aspects and characterization, but stylistic aspects of his craft and his use of conventions and formulaic plots have drawn only incidental comments and even then have been treated as minor stylistic devices. Wodehouse

as a writer whose work reflects the subtle nuances of a humour that is an intrinsic part of the English language and idiom are also aspects of his work that have not drawn much critical attention.

The study makes a detailed examination of the literary tradition in which Wodehouse's novels developed and situates Wodehouse in the perspective and traditions of British comedy. It is an attempt at re-visioning of him as a significant writer who both followed and revived British comic traditions. In tracing the historical and traditional view of humour in English drama and the novel, the study shows Wodehouse as continuing the traditions of English comedy by using the stock comic characters imbued in British culture and society and at the same time how he in his own unique way contributed to the renaissance of the English comic novel. Furthermore in analysing the nature of humour in his novels, the study argues that the works of Wodehouse are an amalgam of the popular and the literary and that he compels a reassessment of the trends in the contemporary English comic novel and their use of culture-specific stock characters which in turn is the continuation of a tradition whose origins can be traced to the highly culture-specific English drama, particularly comedy. The study proves that popular fiction of the kind that Wodehouse wrote deserves a place in the literary canon, for contrary to certain critical opinions Wodehouse's work is mimetic of experience. Besides looking at Wodehouse's distinctive use of the English language, which contributes greatly to the humorous effect he achieves, the study also takes a look at the traditions of comic theory in English literature. Although comedy in its original and strictest sense is a

dramatic genre, it is necessary to trace some of its antecedents for a proper understanding of the comic novel, where the true thrust of the study lies. The investigation will be primarily focused on the historical developments of the theories of comedy rather than on psychological investigations of laughter or on the art of comic performance. Investigations into the history of comic theory show that they basically look at comedy from two distinctly different standpoints as ridicule and festive rejoicing.

The sheer volume of Wodehouse's literary output makes it imperative for any one attempting an in-depth study of the very English comic world of P.G. Wodehouse and his use of English comic characters, to focus on a particular representative area and genre of Wodehouse's works. The proposed study is therefore based on an examination and analysis of four novels from the *Bertie-Jeeves* Series: *Thank You, Jeeves*; *The Code of The Woosters*; *Joy in the Morning* and *Aunts Aren't Gentlemen*. The four novels chosen from the *Blandings Castle Saga* are: *Something Fresh*; *Leave it to Psmith*; *Uncle Fred in the Springtime* and *Sunset At Blandings*.

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## Chapter II

### The Roots

This chapter defines stock characters and differentiates between comedy and humour; then makes a survey of the genesis and development of stock characters in English drama and novel besides looking into the theories of comedy relevant to the study.

The terms stock characters, archetypes, stereotypes and types, will be interpreted to denote “character types that occur repeatedly in a particular literary genre, and so are recognizable as part of the conventions of the form”(Abrams 200). *The Oxford Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms* defines a stock character as “ a stereotyped character easily recognized by readers or audiences from recurrent appearances in literary or folk traditions usually within a specific genre such as comedy or fairy tale” (Baldwick 211). An archetype which means the original pattern is defined by Cuddon as “the abstract idea of a class of things which represent the most typical and essential characteristics shared by the class... ‘the product of the collective unconsciousness’ and inherited from our ancestors...”(Cuddon53). Certain characters or personality types have become established as archetypal and the examples Cuddon cites include the rebel, the Don Juan, the femme fatale, the villain, the traitor , the snob , the social climber and the damsel in distress. Whereas a type which is defined

by Baldwick as a fictional character who “stands as a representative of some indefinable class or group of people” (Baldwick 231) is differentiated by Georg Lukacs as typicality which in turn is “a quality combining uniquely individualized with historically representative features”(ibid 231).Some uses of the term type “equate it with the stereotyped stock characters of literary and folk tradition. Others distinguish between this two-dimensional stock character and the more individualized type” (ibid).The deployment of stock comic characters is seen in both tragedy and comedy but they are more effectively realized and pervasively used in comedy. In Matthieu de Vendome’s *Ars Versificatona* a comic character was an allegorical figure who came surreptitiously bearing his head in a humble fashion and did not have any pretensions or suggestions of gaiety. This striking description is a little ambiguous, but the implications are that comedy is unlike tragedy and in comedy it does not look as if things are going to turn out badly.

The meaning of the word humour has gone through a lengthy process of evolution, it began by meaning simply liquid, went on to being a term used by physiologists and has gradually come to mean entertainment and a form of human communication whose primary intent is to make people laugh and feel happy. Humour often varies by locality and does not easily transfer from one culture to another for it relies on a context and not understanding the context dilutes its effectiveness. A great deal of humour is a consequence of language. Being associated with the written word it results from the oscillation of thoughts between the reader and the text. The essence of humour lies in the presentation of something familiar to a person in such a way that they think they know the natural follow - on thought or conclusion, then

providing, doing or saying the totally unexpected. A joke is notoriously not a joke if it needs to be explained and the British or English sense of humour is distinguished by being both elusive as well as allusive. With its emphasis on social values, mores and customs, the British have a sense of shared values, shared experiences and a spirit of mutual belonging and that collective norm provides them the basis of their humour.

In *Poetics*, Aristotle distinguishes comedy from tragedy by saying it deals in an amusing way with ordinary characters in rather everyday situations. To the 4<sup>th</sup> century grammarians Evanthius, Diomedes and Donatus in comedy the men are of middle fortune, the dangers they run into are neither serious nor pressing and their actions conclude happily, in tragedy life is to be fled from in comedy it is to be grasped. The characters in comedy, unlike those in tragedy, are humble and private people, not heroes, generals and kings and two of the main themes of comedy were love affairs and the abduction of maidens. Comedy was also considered a tale containing various elements of the dispositions of town-dwellers and private people who were shown what was useful and what was not useful in life, and what should be avoided. A century later Vincent de Beauvais describes comedy as a poem in which a sad beginning is changed into a happy ending. Dante derives the word comedy from *comos*, 'a village', and *oda* 'a song'; thus comedy is a rustic song. Chaucer describes it in *The Canterbury Tales* when the Knight interrupts the Monk's long catalogue of tragedies saying that he would like to hear a different kind of story:

I seye for me, it is a greet disese,

Where as men han been in greet welthe and ese,  
To heeren of hire sodeyn fal, allas!  
And the contrarie is joye and greet solas,  
As whan a man hath been in povre estaat,  
And clymbeth up, and wexeth fortunat,  
And there abideth in prosperitee;  
Swich thing is gladsome....

(Chaucer 63)

At the Renaissance a very different view of comedy prevailed, for the most part they held the view that the object of comedy was corrective, if not actually punitive. Bergson in his essay on comedy says that comedy begins when the individual solipsistically defies society and goes his own way. Bergson adds that comedy's task is then corrective. Society, via laughter, must rebuke this waywardness, expose it. But Bergson's idea of comedy leaves no room for sympathy, it is more concerned with the idea of satirical reprimand, surely we both laugh at and feel for Bertie, just as we do with Bottom, Don Quixote or Uncle Toby. For Wodehouse's characters go through this paradoxical estrangement and identification - they are defying society in one sense, but also yearning to belong to it in another.

It is argued that comedy frequently arises from the incongruity between our concepts and objective reality, which seems a fair definition of Bertie's plight. A drawing by Tischbein - of a room entirely empty of furniture and illuminated by a blazing fire in

a grate, in front of the fire stands a man whose shadow starts from his feet and stretches across the whole room with the comment beneath the drawing that it was of a man who did not want to succeed in anything in the world, and made nothing of life, but was now glad to cast such a large shadow. The significance in the drawing lies in the comic and forlorn prospect of a man consoling himself with the fantasy that even if he can not be a success in the world , he can be a success in his own home This hits the nail when it comes to Wodehousian characters.

While it is certainly true that many comedies of the Tudor and Jacobean periods had some moral and corrective purpose but quite a few had not. They were intended to give pleasure and entertainment. From the days of the classical comedy of Shakespeare, Jonson and Congreve, stage comedy led to reconciliation scenes where it embraces in chastened guise what it laughs at through most of the play. In his *Comedy and Culture*, Roger B. Henkle points out that the Victorian bourgeois is represented in fiction as laughing at itself, albeit laughing uneasily. He further states that nineteenth century comic writing from Thomas Love Peacock and Douglas Jerrold down to Oscar Wilde and Mar Beerbohm “developed from the engagement of the writer with his social position” ( Henkle 349).

The majority of the Victorian comic writers were so entangled in ambivalent social class attitudes that they could not maintain a consistent comic outlook. For instance Thackeray’s, comic masterpiece on social climbing, *Vanity Fair*, ends by more or less affirming bourgeois class values and conventions, for Thackeray fails to or is

unable to give free rein to Becky Sharp to liberate herself from the class conventions that shape the behavior of the other characters. Unlike the embittered and satiric comedy of Butler, Thackeray and Shaw, Wodehouse's comedy is gentle, self-mocking and ironic, rarely straying into the realms of satire, even when it does stray into satire it is not the bitter satire of the Victorians but a genial and highly comic satire all his own. His *The Code of the Woosters*, *Something Fresh* and *Heavy Weather* sometimes break the comic form and spill into a mildly satiric attack against upper class values, for while Bertie Wooster sheds the hypocrisies of religion and family, what he turns to for salvation is money, material comfort and self-indulgence. By the late nineteenth century, comedy or the comic spirit had gradually begun to include in its ambit journals, newspapers, novels, the new forms of popular and working-class comic culture in the form of musicals and music hall comedies while continuing to be explored in stage comedy. These traditions exercised a very potent and very telling influence on the works of Wodehouse who tended to ignore generic distinctions subsumes several different kinds of humourous writing into the single vast category of the comic novel. His comic fiction is thus both shaped by and critical of class structure. Social class anxieties and the ambivalences of the decaying upper classes are parallel strands in Wodehouse's fiction. Wodehouse deals with middle class myths and sublimations, but he does this with relish and respect perhaps because he understands that all culture "is both shaped by capable of criticizing and even changing the machinery of social order (Brantlinger 187). No one understands better than Wodehouse that "laughter has always been one of the most effective weapons in culture's liberating arsenal" (ibid).

According to Henkle the pattern of development of comic creation evolves through three stages. The first is the stage of attack, indignation, destruction, close to and often indistinguishable from satire. The second in which comedy turns inward and leads to complicity and ambivalence and where the “elaborative as well as its reductive spirit” (Henkle 153) of comic invention is given free reign. At this stage, the comic writer views himself among his creations. The third stage is that of closure in which the author restrains the inventive spirit and tries to bring the work to a formally satisfying resolution. Henkle believes that comedy as a genre moves naturally through these stages. By extending his comic vision through the elaborative phase, the comic genius of Dickens follows and evolves through all these three stages. Comic writing in the nineteenth century as a whole takes something close to this path partly because Dickens more than anyone else determined its shape. Gradually in writers of comic fiction social concerns were slowly but surely supplanted by psychological and aesthetic ones, although the later are invariably criticisms and reflections of the social. From this standpoint, in spite of his mock endings and artificial conclusions, Wilde comes closest to breaking free from bourgeois values than any other writer of his time.

Several trends in comic traditions of nineteenth century British fiction have been identified by critics like F.R Leavis, Raymond Williams and George Levine among others. In his *The English Novel*, Raymond Williams refers to the tradition of autodidact in the comic writings of Dickens, Hardy and Eliot while George Levine in

his *The Realistic Imagination* sees a tradition of Gothic romance running through the century and informing the work of many writers apparently unsympathetic to it. To Henkle on the other hand, the tradition of the comic novel of ideas runs from Peacock through Meredith down to Aldous Huxley parallel to the tradition of humorous verse and nonsense writing of Tom Hood, W.S. Gilbert and Lewis Carroll, all of which seem to have exercised a profound and palpable influence on the comic works of Wodehouse.

Of the two major forms of dramatic experience, comedy has proved more complex and difficult to categorise. “So many are the manifestations of the laughing Muse that one is tempted to speak not of comedy but of comedies” (Nevo 326). Likewise theories of comedy too are wide ranging in scope and number. Essentially the term comedy and the theories of comedy are the province of drama, it is only by extension that these can be applied to the comic novel that is the focus of this study. Theories of comedy have attempted to provide a valid approach to works as rich and different from one another as *Lysistrata*, *As You Like It*, *The Way of the World* and *City Lights*. Almost all of these theories exclude works which are not drama like *Don Quixote*, *Tristram Shandy* and *The Code of the Woosters* but to which a theory of comedy can be applied. So is the case with comic characters ranging from Micawber to Bertie Wooster.

An archetypal comic situation of primitive comedy was that of a grotesquely painted clown entering the arena and promptly falling into a vat or a pail of paint falling all

over him. In comedy the minor mis-chances, mishaps and setbacks of human life are the laughter provoking ingredients of such elemental situations, and the clown represents this distortion or aberration in such a situation. The clown does emerge triumphant in the end, he is both the victim and the victor, since this duality lies at the heart of comic theory, theories of comedy emphasise this essential duality and look at the comic hero and the clown as separate entities.

Theories of laughter, “however different they may seem, all appear to be reducible to...a formula if the terms ‘ugly’ and ‘worse than average’ (Nevo 329) are interpreted as variables”. Several theories of comedy are based on Aristotle’s definition of comedy as “an imitation of man worse than the average; worse, however not as regards one particular kind, the Ridiculous, which is a species of the Ugly” (trans. Bywater 19). The superiority theory of comedy focused on laughter generated by the imperfections of an urban or civic society and is primarily concerned with the mechanics of New Comedy where the comic is the antithesis to the ideally perfect. Hobbes finds the origin of laughter in the “sudden glory” (Nevo 329) which fills the mind with a sense of its own superiority in the degradation, failure or mishap of another, in short in the ridiculous. In Hobbes’ *Philosophy of Mankind* the best man was necessarily the most competent and capable wolf among the wolves. Following in the footsteps of Hobbes, we have in Dryden another proponent of this theory, to Dryden the “distorted and antic gestures” (ibid) of the fool , “ at which we cannot forbear to laugh because it is a deviation from nature”(ibid). Besides, not being applicable to all comic characters , the superiority

theory of comedy also focuses on the cause of laughter rather than at it. Such a concept of comedy and laughter does not seem to apply to the word play that characterise the comedies of Shakespeare and the playful neologisms of Lewis Carroll and Wodehouse.

A variant of the superiority theory of comedy is Henri Bergson's theory that comedy needs to be mechanical and at the same time inherently human, once again bringing to the fore the inherent duality in comedy. Bergson, in his essay *Laughter* says that a typical comic character is someone with an obsession or *idée fixe* and that something can be funny only when it reminds the audience or reader of their own humanity. People laugh at the antics of chimpanzees because of the animal's mimicry of the human. Bergson's theory does not account for the humour that is directed at the social code as in Swift, Wilde and of course Wodehouse. Nor does it account for the element of incongruity that is so essential an element in the humour of Wodehouse:

'That is the fly in the ointment'.

'Yes, sir'.

'Though pursuant on that, I never could see why flies shouldn't be in ointment. What harm do they do?' ("The Code of the Woosters" 227).

According to the incongruity theory of Kant, for something to be comic there must be an established and referential set of cultural, human and social norms , mores, language and literature against which incongruities can be found and provide the basis for humour and laughter. For Kant humour arises “from the sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing” (Monro *Theories of Humour*) as can be seen in this excerpt from Wodehouse:

‘Pop Basset, like the chap... was plainly feeling like some watcher of the skies when a new planet swims into his ken, while Aunt Dahlia and Constable Oates resembled respectively stout Cortez staring at the Pacific and all his men looking at each other with a wild surmise, silent upon a peak in Darien’.

(“The Code of the Woosters” 212)

While the humour in topical references often become passé, Wodehouse circumvents the problem by carefully balancing it with verbal wit and felicity that is as timeless and fresh as any in Shakespeare and Dickens , Wilde or Shaw.

‘I don’t suppose you have read *Lord Chesterfield’s Letters to His Son*?’

‘... well of course I hadn’t. Bertram Wooster does not read other people’s letters. If I were employed in the post office, I wouldn’t even read the post cards’

(“Aunts Aren’t Gentlemen” 74).

Shakespeare, Greene, Waugh, Wilde and Wodehouse are not entirely culture and society specific, they found humour in mankind itself which is why their works continue to be funny hundreds of years later. However, certain aspects of the incongruity theory like literalization, reversal and exaggeration are the cornerstones of Wodehouse's art:

'I'm not sure you are good old Bertie. More like a snake who goes about the place robbing men of the women they love, if you ask me'.

'Certainly not, I protested, learning for the first time that this was what snakes did' ("Aunts Aren't Gentlemen" 61).

The relief theory of humour was brought into prominence by Sigmund Freud's seminal theories on human psychology. According to Freud, humour is a means of circumventing conventional moral restraints by allowing us to give free reign to many of our natural impulses like sex and malice this is done in literature through puns, innuendos and double entendres: " 'You have disappointed me. I thought you had guts'. 'I have, and I don't want Roderick Spode fooling about with them'" ("The Code of the Woosters" 91).

Although both Hobbes and Freud saw the primary source of laughter in the subject rather than the object, Freud alone among the theorists explicitly bases his explanation upon the release of repressed libidinous impulses in a socially acceptable form. Historically too, comedy has been characterized with both explicit and veiled

references to phallic rituals. Even in the *Punch and Judy* shows for children Punch's remarkable nose is seen as having a faint trace of phallicism through a transference familiar in the history of sexual symbolism. Taking the concept of transference in sexual symbolism to a more complex level is Falstaff, whose immense belly makes him more susceptible to the frailties of the flesh. While sexual innuendo is marked by its absence in Wodehouse, his novels are marked by the free play of romantic love, in Wodehouse the secondary plot involves a love affair and its various stages of development, crisis and fruition, with Bertie on the other hand narrowly missing the walk down the aisle. While the romantic impulse is awakened in Bertie, it is chastened, belittled, even purged by the mockery accorded to it by Bertie in the end. Bertie's predominant feeling is one of profound relief not regret at somebody else getting married to the girl he had been engaged to. Just as Falstaff's inexhaustible wit survives the stumbling block of his belly, so too Bertie's foolishness, innocent naiveté and involuntary comical actions enable him to overcome the stumbling block of his code and his overwhelming desire to be a *preux chevalier*.

Renaissance theory about the nature and function of comedy is borne out in the practice of Ben Jonson, who in his *Comedy of Humours* drew on the medieval teaching about the various humours and in most of his plays was concerned with exposing the vices, foibles and follies of the society as he saw it. Marlowe wrote no comedies but there is so much rough and ready comedy in *Dr Faustus* that at times it is almost farcical. One should also mention the somber tragedies of Webster and Tourneur which depend for much of their effect upon comedy of a peculiarly

sardonic and ironical kind.

The Russian linguist Mikhail Bakhtin in his works *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1929) and *Rabelais and his World* (1965) propounded the theory of Carnivalization. Bakhtin argued that carnivalization is the 'liberating and subversive influence of popular humour on the literary tradition' (Baldwick 30). Bakhtin argued that "the overturning of hierarchies in popular carnival, its mingling of the sacred with the profane, the sublime with the ridiculous lies behind the most open, i.e. dialogic or polyphonic literary genres, notably Menippean satire and the novel, especially since the Renaissance" (ibid 31). Carnivalized literary forms allowed alternative voices to dethrone the authority of official culture.

Even when the novelist keeps to a single genre more often than not no single theory of comedy is applicable, and when the novelist, as Wodehouse does, mixes genres and defies the conventional, it becomes even more of a problem to find a single theory which can be said to characterize his works. In Wodehouse, as in Shakespeare, the character of the hero Bertie is valued on account of his capacity for human happiness despite his comic behavior and comic setbacks. Finely balanced between the moralizing of the Sentimental Comedies and the licentious wit of the Comedy of Manners, the character of the comic hero, Bertie, is a combination of moral goodness and wit. Wodehouse respected impulse but he also respected society and social order, while at the same time holds up the absurdities and feelings of both society and the hero for the readers to arrive at their own individual opinions and

conclusions.

Stock characters are found in both folk and literary traditions. The folk stock characters have come down from drama and the performing arts while fiction gives us the literary stock characters. The earliest identifiable stock characters can be traced to Greek Old Comedy which had “three stock characters whose interactions constituted the standard plot: the *alazon* or impostor and self-deceiving braggart; the *iron*, or self-derogatory and understating character, whose contest with the *alazon* is central to the comic plot ; and the *bomolochos* , buffoon....”(Abrams 200). In his *Anatomy of Criticism*, Northrop Frye, added the *agriokos* - the rustic or easily deceived character, Frye also identified the persistence of stock characters in comic plots up to the present day.

Originating in the tropes and liturgical plays of the Middle Ages in England stock characters are an integral part of English drama and fiction, “it was out of such tropes that there arose in the tenth century ,the very first modern play, the *Quem Quaeritis*”(Nicoll 18) which according to him is ‘the embryo of drama’(ibid19).With the secularization of drama came the mysteries and miracles which gave English drama *Dolor* or *Misery* and *Mak* the trickster. Moralities and Interludes provided English drama with types like *Death*, *Everyman*, *Prince Magnificence*, *Rex Humanitus*, *Counterfeit*, *Folly*, *Wit* etc. According to Nicoll the character of Diccon, the predecessor of *Vice*, who in turn anticipated the stock character of the *Fool*, first appeared in *Gammer Gurton’s Needle*. In Robert Howard’s *The Committee* occurs

Teg or Teague a loyal Irish servant who sets the precedent for many similar types in later years.

In imitation of the Latin and Italian masters, English comedy followed the formula of a romantic comedy with love-intrigue as its central theme, and characters of the romantic hero and heroine, the other woman, the loyal servant and the senior family member whose objections stood in the way of true love and of course the joker, jester or clown. Stereotypes have also come down from English folk festivals like mumming plays which were “a primitive form of folk drama associated with funeral rites and seasonal fertility rites, especially the spring festival”(Cuddon 523).The stock characters associated with the mumming plays are a *doctor*, a *fool in cap and bells* and the *Devil*. From the English folk festival Plough Monday have come the stock characters of the *Young Lady* and *Old Dame Jane*. The English pantomime which developed as the result of converging strains from masque, mime, commedia dell’ arte and dance and placed an absurd overemphasis on popular conventions and comic exaggerations. It saw the evolution of the stock characters of *Ebenezer Scrooge / Miser*, the *wise old man*, *rogues* and *vagabonds*, the *gambler*, the *town drunk* and the *male impersonator*. It led to the development of a kind of drama replete with “the dialogue, the situations, the characters, the plot... slick manipulations of what had by long become the stock dramatic properties”(Daiches 1096) best exemplified in the later comic operas of Gilbert and Sullivan.

Stock characters were born in the theatre and therefore a brief look at the roots of

their development is warranted. The origins of comedy can be traced to Greece where it was associated with fertility rites and the worship of Dionysus, thus with *komos*. Aristophanes and Menander onwards comedy came to be primarily associated with drama and their followers Romans Plautus and Terence in imitation of Menander used stock characters and themes of youthful love. Mimicry and make belief being universal human impulses drama developed independently at various times and places in the world's history. While it attained high distinction among the Greeks, it was less popular among the Romans and Italians.

In England, the earliest and the most popular theatrical entertainments were performances of mimes in which coarse humour and indecency were combined, and it soon ran into difficulties with the rise of Christianity, thereafter "the drama of the Middle Ages is not a continuation of Roman drama but a development from entirely new beginnings in the services of the church, first in the more solemn service of the *Mass* and later in the less rigid office of *Matins*" (Malone and Baugh 273). Although, theoretically no deviations from the text of the *Missal* was allowed in the celebration of the *Mass*, "but actually inclusions crept in, at first in the form of musical embellishments at the end of the *gradual*, to which words were in time added and later through amplifications woven into various other chants" (ibid 273). The chants were called tropes and it is through the tropes in the *Mass of Easter* that developed "the germ out of which modern drama grew"(ibid 274). Stock scenes, situations and characters were part of these tropes which were soon imitated and introduced at dramatic representation of Christmas and Twelfth Day scenes. Stock

characters like the *Magi*, *Shepherds* and *Kings* in costumes of Oriental splendor came to be incorporated and culminated in the character of *Herod*, the central figure in the action “we have thus early the model for the ranting *Herod* of later drama” (ibid 275) with its most celebrated example in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. Episodes from the Old Testament were soon enacted in which prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah and Daniel had “their words not merely reported but delivered by separate personages appropriately costumed”(ibid 278) wherein the seeds of stock British characters were sown. As the performances of plays moved from the precincts of the church to the public square, liturgical language gave way to the vernacular.

The next important step in the development of English drama was the presentation of pageants on Corpus Christi Day for it finally led to the mystery cycles where realistic elements verging on the humorous gradually crept in. Three of the most important cycles of mystery plays, the York, Coventry and Chester made very significant contributions to the development of British stock character in this that they for the first time standardized performances with fixed scenes and characters while allowing for variations in plot lines. As far as possible each company took for its pageant some Bible story fitting to its trade, in New York the goldsmiths played the Three Kings of the East, the fishmongers the flood and the shipwrights the building of Noah’s Ark. Humorous elements gradually began to increase till they reach a height of excellence in “the work of the Wakefield master...(which) is unique in medieval drama. Nowhere else do we find such a combination of what we call nowadays good theatre with boisterous humour and exuberance of spirit. Satirical sallies and farcical

situations burst forth without regard to propriety or convention”(Malone and Baugh 281). *The Second Shepherd's Play* best exemplifies this in its use of the folk tale of *Mak*, a notorious sheep stealer, worked up through successive moments of dramatic suspense in which *Mak* attempts to steal and smuggle out a sheep by concealing it in a cradle and trying to pass it off as a baby, the story works up to its dramatic climax replete with “humour of situation, humour of dialogue and incidental allusion”(ibid 281).

The presentation of character types became further accentuated with the coming of the morality plays which dealt with personification of abstract qualities such as *Beauty, Strength, Gluttony* and *Peace* all with generalized classes such as *Everyman, King* and the *Bishop*. The stock characters of the morality also include allegorical characters like the Four Daughters of God - Mercy, Peace, Righteousness and Truth besides the Seven Deadly Sins and the Dance of Death. From *The Pride of Life* the first extant English Morality play to the last and the greatest of the medieval moralities, *Everyman*, it is noteworthy that, the “characters are for the most part not abstractions but individuals generalized to represent a class”, in other words stock characters. “It is said that the Vice commonly degenerated into comic relief is the ancestor of the Fool in Shakespeare” (Mair 60). Again it is with the morality play *Mankind* that we can notice a subtle swerve towards comedy in English drama. The stock characters of the morality plays continue to appear in Elizabethan chronicle plays, comedy and tragedy but practically drops out of sight by the time of Shakespeare, till it makes a temporary revival in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century in the plays like

*The Servant in The House.*

With the Interludes, English drama moves closer to attaining its crowning glory of the Elizabethan age. Heywood's Interludes mark the next milestone in the development of stock characters and English drama, figures in general tended "more to the class type than moral personification and many of these Interludes approached farce or social comedy" (Malone and Baugh 365). Heywood introduced four new social types - the wife, the husband, the clergy and the lover and invested them with a liveliness of action and witty dialogue hitherto not seen in the Interludes and this in turn made them, like the Jacobean masque, dependent for much of their effect upon the brilliance of the social setting.

The next stage in the development of the stock characters occurs in the sixteenth century which witnessed an all-round development of all the literary types, but the greatest strides were made in the sphere of prose narrative and drama. Influenced by the *fabliau* and the *exempla*, a new kind of prose narratives began which were the forerunners of the short story and the novel, these were mostly in the form of "a loosely linked series of dialogues between contemporary type-figures... within a framing narrative" (Brooke and Shaaber 412).

The impact and importance of the Italian comedies and the *Commedia dell'Arte* in the development of stock characters in English drama cannot be overemphasized. In 1566, George Gascoigne translated Ariosto's *I Suppositi* into English as *The*

*Supposes* and the English stage received both the story and the comic figures Lucentio, Tranio, Gremio and the true and false Vincentio immortalized by Shakespeare in *The Taming of the Shrew*. Under the Italian influence were introduced into English drama the characters of the *Braggadocio Captain*, and the absurd *miles gloriosus* and technicalities of dramatic language like malapropism and horseplay which soon became stock characters and aspects of English drama. Hence forward in imitation of the Latin and Italian masters, English comedy followed the formula of a romantic comedy with love-intrigue as its central theme as was so brilliantly shown by Shakespeare in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Much Ado About Nothing* where the formula of two romantic couples at cross purposes is exploited. Wodehouse later was to use the same formula in his comic novels.

The new genre of the romantic comedy gave the English theatre several stock characters like the *romantic hero* and the *romantic heroine*, the *other woman*, the *loyal servant* and the *senior family member* or *senex* whose objections stood in the way of true love and of course the *joker*, *jester* or *clown* whose development reaches its celebrated heights in *King Lear* and *Hamlet*. In fact Gascoigne's lively sketch of English country house life set the stage for the novels of Richardson and Meredith, as well as contributed to the use and development of stock characters in prose narratives. Besides the three chief characters of the *host*, the *charming daughter* and the *guest hero* who soon became types Gascoigne's novella, *The Adventures of*

*Master F J*, presented certain other characters with such distinctness and realism that these two were soon elevated to the status of stock characters.

Miscellaneous prose narratives and quasi-historical novels continued to be written, but the next important stage in the development of stock character types did not take place till the Elizabethan Age which saw several important developments in the field of literature and drama. With the flourishing of trade and commerce, education reforms and increase in the number of theatre going and reading public, it was the golden age of drama. The inclusion of the Latin comedies of Plautus and Terence in the scheme of Renaissance education had a tremendous impact and played a determining role in the development of English drama, particularly comedy. School regulations of 1561, required the performance of Latin plays at Christmas and school boys acted out Roman comedies for improving their conversational Latin, the result was an indoctrination of Plautine and Terentine methods and dramatic ideas with the result that plays like Udall's *Ralph Roister Doister* and Stevenson's *Gammer Gurton's Needle* becoming hybrid plays where characters and settings are partly English and partly Greco-Roman and the structure wholly Latin, for instance "the conventional character types of the Greek and Roman city comedy are most observable in *Roister Doister*, which has a braggart soldier and a parasite, but the leading figure in the play, *Dame Christian Custance*, is as English as the *Wife of Bath*" (ibid 448).

Richard Edwards' *Damon and Pythias* introduced several important innovations in English drama. An interesting blend of elements from classic comedy, tragedy and certain convention of English farce *Damon and Pythias* proceeds to develop the Horacian theory of decorum in character types and to introduce the genre of tragic-comedy. *Damon and Pythias* also introduces the stock characters of the virtuous and self-sacrificing friend or *Preux Chevalier*, the good counselor, the tyrant monarch and the court-wit which were to become the staples of both English tragedy and comedy.

Lyly in his *Euphues : The Anatomy of Wit* which set the trend of euphuistic romances and standards for prose narratives as social chronicles for the next couple of decades. Lyly for the first time used character types from across the class spectrum- the peers and country squire aristocrats rubbed shoulders with the business folk, the bourgeois and the philistines and a class of Englishmen with few pretensions to breeding and none to hereditary elegance, the characterization of which reaches its most famous heights in the novels of Wodehouse in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century all within a vast single framing narrative.

Developments in English tragedy are only incidental to the present study and will be dealt with very briefly. Early Elizabethan tragedy is Senecan tragedy for Seneca influenced the structures of English tragedy more than anyone else. Although the earliest plays modeled on Senecan tragedy were not written for the popular theatre they had a strong and abiding influence on the popular stage by giving it its ghosts

and supernatural elements, its soliloquies and its melodramatic elements. Apart from showing the influence of Seneca the earliest English tragedy *Gorboduc* by Sackville and Norton incorporates several aspects of the Italian dumb shows and the Commedia dell' Arte until it reaches its celebrated climax in with Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* of 1592, where it perpetuates the convention of the genre of the tragedy of blood and thunder, which was a blend of the Senecan, the Italian and the English conventions and provided English drama with several stock characters. "Kyd gave his characters lurid psychological twists of mind Hieronimo, the hero is obscurely mad; Lorenzo, his antagonist is an embodiment of Machiavellian cunning and ruthlessness; Viluppo is a blueprint for all the villains of nineteenth century melodrama; Bell-Imperia is that ever new and dreaded portent the new woman who flouts the mores with the lethal charm"(Brooke and Shaaber 463).

The University Wits Peele, Greene, Kyd, Nashe and Marlowe carried the development of English drama and augmented its store of stock characters. These University Wits introduced into their plays the conventions of a tangled love story set in the backdrop of a rural scenario, Plautine jokes, Interlude devices and classical reminiscences, the woodland setting and idyllic atmosphere and most importantly the characters of the capable and high-spirited heroine and specialized humour types of Dick Coomas and Nicholas Proverbs, which were soon to become stocks of English Comedy. They fused the academic and the popular drama which reached its acme in Shakespeare. No doubt, Greene's comedies, Peele's historical plays and Kyd's tragedies have contributed to the cause and development of English drama. It was

however, Christopher Marlowe who crystallized the conventions of the poetic romantic drama and the character type of the overwhelming all powerful hero in the central characters of his plays like *Tamburlaine* and *Doctor Faustus*.

While the importance ascribed to Shakespeare in the history of English drama is too well known to need reiteration, what needs to be focused upon in the context of this study are two-fold-“The broadest single fact about his poems and early plays is that he is following the lines of least resistance and going with the crowd...”(ibid476)

Dealing with the kinds of classical stories which had the greatest popular appeal, exactly what Wodehouse did in his short stories and novels, nearly four centuries later. In his earliest comedies Shakespeare established the convention of treating simple stupid men with humourous understanding, a convention which was to reach its heights of excellence in his mature comedies.

Since Shakespeare was not a great originator of plots but content to rework the plots he freely borrowed from other sources, he made extensive use of stock characters and conventions. Shakespeare incorporated all the elements of popular drama into his plays , be it ghost with his ghostly prompting to revenge , terrible crimes or a feigned mad man , or the stock characters of low comedy - the clown , the thrifty citizen and his frivolous wife , the gallant , the bawd and the good and bad apprentices. To the readymade stereotypes he freely employed in his plays, Shakespeare also added his own repertory of stock characters. The bold and high spirited heroines who lives paradoxically ended in pathetic surrender like Ophelia,

Desdemona, Juliet, Portia, Cordelia , Lady Macbeth , the celebrated villains Iago , Shylock and Claudius, and his immortal fools Touchstone and Feste who the standards and conventions for all drama that followed.

Of course the exigencies of the Elizabethan stage and its popular favourites, the comic actors, too contributed to the development of the stock character of the fool and the clown. In fact the “Elizabethan stage” according to Mair, “was the ancestor of the modern music-hall” (Mair 62) and it was the Elizabethan’s delight in their comic actors that elevated them to the level of conventions and stock characters and this in turn perhaps explains the magnificent largesse given by Shakespeare to the professional fool in his plays.

The older post Shakespearean dramatists like Beaumont, Fletcher, Marston, Dekker, Davenant, Middleton, Massinger, Ford and Shirley with the exception of Webster , followed the general trends in drama and made no lasting contribution to the development of stock characters. In the revenge tragedies of Webster revenge is rather a fever of the blood than an impulse for justice and in the character of Bosola we have the stock character of the super- spy who will dominate English drama and novel in the years to come. Thomas Middleton is an admirable painter of manners and a vigorous fore - runner of the Restoration comedies. Middleton’s lively humour, his skill in sketching out an intrigue and his knack for easy dialogue finds an echo in the later dramatists and novelists.

Jacobean drama was primarily concerned with tragedy and the influence of Machiavelli which had given Marlowe tragic figures that were bright and splendid, smoldered into a duskier heat in the plays of Webster, Beaumont, Fletcher and Ben Jonson. Webster's plays of lust and crime, full of hate and hideous vengeance created the stock characters of the gloomy, meditative and philosophic murderer, the cynical informers besides his two most enduring stock characters in Flamineo the blood curdlingly real villain and Bosola the super spy.

Ben Jonson's theory of comedy led him to build up stock characters who were embodiments of some humour or eccentricity postulated in the theory of humours. "At first glance his people are contemporary types, at the second they betray themselves for what they are really - cock-shies set up by the new comedy of Greece a type that every 'classical' satirist in Rome or France or England has had his shot at since" (Mair 78). Jonson drew his characters from the Roman comedies and his "muse moves and carries in her train types that have done services to many since the ancients fashioned them years ago." (ibid 79) and includes such stock types as the jealous husbands, foolish pragmatic fathers, a dissolute son, a boastful soldier and cunning slave. Congreve was the next dramatist to have added to the stock of stock characters, in his plays Congreve portrayed the social frauds and foolishness of actual living men and women and in doing so added the dimension of satire to his characters.

The Restoration dramatic mode persisted for some time after the political and social conditions that had bred it had disappeared, before gradually giving way to a more moral and more sentimental kind of drama replete with stock characters and situations. Richard Cumberland, whose sentimental comedy *The West Indian* was immensely popular and “the dialogue, the situations, the characters, the plot... are all simply slick manipulations of what had by long become the stock dramatic properties”(Daiches 1096). Oliver’s Goldsmith’s quaint whimsicality, his tendency to pass unexpectedly from delicate fancy to elfish merriment and his iridescent humour anticipates in many ways the pervading spirit of the Wodehousian novels. Goldsmith too used and developed stock characters in his works. For instance in his *The Vicar of Wakefield* and *The Citizen of the World* we have both the conventional stock character of the genial vicar and his relatives who used him, but also variations from the stock characters in the depiction of an unworldly priest in Moses and Primrose. In *The Good-Natured Man*, Goldsmith’s story of the testing and curing of a generously credulous hero by the devices of a sensible uncle point both back to Jonson and forward to a new kind of comedy of “ nature and humour ”(Sanders 332). In *She Stoops to Conquer* Goldsmith established the prototype of the hero, as a “ bashful and reserved central character ”(ibid 332), a stock character who were to reach dizzy heights in Wodehouse’s Roderick Spode, Gussie Fink Nottle , Stilton Cheesewright and Nobby, Corky, Pauline and others.

Sheridan’s comedies are equally full of action, reversals, misunderstandings, social faux pas and verbal wit. Apart from using the staple stock characters of comedy and

fable like Sneerwell, Candour and Backbite, the booby squire and the tyrant in his *A School for Scandal* Sheridan gave to English drama several immortal stock characters and techniques. Resourceful and bold young lovers apart, Sheridan introduced extraordinary linguistic variety through the inventive oaths of Bob Acres, the inflated Irishisms of Sir Lucius O' Trigger and above all the wonderful Mrs. Malapprop, all of which had a profound and telling impact on Wodehouse who too used linguistic variety to delineate and develop character by personalizing language for his characters.

Eighteenth century tragedy too used stock characters in abundance, they dealt primarily with the misfortunes of middle class characters and this shift in class interest set the pattern for more than a century and half of tragedy. This is the tribulations of ordinary people displayed in a prose drama in which the morality is emphasized by a simple division of characters into black and white and a perpetual uttering of moral platitudes by the good. The eighteenth century was also the great age of pantomime and of spectacular shows depending on ingenious and abundant use of stage machinery. The pantomime developed as the result of converging strains from masque, mime, commedia dell'arte and dance and was often performed as an after piece, but eventually became a full blown and established form of its own and by the nineteenth century became a peculiarly English institution. Italian opera was also popular in England in the early eighteenth century and it was as a patriotic reaction against it that the ballad opera set to native airs and written in English developed until it eventually gave way to the comic operas in the 1760's which

reached their highest water mark with Gilbert and Sullivan in the twentieth century. Their brilliantly vital comic operas like *H.M.S Pinafore* (1878), *The Pirates of Penzance* (1880), *Patience* (1881), *The Mikado* (1885) placed an absurd overemphasis on popular conventions and comic exaggerations.

With Britain becoming a welfare state and the gradual disappearance of the social problems that plagued Britain in the twentieth century there emerged a generation of younger writers who took up the theme of the impossibility of heroism in the modern world. A whole new cast of stock characters suddenly crop up in English fiction like “the beer-drinking provincial student , schoolmaster or university lecturer , surrounded by a philistine affluent society which is utterly indifferent to the job he is doing and implicitly denies the value which such a job stands for , mocking his own cultural pretensions , deriding his own earlier symbols of high culture and setting for the role of clown or cynic or struggling compromiser”(Daiches 1172).

The anti romantic plays and novels of Bernard Shaw used stock characters to debunk standard theories and conventions of comedy. Often Shaw took the accepted pattern of Victorian melodrama or farce or drawing room comedy and at the most effective moment, inverted it by transposing the parts of the conventional hero and the conventional villain and having led his audience to believe that it is a revolutionary or iconoclastic play, inverts it again to show that the conventional hero is, after all, a hero, but in a new sense. The Swiss soldier in *Arms and the Man* (1894) behaved with natural morality, as a soldier actually does averred Shaw not as the conventions of Victorian melodrama would have a soldier behave with romantic morality. This

dramatic device of double inversion was again used in *Man and Superman* (1903) where the hero is built up into a conventional rebellious figure, laughed at, then restored to his revolutionary status. With all his heroes and heroines Shaw's basic concern was not with individual characterization but with problems in character and conduct of universal import, consequently there is a tendency towards the symbolic and the stock in his work.

The French ideal of the *pièce lien faite* lived on till the close of the century and greatly aided in the creation and development of the stock in English drama, the conventions of the *pièce lien faite* were its over-ingenious plotting, its great scene, its conversational exposition and its use of asides, and all of these were employed by Henry Arthur Jones and Sir Arthur Wing Pinero, two of the most successful playwrights of the period. In Jones' plays like *The Silver King* (1882), *Saints and Sinners* (1884) and *Dolly Reforming Herself* (1908) there is genuine high comedy but his criticism of the social system remained superficial. Pinero's plays *The Profligate* (1889) and *The Gay Lord Quex* (1899) were comedies and farces, light in substance and noteworthy for the expertise with which comic entanglements are devised and resolved. In his high society drama, *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* (1893) Pinero boldly questioned both received conventions of sexual morality and standard theatrical representation of such conventions. Through the character and situation of Paula Tanqueray, Pinero criticizes the secondary status of women and the assumptions made about women's roles in a male dominated society.

Wilde's plays were not the direct product of those views of art and life which he expressed in his symbolic story of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) , in his comedies he wrote for the theatre and for commercial success. For his plays, Wilde took the formulae and conventions from Victorian Farce and melodrama and added to it his trademark ultra sophisticated stylization and polished wit. Wilde's use of stock characters and situations, his stylization and witty dialogue is best exemplified in *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895) which has been “ accorded an unchallenged canonical status ” (Sanders 484) attested by the fact that it is “ probably the most quoted play in the English language after *Hamlet*” (ibid 485). In his plays Wilde created the stock character of “ dandified male aristocrat” (ibid 485) and the snobbish central female character and peppered with the conspicuously Wildian witty speeches.

J. M. Barrie's unabashedly sentimental and humourous plays like *The Professor's Love Story* (1894), *Quality Street* (1902) and *The Admirable Critchon* (1902) and *Dear Brutus* (1917) used stock humourous characters like the absentminded professor, long lost lovers , the ghost and the butler , a character type later immortalized by Wodehouse in his Jeeves.

J. M. Synge too attempted to minimize conventional action but not through a stress on ritual but by introducing a language that distinctively echoed the rhythms of Western Ireland by which characters and action are subsumed into something approaching a choric flow through a series of reiterated similes. In *The Tinker's*

*Wedding* (1903), *The Well of Saints* (1905) and his masterpiece *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907) Synge perfected a distinctly Irish comic form which was distinctively different from the Irishisms of Dion Boucicault, the English Victorian conventions and modern realism of Zola and Ibsen and instead created his own vibrant Irish conventions. The plays of Sean O' Casey showcase the Irish stock characters, particularly from amongst the peasantry and fisher folk and his use of traditional stories in plays like *Riders to the Sea*, *Red Roses For Me* and *Within the Gates* carried forward the use of distinctly Irish stock characters.

W.B. Yeats's *The Countess Cathleen* (1892) is an episodic poetic drama which combined folklore elements with a naturalism fueled by ancient and modern memories of injustice. Yeats in his plays attempted to fuse Celtic and Christian traditions and in the process created a new national dramatic style. Yeats's sequence of plays which are concerned with the ancient hero Cuchulain began with *On Baile's Strand* (1903) in which characters reflected certain abstract ideas and in which psychological realism was broken down into oppositions, shadows and reflections. Yeats took aspects of the aristocratic Japanese *Noh* drama which helped him to move away from direct reference to legend and transfigure Cuchulain into a series of patterned words and symbols, a transfiguration emphasized by light effects and by the use of masks, dance and the music of a drum, a gong and a zither.

Galsworthy too dealt with types like rich and poor , country families and the nouveau rich in his plays *The Silver Box* (1906), *Strife* (1909), *Justice* (1910) and *The Skin*

*Game* (1920). Galsworthy's fame as a novelist rests upon *The Forsythe Saga* in which an entire class whose types are represented by the different members of a large family are used, and he created a whole range of stock characters in Soames Forsythe the man of property old Jolyon Forsythe, the disapproving and bewildered spectator, and Irene the emancipated woman. William Somerset Maugham who chose to expend his polished technique for many years upon already well-worn themes often satirized the pose of the "Bright Young Things" (Chew and Atlick 1528) of the post-war generations used stock morality elements in his play *Sheppey* (1933) and the stock character of politicians in *For Services Rendered* (1932). In the twentieth century there emerged a generation of younger writers who took up the theme of the impossibility of heroism in the modern world and with it a whole new cast of stock characters crop up in English fiction. Likewise the New Theatre of Beckett, Golding, Osborne and Kingsley Amis dealt with the theme of the angry young men and portray their heroes as clowns.

The vogue of stock characters in fiction which began with *Character* writing in Greece came to England in the seventeenth century. Basically descriptions of persons with stress on both the physiology and psychology these were the ancestors of the novel. In prose character types from across the class spectrum were first used by Lyly in his work *Euphues*. A pioneer of the modern novel, Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678) reflects the qualities of the great story-teller, his insightful character sketches, his humour, pathos and his visualizing imagination on display here had a profound and lasting impact on the English novel. Close on the heels of the

*Characters* came the periodical essays of Addison and Steele where once again stock characters were used. Beginning with the *Coverley Essays* in the *Spectator* (1711), the novel in one of its forms - that of an omniscient narrator who lays bare the character of the hero - is born. With the decline of the drama in the eighteenth century there was nothing to compete with fiction in the popular taste. Daniel Defoe's techniques of story - telling, his thorough knowledge of men and women from all strata of life, his eschewal of the sentimental and his ability to let the story carry its own implications gave English novel many of its classic characteristics. Aware of the infirmities of human nature, Defoe realized that there was something of a rogue in all men and a bit of rake in most women, he peopled his novels with pirates, pickpockets and loose women, and in his *Crusoe* and *Friday*, *Captain Singleton*, *Moll* and *Colonel Jack* created some of English literature's most enduring stock characters.

Unlike Defoe who painted his characters with an economy of touches and exerted his power of detail to elucidate incidents, Richardson built up his characters slowly “touch by touch and line by line, so that they gradually assume a stereoscopic sustainability” (Compton-Rickett 249) and become real living characters. Richardson's particular talent lay in his portraiture of women, where despite the limitations of conventions, *Pamela* and *Clarissa*, *Harriet* and *Clementi* attain individuality and set new standards in the depiction of women characters in the English novel. Again it was Richardson who introduced sentimentality into English fiction and popularized it forever.

Although Richardson in his novels, added interesting insights and eccentricities to his characters, it was Fielding's quick eye for contemporary types and his amazing power of building out of them men and women whose individuality is full and rounded that gave English novel a rich gallery of stock comic characters, each of them minute studies of character like Joseph Andrews, Parson Adams, Jones, Partridge and Sophia. His lively and vivid style apart, Smollett's greatest claim to fame is his genius for depicting oddities of character. " His seamen are the real thing: Tom Bowling (in *Roderick Random*) and Hawse Trunnion (in *Peregrine Pickle*) have the salt savour of the sea about them , and are real and valuable contribution to the portrait gallery of fiction "(Compton-Rickett 255). Equally memorable are humorous and vital characters of Hatchway and Pipes, although the fact that they lapse into caricature is equally true. Just as Smollett's huge and obvious enjoyment in the portraiture of his characters, and his infinite zest spread the hilarious contagion to his readers, so is the case with many of Wodehouse's characters to name just a few like Gussie Fink Nottle, Mr. Roderick Spode, Mr. Bassett, Mr. Washburn Stoker and Mr. Chichester Clam, not to mention Bertie and Stilton Cheesewright. To the readers with a relish for farce and fresh exuberance there is certainly the same enjoyment to be found in the rollicking extravagances so abundant in the novels of both Smollett and Wodehouse. Again, both presented the vagabond pretty thoroughly, whether as a swaggering adventurer or as a harmless crook out to make a fast buck and raised them to the level of formulaic stock characters.

Structurally Sterne defies every convention of the novel, yet his peculiar blend of humour and sentiment did much to develop and further the art of characterization. Sterne's supreme invention is his Uncle Toby, a lovable, affable, eccentric, whose simplicity, and charm makes him the prototype for Wodehouse's Lord Emsworth.

Jane Austen carried Fielding's art of characterization a step forward. With her first hand knowledge of genteel society and seconded by her intuitive knowledge of the feminine mind, Austen's novels show a delicate and finely humorous feeling for character. The special charm of Jane Austen's novel lies in the fine impartiality with which she individualises and differentiates her characters. Faithful observation, personal detachment and a fine sense of ironic comedy are among Jane Austen's chief contribution to English fiction. Yet curiously enough, for all her minute observation unlike Charlotte and Emily Bronte, Jane Austen rarely describes personal appearance, it is through language that Austen individualises her character. Humour touches and illuminates all her best characters, just as it does with the characters of Wodehouse. Another trait which Wodehouse shares with Austen is the canvas of their fiction, both look at an upper-middle class secure in its values, its privileges and its snobberies. It is a society which defines itself very precisely in terms of land, money and class and accepts that rank is an essential Guinea stamp. This relatively restricted world of their fiction, the social and physical confines of their settings define the limits in which opinions are formed and within which their fools and snobs, bores and gossips, prudes and poseurs must be both understood and

accepted. The illusion of actuality which the works of these two writers suggest demand a response to a society confident of its own codes and values.

The seven compact novels of Thomas Love Peacock (1785-1866) satirically explore the ways in which philosophical or ideological stances sever his characters from the ordinariness and from ordinary human communication. Peacock generally models his fiction on parodies of Socratic dialogues or Platonic symposia placing his thinly, but deftly sketched characters in the relative luxury and seclusion of country houses where they have the leisure to make fools of themselves, just as Wodehouse was to do almost a century later. Another similarity between Peacock and Wodehouse was that both had a specific intent and theory of what a novel should be. On the one hand we have Peacock asserting that there were “ two very distinct classes of comic fictions: one in which the characters are abstractions or embodied classifications , and the implied or embodied opinions the main matter of the work; another in which characters are individuals and the events and the action those of actual life” (Sanders 399).

However, it was with Dickens that the English novel took its most memorable steps towards the development of the stock comic characters. Dickens for the first time dug down into the masses of the people for his subjects, “ apprehended them in all their inexhaustible character and humour and pathos and reproduced them with a lively and loving artistic skill ”(Mair 228). Many of Dickens’ characters like Pickwick and Mrs.Nickleby began by being purely ludicrous develop a serious and

sympathetic individuality. This technique of Dickens of beginning with a salient impression or an exaggerated character trait and then working outward to a fuller conception of characters contributed immensely to the development of the stock characters in English fiction. That Dickens was consciously creating and using types can be seen from the fact that he “ is not only the first great story-teller of the common lives of commonplace people in commonplace surroundings , but remains after countless imitators and brilliant successors, yet facile *princeps*. For he took the trivialities of everyday life , the little worries, the little pleasures , the little hardships , the little comedies , the little tragedies , and irradiated them with his glorious humour and ever - flowing sympathy”(Compton-Rickett 499). The unique quality of Dickens’s wit was his ability to invest familiar things with a strangeness that was not extraneous extravagances but a logical and integral part of the subject. And in this way he created types or stock characters who were types yet not types. To name just a few we have Robin Toodles the rambunctious son of the nurse in *Dombay and Son*, Noah Claypole , the loutish charity boy type; Joe, the crossing sweeper , the contrasting types of schoolboy characters Traddles and Steerforth , the curious mixture of innocence and shrewdness of his child character types epitomized by Nell, Pip and Oliver. Some of his character types include women like Betsy Trotwood , Miss La Creevy and Miss Pross who have little physical charm but have a soundness and sweetness of heart, then we have the *termagants* and *shrews* like Mrs. Joe , Mrs. Snagsby, Mrs. Varden , Mrs. Sowerberry , Mrs. Grummidge , Miss Miggs , Mrs. MacStinger , Mrs. Jellyby and Mrs. Pocket , the many variations on the type of *landlady* in Mrs. Bardell , Mrs. Raddle, Mrs. Crupp and Mrs. Todgers; the

*eccentric and disagreeable* Mrs. Pipchin, the *cads and bullies* like Sikes, Fagin, Jonas Chuzzlewit and Quilp, the *lawyers* Dick Swiveller and Mr. Micawber. All Dickens' characters are type-cast one way or the other, and in this is the special and enduring value of Dickens' stock characters, whose personal magnetism has affected us so strongly that we have been inclined to overlook their weakness and condone their faults..." (Compton-Rickett 505).

There is much of the Dickensian type of characterization in Wodehouse too. Like Dickens, so sure is Wodehouse's touch, so vital his imagination that the credibility or psychological accuracy of a character study scarcely affects its success. Just as Dickens intensely believed in his Pecksniff, Stiggins and Scorge that we too are compelled to believe in them, so too did Wodehouse in his Bertie, Jeeves, Emsworth, Galahad and Basset. Sometimes they are outrageously improbable, but improbable or not they are alive and decline to be dismissed into the limbo, they are enduring types of English fiction.

Charlotte Bronte's portraits of men are idealized pictures of strong, ruthless masculinity. On the other hand, she revolted against accepted conventions of the heroines in fiction as sweet immaculate and meek creatures, she removed the halo of romance from the character of the governess and introduced the type of the plain and dowdy governess.

Thackeray excels as a painter of manners, as an artist of the conventions, and his finest art is seen in his pictures of rogues, both male and female, like the genial rogues Barry Lyndon and Rawdon Crawley and Becky Sharp and his snobs Sir Willoughby Patterns, Colonel Newcome, the happy-go-lucky Pen and the peccant Costigan, who have become permanent members of the portrait gallery of stock characters in English fiction. Trollope (1815-82) aimed to entertain by constructing stories grounded in the kind of life readers recognized. That he had an eye for character types and individual eccentricities is evident in his popular novels that constitute the *Barchester Towers* saga.

George Elliot is at her happiest in characterization, which she did with both subtlety and variety. Her novels are peopled with types, Florentine scholars, half-witted rustics, cultured free thinkers, and men and women of the world like the hedonistic Tito, the fine old Puritan Dr. Lyons, the erratic Gwendolen Harleth, the commonplace Fred Vincy, the rough uncultured Bob Waken and the polished scholar Cassubon, and of course the brilliant character types of her heroines Romola, Maggie and Dorothea, who were to inspire countless imitations in English fiction that followed. A minor novelist who represents a characteristically English genre the sporting novel with remarkable spirit is R.S. Surtees (1803-64) whose novels like *Jorrocks's Jaunts and Jollities*, *Handley Cross*, *Mr Sponge's Sporting Tour* and *Ask Mama* with their lively and humorous pictures of the way of life like country gentry, have a local, period and class humour, which is echoed by Wodehouse in his golf stories. Lewis Carroll's (a.k.a. C.L. Dodgson) *Alice's Adventure in Wonderland*

(1865) and *Through the Looking - Glass* have below a surface of attractive and quaint adventure rich patterns of parody, irony, sentimentalism and symbolic suggestiveness.

In Thomas Hardy's novels we find simple primal character types vividly actualized , rustics like Poorgrass and Dewey, sturdy young countrymen like Winterbourne and legions of passionate wayward women like Eustacia ,Sue, Bathsheba and Tess. "His characters fall into a few recurrent types which reveal his prepossessions" (Chew and Altick 1471). We find in the realization of character in the novels of Thomas Hardy the validation of his conviction that in the upper classes character could be studied and portrayed only subjectively and in the peasantry character could be shown objectively as the direct expression of their inner life. Hardy pioneered the development of the stock character of a woman pitted against the operations of fate, chance and coincidences, as well as the queer convention of a pessimistic romantic setting.

The brief vogue of the Realistic novel in England saw portrayal of character "as they are, not as they would like to be, and where they are, not where they would like to be" (Mair 235) as exemplified by the novels of Moore, Gissing and Bennett did not constitute substantially to the development of stock comic characters. George Moore (1852-1933) who in his works "assimilated the doctrines of roman experimental - naturalism and scientific impersonality in fiction (ibid 1494) discards the Victorian principle of alternation where the interest shifted from one group of characters to

another and instead favoured the restricted point of view in which every chapter focused on the primary characters , just as Flaubert and Henry James did in their novels.

While the novels of Samuel Butler , R.L. Stevenson, Gissing contributed to the growth and development of the English novel, their works have had little or no impact on the development of stock characters their contemporary Charles Lever (1806-72) with his breezy and light-hearted stories of Irish life developed the popular literary figure of the “stage Irishman”(Daiches 1085) and dealt with Irish types in his *Rory O’ More, Handy Andy, Charles O’ Malley* etc . His fellow Irishman George Moore used the method of oral narrative which derives from Irish folk-lore and a multitude of stock Irish characters like *trouvères* and *gleemen*, lords and ladies , clerics and scholars people his works like *Heloise and Abelard* , *The Apostle* and *The Brook Kerith* .

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle created the most famous stock character in all English fiction in *Sherlock Holmes* who was introduced to the reading public in his story *A Study in Scarlet* (1887) popularized the sensational popular literature of crime and took it many notches up from the criminal fiction pioneered by G. W. M. Reynolds , R.L. Stevenson and Wilkie Collins.Kipling used stock characters in both his verse and fiction, most famous of which are the “soldiers three, Mulvancy, Ortheris and Learoyd” (Chew and Altick 1503) and these stock characters helped to bind his heterogenous mass of verse and fiction into a whole. His stock characters include the

soldier, the engineer, the schoolboy and the fisherman all of whom are bound by his rituals and codes. George Gissing (1857-1903) is the most significant figure in the period of transition from the Victorian to the modern novel. Concerned with a depiction of social and class problems through his contemporary characters in *Demos* (1886) and *Born in Exile* (1892) in which he narrates the efforts of a young man to rise above his social class. In almost all his books grim realism is softened by the charm and tenderness with which at least one woman in each story is idealized, in this and his portrayal of the abnormal temperaments Gissing made a break with the traditions of the old “three-decker” (Chew and Altick 1492) Victorian novel, but otherwise he continued in the same mould of the Victorian novel and with its elaborate and often melodramatic plots, its crowd of supernumerary characters, its different groups of people and presentation of old-fashioned intrigue.

The English novel was essentially bourgeois in its origins and throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries it was solidly anchored in a social world. The fact of social class was not only taken for granted but even depended on by the English novelists to whom it provided humour and atmosphere and local colour. Stock characters and situations based on fortune, status and marital positions were all important for the Victorian as well as the eighteenth century novel, and the standards of significance for the novelists was public taste and popular interest. All these set concepts underwent a sea-change with the loss of the confident sense of a common world and move forward subtle private association and interpretations. Mainstream English fiction of the early 1990's saw the gradual marginalization of the religious doubts of

the preceding twenty years as well as the reaction against Victorian repression and social and familial oppression. What remained was a pervasive desire to articulate the unsaid and to give voice to formerly silent social groups and to the conventional, generally ignored petty bourgeois.

In the Edwardian novel, as it came to be known, the common man and woman briefly moved to centre stage before being swept away again by the tides of Modernism. Writers began presenting a world which did not depend on any single criterion but in which everything interpenetrated everything else and the same event or character became important or trivial depending on the author's view or presentation. New concepts of time influenced by William James' view of the "specious present which does not really exist but which represents the continuous flow of the *already* into the *not yet* of retrospect into anticipation" (Daiches 1153) and Henri Bergson's concepts of *durée*, of time as flow and duration rather than as a series of points moving chronologically forward had its impact on plot structures and modes of characterization adopted by the twentieth century novelist. Further new psychological ideas emphasized the multiplicity of consciousness, the simultaneous co-existence of several levels of consciousness in which past experience was retained and by whose retention the whole of personality was coloured and determined. Marcel Proust in France had explored ways of presenting the past as contained in the present, and more and more the new concept of time came together with the new concept of consciousness to develop a new view of character.

The typical character in the novels of Henry James' first phase like *Roderick Hudson* (1875) and *The American* (1877) is the American abroad and the stock theme is the clash between transatlantic Puritanism and European tolerance but James rarely explored the comic aspects of situations developing from the antagonistic traditions. Joseph Conrad's (1857-1924) tales like *Lord Jim*, *An Outpost of Progress* and *Heart of Darkness* which dealt with nature and effects of European imperialism is circumscribed by the limited canvas of his settings - the ship and the sea with its own set of stock characters drawn from its small hierarchical society. His themes were drawn from people he had known or heard, places he had visited and he used the stock characters of the morally degraded Dutchman and in Marlowe a narrator with a phenomenal memory. Conrad used the character of Marlowe as a means of bringing stories close to the reader and as a means of avoiding the old convention of the omniscient author. He created the new convention of the omniscient narrator in Marlowe, *Lord Jim*. Conrad also turned to exotic stock characters and things remote from the occidental experience like the natives of Malay peninsula, which he used repeatedly in varied settings like *An Outcast of the Island* (1896) and *Lord Jim* (1900). His stories of the sea or set at sea used the conventional stock characters of the sailors like Captain M'Whirr, James Wait and the almost Christ-like figure of Singleton while his mysteries like *The Secret Agent* (1907) and *Under Western Eyes* (1911) used the stock characters of the Russian agent provocateur, underworld terrorists and international conspirators and villains.

Arnold Bennett and H. G. Wells developed existing lines of story-telling and diachronic movement in order to delineate the ordinary and wholeheartedly accepted the conventional. Bennett himself advocated in his *The Author's Craft* (1914) that “the mind of the ideal novelist should be permeated and controlled by common sense”(quoted in Sanders 494). This “common sense” (ibid) precluded a break with a received view of character and with the supposed stability of the narrative form. The novels, farcical tales, thrillers and plays of Arnold Bennett are concerned with small lives and the normal give - and - take of family life and the urban lower - middle class characters, an expert craftsman, he was content in general with the older terms of the novel and made no innovation of consequence but continued to use stock characters and situations. Bennett invariably relates his characters to the class and culture that surrounds them but brings them back to acquired habit in his trilogy *Clayhanger* (1910), *Hilda Lessways* (1911) *The Old Wives Tale* and *These Twain* (1916). H. G. Wells, journalist, propagandist and reformer, used fiction as a vehicle for his criticism of existing society and in his comedies of middle - class life like *Love and Mrs. Lewisham* (1900) *Kipps* (1905) and *The History of Mr. Polly* (1910) depict commonplace people with kindly humour and pathos and it is in his scientific fantasies like *The Time Machine*, *The Stolen Bacillus*, *The Invisible Man* that he excelled.

E.M.Foster's novels almost exclusively focus on Edwardian middle-class perceptions. His sometimes bitter social comedy advocated the virtues of tolerance and human decency as well as his concern with the awakening of repressed sexuality

which was looked at from a heterosexual point of view in *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905), *The Longest Journey* (1907) and *A Room with a View* (1908). Foster's conventional characters are set in unconventional settings before reverting back to their comfortable conventional pretentious settings. In his *A Passage to India* (1924) Foster deals with ill-founded sense of racial, social and cultural superiority of the British and of how these are unable to be reconciled and hence doomed to failure.

D.H. Lawrence in his fiction repeatedly used the stock characters of a woman of high social rank and a man of brutish primitiveness, in characters who were overt and covert expressions of Freudian complexes and characters of unsuccessful lovers, and his concepts of man as inheritors of primitive life modes. James Joyce tried to create his own credo and character types in Stephen Dedalus and Molly Bloom, Leopold Bloom and Ulysses. Joyce held that "Ulysses, far more than Hamlet or Faust, was the complete or representative man - son, father, husband, wise, courageous shrewd..." (Chew and Altick 1561). Aldous Huxley's novels are discussion novels, in which the plot is negligible and the action consists in the clash of contrary opinions and his characters invariably intellectual eccentrics each representative of a point of view. The character of each person is implied in the ideas of which he is the mouthpiece, as in his novels like *Crome Yellow* (1921), *Antic Hay* (1923), *Those Barren Leaves* (1925), *Point Counter Point* (1928) and *Brave New World* (1932).

Virginia Woolf who used both impressionism and stream of consciousness techniques with a difference experimented with the use of stock characters by

reversing traditional roles and relationships just as she did with her plots and genres. In her novels Woolf takes the reader from mind to mind through transitional impressions of environment and within the personality the movement is back and forth through time as can be seen in her novels like *The Voyage Out* (1915), *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1927). A determinedly modern novelist who stands somewhat apart from the great practitioners of the modern novel is Ford Maddox Ford. An avowed impressionist, in his novels like *The Good Soldier* (1915) and his tetra logy beginning with *Some Do Not* (1924) and ending with *The Last Post* (1928) he used stereotypes to filter the action of his novels.

Wyndham Lewis stands apart from his contemporaries by his return to the pre-Proustian techniques of characterization and plot construction. Rejecting the concepts of the novelist's surrender to the flux of experience and the call of the unconscious, *The Apes of God* (1930) uses a wide range of character types drawn from amongst contemporary personalities and real life situations. It was Tom Taylor (1817-1880) in his *Our American Cousin* (1858) who developed the "character part" (Chew and Altick 1516) of Lord Dundreary setting the trend of individualising stock characters as opposed to reliance upon conventional stage types.

In her novels, Evelyn Waugh brilliantly explored the possibilities of the hero as a fool, reversing the traditional English view, as old at least as Henry Fielding, that ignorance of the wicked world, innocence, virtue and heroism go together. This

produced an extremely sophisticated and cruelly ironical kind of comedy like *Decline and Fall* (1928) , *A Handful of Dust* (1934) and *Put Out More Flags* (1942). In her trilogy *Men of Arms* (1952) Waugh continued to use variations of the same theme but with an increasingly romantic nostalgia for a lost gentlemanly code. One of the wittiest novelists of her generation, Waugh excelled in the inventiveness of character and incident. Graham Greene in his novels explores the disparities between human decency and theological virtue, between moral intention and irreligious act so as to shatter the traditional conventions that good intention on the humanist level were related to divinely approved human behavior. Greene probes into the nature and possibilities of heroism in *The Power and the Glory* (1940), *The Heart of the Matter* (1948) and *The Quiet American* (1955).

Mainstream English fiction of the early 1990's saw the gradual marginalization of the religious doubts of the preceding twenty years as well as the reaction against Victorian repression and social and familial oppression. What remained was a pervasive desire to articulate the unsaid and to give voice to formerly silent social groups and to the conventional, generally ignored petty bourgeois. In the Edwardian novel, as it came to be known, the common man and woman briefly moved to centre stage before being swept away again by the tides of modernism. Pelham Grenville Wodehouse's novels which almost exclusively focused on Edwardian middle-class perceptions created and sustained, as Waugh so famously observed, an idyllic world which never staled to the end of his career. Renowned the world over for his distinctive use of stock comic characters his conventional characters are set in

unconventional settings before reverting back to their comfortable conventional pretentious settings. Grounded in the quixotic battle between internal fantasy and objective reality P.G. Wodehouse's comedies certainly have a universal dimension but distinct English lineaments of class saturation also emerge. Wodehouse who brought something new to English narrative with his curious mysterious delicacy made his stories creep up on the reader, not frontally, but sideways. Like Shakespeare and Dickens he saw that the metaphorical is central to writing and central to character; that characters expand via metaphor. His similes, metaphors and images are not only poetic, but appear as natural extensions of the characters and speech patterns.

Traditional elements of British comic satire emerge in Wodehouse through the use of techniques like incongruity - where the deliberately inappropriate word or idiom is made to appear well chosen and apt; caricature, the time-honoured technique of denigration through distortion and exaggeration; subversion through the use of a polysyllabic and circumlocutory style; exaggeration by constructing elaborate similes with a built-in element of absurdity, and of course facetiousness where the effective employment of flippancy and drollery produce comic effect. Wodehouse's distinctive use comic stereo-types was made through a unique manipulation of stock conventions, situations and above all through language.

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## Chapter III

### *The Blandings Castle Saga*

In traditional comedy which is plot driven and culminates in the ritualistic resolutions of feasts, marriages or revelations, comic characterization is usually subordinated to the demands of plot and consequently “more effectively realized with stereotypes and one-dimensional characters than anything approaching the realistic portrayal of human emotions” (Stott 39). This privileging of structure and plot over character and dialogue in comedy criticism reinforces the concept of comic characters as types, on the other hand “comic character types are traditionally one-dimensional in the sense that they are unable to learn and change” (Stott 41). Wodehouse who made extensive use of comic characters and comic conventions drawn from the stock-pool of traditional comedy in his novels was also unashamedly formulaic in both their deployment and the kind of plots he placed them in. Like the New Comedy of Menander, prized for the quality of his plots and excellence of characters, and whose concerns were the intimate themes of domestic and private life, Wodehouse's comedies too are woven around themes of romance, sexual desire, money and the imposition of order, and therefore his repertory of stock characters emerge from the household and orbit around this central domestic space. Wodehouse populated his novels with variation of the same basic character types: the profligate

or impractical young men epitomized by Ronnie, Ricky and Freddie ; the *senex* or parent played by Lady Constance Keeble , Lady Julia and Lady Florence , the clever servant Jeeves , the *miles gloriosus* represented by Ashe Mardsen and Hugo Carmody, besides the nervous parasites like Freddie Threepwood and Ronnie Fish, who echo in many ways Theophrastus' *Characters*, thirty sketches of human types embodying particular faults and follies. Unlike the resilient character types of Western fiction, which have “practically remained unchanged for twenty-five centuries” (Frye 271) the mixing of genres by Wodehouse enabled him to make his stock characters more dynamic and varied.

Closely following the *Bertie-Jeeves* novels in the popularity ratings amongst the works of Wodehouse are the novels that constitute the *Blandings Series* or as Wodehouse himself puts it succinctly “the Blandings Castle Saga” (“Something Fresh”<sup>10</sup>) which Wodehouse began with *Something Fresh*, the first of the novels, published in 1915 and ended with *Sunset at Blandings* , his last novel. In his *Blandings Castle Saga* novels Wodehouse wrote about separate but overlapping worlds, each with its own distinctive set of characters, “together they form a roman fleuve vaster than any since Balzac” ( Ring and Jaggard i ). Easdale goes a step further in his assessment of the *Blandings Castle Saga* according to him “ ... with the creation of *Blandings Castle*, he hit upon something original, something different. He was beginning his stride into mid-season form ...” (Easdale 2). The cast of resident characters here is greater than that of the Wooster Canon and consists of three Threepwood siblings-Lord Emsworth , Galahad Threepwood and Lady

Constance Keeble, Beach their butler, Ino the taxi driver, Angus Mcalister the Scottish gardener and Rupert Baxter, Lord Emsworth's secretary. The rest of the characters come and go according to the exigencies of the plot lines. In his *Blandings Castle Saga*, Wodehouse effectively combines two worlds “in the world Wodehouse was to carve out in his books, America is where the money is and England is where social standing is to be obtained. Many of his plots were about the marrying of the two” (Easdale 101). There are several other, features which characterize the novels that constitute the *Blandings Castle Saga*. The devoted Wodehouse reader soon discovers the stock elements that were to form the bed rock of the *Blandings Castle Saga* novels in the first novel *Something Fresh* itself like "a country house of immemorial ancestry, infested by a tyrannical aunt, a paternal butler and a hopeless but amiable young peer" (McCrum 94). Wodehouse for the first time combined both English and American characters with stock settings like laying the opening scene in a club, the hero is someone with athletic inclinations, the hero or the heroine gets an unexpected inheritance; a private detective masquerades as someone else; love at first sight followed by a brief courtship and marriage, the triumph of young love over the obstacles put by the elders, coincidences which strain the bounds of credulity, the theft of a necklace; aristocracy portrayed in an unflattering light.

In the *Blandings Castle Saga*, Wodehouse's use of the formulaic or stock pervades all levels - genre, character, narrative structure and style, he used stock characters, situations, phrases, incidents and plot patterns, not accidentally but intentionally. In the Preface to *Summer Lightning*, he says that his response to an anonymous critic

who had “made the nasty remark about my last novel that it contained ‘all the old Wodehouse characters under different names’ ...” (“*Summer Lightning*” 183) was to ensure that “he will not be able to make a similar charge against *Summer Lightning*. With my superior intelligence, I have out-generalled the man this time by putting in all the old Wodehouse ‘characters under the same names ...’” (ibid 183). Keen to exploit a successful formula Wodehouse resolved to keep his character names the same from then on. Despite the fact that his stock characters fall into a small number of similar groups and are often almost inter-changeable his wonderful capacity for story telling and his consummate mastery over the language make his readers delight in the return of familiar elements, “elements that were usually not original to begin with” (Thompson 8).

“*Something Fresh* was the first of what I might call - in fact, I will call - the Blandings Castle Saga” (“*Something Fresh*” 10 ) was published as a serial by the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1915 before it was published in book form on both sides of the Atlantic. Published as *Something New* in America, it is a comedy with an Anglo-American plot structured around the dual motifs of the theft of a scarab and a house party gathered to celebrate Lord Emsworth's son, Freddie Threepwood's engagement to Aline Peters, the daughter of an American millionaire, J. Preston Peters. The two strands of the story merge to produce comic mayhem and result in “one of those masterpieces you can't alter a comma of” (McCrum 117).

*Something Fresh* which is the first of the nine novels that constitute the *Blandings Castle Saga*, introduces some of Wodehouse's most famous characters like Lord Emsworth , his pig the Empress of Blandings , Beach the butler, the Honourable Galahad Threepwood , Freddie Threepwood and the obnoxious Rupert Baxter, who were to people the *Blandings Castle Saga*. The novel opens with Lord Emsworth absentmindedly pocketing a valuable Cheops of the Fourth Dynasty belonging to his son's prospective father-in-law, J. Preston Peters. Mr. Peters' emotional outburst "I'd give five thousand dollars to get it back. If there's a burglar in this country with the spirit to break into the Castle and steal that scarab and hand it back to me , there's five thousand waiting for him right here ... " ("Something Fresh" 51) sets off the comic mayhem rolling. As word gets out, prospective thieves under various pretexts and aliases descend on Blandings Castle in droves and their various attempts towards recovering the scarab and getting the reward takes the story forward. Ashe Marson and Joan Valentine the hero and heroine of *Something Fresh* are ordinary middle class people who are spurred by the tempting reward of five thousand dollars. Disguised as a valet to Mr. Peters and a maid to Ms. Peters respectively, they travel together to Blandings Castle, meet on the train and on realizing that they were after the same thing decide to join hands and split the reward. In the meantime George Emerson, who is in love with Aline Peters, is also invited to Blandings Castle by Freddie Threepwood her fiancé. Almost simultaneously Freddie engages R. Jones, a private investigator, to ward off any attempts at blackmail by Joan Valentine to whom Freddie had once written poetry to. All the imposters immediately become suspects in the eyes of Baxter who efficiently arrives at the theory that all of them

were after the scarab and sets out to thwart them. However in spite of their best attempts before any of the prospective thieves could steal it, the scarab disappears. Ashe Marson finally restores the scarab to Mr. Peters and the novel ends with the elopement of Miss Peters with George Emerson and the prospect of Ashe and Joan's imminent wedding.

*Something Fresh* which marks a subtle swerve away from the focus on the aristocracy and the upper middle class which characterize his Wooster canon is also noteworthy for its Anglo-American plot and the fact that its hero and heroine belong to the middle class. At the same time the novel also gives a detailed account of England's social structure both deriding and celebrating “English aristocracy's extraordinary resilience” ( McCrum 116 ). In the *Blandings Castle Saga* novels while the aristocracy still holds center stage, it is the upcoming middle class who steal the spotlight. A mixing and blending of genres with romance and its concomitant trials and tribulations is also a pronounced aspect of the novels of this group. The settings however are varied and with each variation a new set of aristocracy and their idiosyncrasy became part of the plot line. While *Blandings Castle* and its residents provide the setting and the skeleton of the plot it is the lives and loves of the middle class or working class characters like Sue, Pilbeam, Ashe and Joan Valentine who are “fellow-serfs” (“*Something Fresh*” 20 ) and the servants to the rising economically powerful upper middle class who flesh out the plots. In keeping with the formulaic note which characterise the *Blandings Castle Saga* we have the typical boy meets-girl story, their happiness held ransom by the controller of the purse

strings and the ultimate triumph of that love. We have Ronald Fish, the nephew of Lord Emsworth romancing Sue Brown, a chorus girl. Ronald's affair sends shock waves up the aristocratic spines of his mother Lady Julia Fish and Aunt Lady Constance Keeble who are outraged by the audacity of Sue wanting to marry above her. It is significant that Ronnie and Sue are backed by the non-knighted Galahad Threepwood and Beach the butler and that Lord Emsworth is blackmailed into relaxing his grip on the purse strings by Ronnie his nephew.

The repeated use of a character type or stock character, literary device or stylistic formula essentially robs it of its power to *defamiliarise* and makes it *automated*. Wodehouse effectively evaded the trap even though he concentrated minutely on the conventional. He attains this unique feat not by attempting to camouflage it all but by *foregrounding* it through the deployment of a wide variety of stylistic devices. Lord Emsworth is a true picture of the English peers who have for so long taken advantage of their privileges to indulge their eccentricities that they have entered the cast of stock figures. That Lord Emsworth and the Duke of Dunstable are stocks of stage comedy is attested to by Wodehouse himself when he says “the ninth Earl of Emsworth was a man who in times of stress always tended to resemble the Aged Parent in an old-fashioned melodrama when informed that the villain intended to foreclose the mortgage.” (“Uncle Fred in the Springtime”109). We find Wodehouse once again alluding to stock aspects of his character in his comparison of the response of the Duke of Dunstable to the gardener’s whistling to that of a “heroine

of an old-fashioned novelette speaking of her lover . (“Uncle Fred in the Spring time” 109).

Lady Constance Keeble is cast in the mould of the classic aristocratic matriarch, she is snooty, sniffily disapproving and highly conscious of her superior social standing and she imposes her will on her brothers. In *Uncle Fred in the Springtime*, Lord Emsworth's wishes are repeatedly over- ridden. She sets such a high store on her friendship that she rides rough shod over her brother, Lord Emsworth to accommodate her friends at Blandings. When he, albeit feebly, objects to the Duke of Dunstable coming to Blandings as a guest once again, she is coolly dismissive. Lord Emsworth almost has apoplexy when Lady Constance Keeble states unequivocally "there's no use arguing about it .If he wants the pig, he must have it." ("Uncle Fred in Springtime" 26) and does not dare to defy her diktat openly. Again when their nephew Ronnie wants to marry a chorus girl, Sue Brown, who is obviously unsuitable in her eyes her authoritative demand to Lord Emsworth is " you are not to consent to this marriage" (“Summer Lightning” 384) Similarly in *Summer Lightning* and its sequel, *Heavy Weather*, Lady Constance Keeble openly supports Sir Gregory Parsole-Parsole in his campaign against her brother the Honourable Galahad Threepwood in their tussle over the infamous Reminiscences.

*Leave It to Psmith* is “a straightforward narrative of the simple home life of the English upper class and is a novel that marks Wodehouse's steady creative transition towards a post-war sensibility” (McCrum 153). With one of Wodehouse's trademarks

motifs, theft, in this case of a diamond necklace, and myriads of thieves operating with the same motive, *Leave It to Psmith* is one of Wodehouse's funniest novels. Continuing with the *Blandings Castle Saga* trait of having middle income working class heroes and heroines, we have Psmith the private investigator turned impostor, turned thief. Eve Halliday a cataloguer at Blandings Castle library turned thief, Miss Peavy, a poet guest turned thief, Mr. Edward Cootes, valet to Psmith turned thief, all suspected and watched over by the efficient Baxter. The tight gripped Lady Constance Keeble's refusal to provide a three thousand pound financial bailout package to her stepdaughter Phyllis and Freddie Threepwood's troubled financial state make him come up with the scheme of stealing his aunt, Lady Constance Keeble's diamond necklace. Freddie's plan was that after getting out a cheque for its value from her they would return the necklace which is warily accepted by her husband, Joseph Keeble. At just this critical juncture with his doubts and misgivings escalating into downright panic Freddie Threepwood chances upon a front page advertisement in the *Morning Globe* which "had something of the quality of a direct answer to prayer" ("Leave It to Psmith" 32). Freddie's extraordinary plan set in motion a typical Wodehousian comedy marked by mistaken identities, lover's spats, thieves outsmarting thieves before calm is restored at Blandings. In a happy twist of events just after Freddie had hired Psmith to steal the necklace, Lord Emsworth mistakes Psmith to be Ralston Mc Todd and invites him to Blandings Castle. Following the theft of the necklace engineered by Miss Peavy and Cootes, the necklace lands at the feet of Eve Halliday who immediately hides it in one of the flower pots to be retrieved later. As Eve makes a nocturnal attempt to collect the

necklace she is aghast to realize it has been stolen and as she returns disappointed , accidentally locks Baxter out. Miss Peavy and Cootes and Freddie in the meantime are desperately looking for the necklace and ransack Psmith's cottage in their efforts to locate the missing necklace, before they are all outsmarted by Psmith. The novel ends with the exposure of the crooks, the sacking of Baxter and wedding bells for Eve and Psmith.

The younger scions of the aristocracy in the *Blandings Castle Saga* too have the elements of the stage-dude in them, particularly in their tendency to frequent clubs and their vocabulary is punctuated with a lot of *what ho's !* and *don't you knows*. They live off the wealth inherited from their parents or wealthy relatives and never do work until and unless they fall in love with someone not approved by the holder of the purse strings, then without exception all of them-Freddie, Pongo and Ronnie earn their bread and butter. In Freddie Threepwood the character traits of the dude and the self- sacrificing knight are merged a merging which makes him aware of what happens to him but the overwhelming generosity of spirit blanks it out. In *Leave It To Psmith*, Freddie has a stake of two thousand pounds in theft of the necklace but when he realizes that Eve is also in the race , he gallantly bows out.

“Psmith, in appearance and very broadly in manner, is a Knut. The Knut was not a Wodehouse invention. He was a fashion-eddy of Late Edwardianism , though his line goes back to the dandy and the fop” (Usborne 83 ) who peopled the Restoration comedies and the plays of Sheridan. A figure of fun in the Edwardian editions of

Punch, a knut was “an amiable cove you could laugh at but hardly despise”, (McCrum 84 ) and had a tendency to use absurd expressions like *Oojah-cum-spif* and *Tinkerty-tonk*. In an essay, “The Knuts of London” which he wrote for *Vanity Fair*, Wodehouse himself wrote that the Knut was descended from “ the Beau, the Buck, the Macaroni, the Johnnie Swell and the Dude and should be distinguished from the Blood” (*Vanity Fair* 43). Wodehouse further elaborated that the Knut was “too listless to do anything energetic” ( ibid) . The language of a Knut according to Wodehouse is “a language of his own”.(ibid).

The basis for characterization in Ben Jonson's drama was his theory of humours according to which the preponderance of blood produced sanguinity, too much phlegm resulted in apathy; black bile led to melancholia and disproportionate cholera caused irascibility and hot headedness, may be said to be in operation in the characterisation of both Lord Emsworth and the Duke of Dunstable. Apathy, except where his pig, the Empress of Blandings, is concerned is a marked trait of Lord Emsworth, a trait reinforced by the use of adjectives like woolly headed and dopey. He is the quintessential absentminded elderly gentleman, a stock of stage comedy. The portrayal of Lord Emsworth is not all that sympathetic, as a representative of the British aristocracy he is painted in an unflattering light. Over the course of the novels the social critique lessens, but he is never an admirable figure. He is weak, cares little for anyone else and evades his responsibilities. The irascibility and hot-headedness that are highlighted in the character of the Duke of Dunstable who figures in *Uncle Fred in the Springtime* is likewise emphasised both in the language used to describe

him as being “barmy to the back-teeth” (“Uncle Fred in the Springtime” 12) as well as in the actions attributed to him like the wrecking of his nephew Horace Davenport’s sitting-room with the poker or the throwing of eggs at the gardener.

*Uncle Fred in the Spring time* which was published by Herbert Jenkins in 1939, has in Uncle Fred one of Wodehouse's most loveable and perhaps also the looniest characters. Continuing with his formulaic motifs of theft and impersonation, and guests who lead from the front in creating mayhem at Blandings Castle is the loony Duke of Dunstable , uncle of Horace Pendlebury-Davenport. Horace in turn is engaged to be married to Valerie Twistleton the niece of Uncle Fred the redoubtable Lord Ickenham who was “loopy to the tonsils” (“Uncle Fred in the Spring time” 8). The novel begins with Pongo stumbling upon the investigation results of Claude Pott who had been hired by Horace Davenport to spy on his fiancée Valerie Twistleton. The Duke of Dunstable who was never a favourite with Lord Emsworth earns his instant and lifelong dislike with his unflattering comments on the Empress of Blandings and things only go downhill when the Duke of Dunstable's suggestion of getting the Empress slim and healthy is endorsed by Lady Constance Keeble. In desperation Lord Emsworth turns to Lord Ickenham in hopes of saving the Empress. Soon Lord Ickenham, disguised as the brain specialist Sir Roderick Glossop , with his nephew Pongo disguised as his secretary and Polly Pott disguised as his daughter in tow reach Blandings Castle. Their plans almost unravel when they meet the real Sir Roderick Glossop also bound for Blandings , on the train. Lord Ickenham, with great ingenuity averts disaster by convincing Sir Glossop that he could oblige Lady

Constance Keeble by conducting a discrete examination of the patient, who also happened to be on the train. Lord Ickenham suggested that Glossop could then get off at the next station, Oxford, which in turn would enable to attend his conference in London comfortably. The thankful Sir Glossop accepts the suggestion, conducts a quiet examination and gets off at Oxford after satisfying himself that Rupert Baxter, whom he was led to believe was the Duke of Dunstable, was quite normal. Just as they heave a sigh of relief disaster and recognition loom large when Lord Ickenham realizes that Lord Bosham, who had come to meet them at the rail station was the same man whom he had relieved of his wallet by a confidence trick. Just as all seemed to be lost, Lord Ickenham with cool confidence introduces himself as Sir Robert Glossop to the vaguely suspicious Lord Bosham who is compelled to accept that Lord Ickenham was in fact Sir Roderick Glossop, whom he had been sent to meet at the station and escort to Blandings Castle. No sooner had the fresh disaster been averted, a bigger one loomed up. Much to the horror of Polly and Pongo, Rupert Baxter who had been examined by the real Sir Roderick Glossop on the train is introduced to the company. Lord Ickenham saves the situation once again by claiming that the real Sir Glossop was in fact one of his delusional patients.

However yet another threat looms up, when Lord Ickenham hears that his niece's fiancé Horace Davenport was a guest at Blandings Castle. Just when exposure seems imminent, Lord Ickenham somehow convinces Horace Davenport that he was in fact suffering from "sublunary medulla oblongata diathesis" (ibid 115) and manages to shunt him off immediately to Bournemouth. Lord Ickenham then turns his hand to

pig-napping and enlists the support of Pongo to remove the Empress from its sty and “then drive it across country to Ickenham , where it can lie low till the danger is past” ( ibid 121) only to be temporarily stymied by Rupert Baxter's confrontation and accusations. All seems to be lost and Lord Ickenham apparently gives up when he succinctly puts it in a nutshell with: “I see. You accuse me of assuming another man's identity, do you, of abusing Lady Constance's hospitality by entering her house under false pretences? You deliberately assert that I am a fraud, an imposter ?” (ibid 125) and in reply to Baxter's emphatic ‘I do’( ibid 125) suavely and coolly replies, “And how right you are, my dear fellow!” ( ibid 125 ). Only to come up with the brilliant theory that “you cannot unmask us without unmasking yourself. But whereas we, unmasked, merely suffer the passing embarrassment of being thrown out by strong-armed domestics, you lose that splendid post of yours ...” ( ibid 127) and effectively silences Baxter. A minor accident the Duke of Dunstable meets with puts an end to Emsworth's wishes to have the Empress snatched. Just as calm appears to prevail at Blandings , another bombshell is dropped that “Polly's minstrel boy. The poet with a punch ... will shortly be with us.” (ibid 138) and that he has been commanded by the Duke of Dunstable to come and steal the pig. To add to the mess Lord Bosham and Lady Constance decide to hire Claude Pott , the father of Polly Pott , to investigate the goings on at the castle. Meanwhile, Ricky who arrives at Blandings and as per the instruction of the Duke was to steal the pig and lodge it in the Duke's bathroom. But a disagreement over the payment scuttles the plan .Not one to give up easily, the Duke then commandeers Rupert Baxter:

‘Ever done any pig stealing? he asked’ .

'I have not' said Rupert Baxter coldly'.

'Well, you start to-day' , said the Duke'.

(“Uncle Fred in the Spring time” 158 )

By chance Lord Ickenham and Claude Pott meet before he reaches Blandings Castle, avert discovery and disaster and are once more in cahoots. Just as things begin to look up Horace Davenport returns “ to Blandings Castle considerable incensed and pretty dashed shirty”(ibid 188) and confronts Lord Ickenham who admits that" it was military necessity" (ibid 188) that had made him do it and proceeds to explain what has necessitated it all. When the news came that Valerie Twistleton was on way to Blandings Castle, Lord Ickenham decides that before things got out of hand they would leave and “unlike the Arabs, who paused to fold their tents before silently stealing away, we will not even stop to pack”(ibid 194). But fate had other plans and Lord Ickenham found himself locked in a cupboard and when let out confronted by Valerie who declared him to be Lord Ickenham. The wily old man then concocts a story to beat all stories by claiming that Lord Emsworth was in love with Polly Pott and that he had helped Lord Emsworth overcome his infatuation by a sustained exposure to Polly “in the surroundings of his own home-with the portraits of his ancestors gazing down at her” (ibid 247) which he had, but now to avoid any unpleasant publicity the girl had to be bought off with three hundred pounds. Thus in one fell swoop Lord Ickenham was able to explain away the reason for his disguise as well as secure money for Polly Pott's wedding. The novel ends with Lord Ickenham and Pongo's departure for London the next day.

As with almost all of his characters in *Galahad Threepwood* and *Lord Ickenham* too Wodehouse has combined the characteristics of several stock characters to produce a typical Wodehousian stock character, that is a stock character with a comic twist. In the character of *Galahad Threepwood* we have the stock character of the sympathetic and powerful aide to the romantic couple, coupled with the stock character of the reformed rake. As one who had lived it up in his heyday, characteristically helpful in solving the problems of those who he has taken under his wing, *Galahad* also takes on the role of a blackmailer so admirably played by Aunt Dahlia in the *Bertie-Jeeves Series*.

The twentieth century witnessed a wide spread use of parody and irony as literary modes accounting for the centrality of artifice and 'playing' as themes in the comedy of the age. The extravagant use of disguises, impersonations and subterfuges in the *Blandings Saga* draw pointed attention to the issue of credibility, and represents the “culmination of knowing meta-theatricality” (Stott 56) and a parody of literary and dramatic conventions. In *Something Fresh* we have Joan Valentine disguised as a maid and Ashe Mardsen as a valet, in *Summer Lightning* we have Sue Brown disguised as Myra Schoonmaker an American millionaires and in *Leave It to Psmith* we have Psmith pretending to be the poet Mr. Ralston McTodd , Miss Peavy pretending to be an admirer of Mr. McTodd all the while working in cahoots with Mr. Cootes to steal the diamond necklace of Lady Constance Keeble which Psmith too has been engaged to steal. Such parodying of stock conventions reaches its height

in *Uncle Fred in the Springtime* where Uncle Fred impersonates Roderick Glossop, Pongo pretends to be his nephew Basil and Polly Pott to be his niece Gwendoline.

What Stephen Greenblatt writes of Shakespeare in his essay *Invisible Bullets* can be seen at play in Wodehouse too. Greenblatt asserts that during the process of transgression and inversion "authority is subjected to open, sustained and radical questioning before it is re affirmed, with ironic reservations, at the close." (Greenblatt 29) Nowhere is this more in evidence than in the Ashe-Peters relationship. Mr Peters an American millionaire is in a piquant situation, Lord Emsworth, to whose son Freddie his daughter is engaged, absent-mindedly pockets one of his valuable Cheops. Now Mr Peters is desperate to recover his Cheops but without antagonizing Lord Emsworth. In response to his advertisement for a personable young man to carry out this delicate enterprise from among the several men who responded Mr Peters picks Ashe Mardsen for the job. Disguised as Mr Peters' valet Ashe Mardsen is brought to Blandings to carry out the plan for a thousand dollars. Right from their first meeting itself Ashe asserts himself during the process of transgression and inversion of authority Ashe successfully imposes his will on his employer most of the time. Equally applicable to Wodehouse is a radically materialist reading of Bakhtin's concept of carnival postulated by Peter Stallybrass and Allon White in *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*. The upheavals caused by the inversion of "the relations of subject and object, agent and instrument, husband and wife, old and young, animal and human, master and slave" (Stallybrass and White 56) reformulate, for a short while, socially sanctioned power relationships and bring the margins to

the centre endowing it with a voice and visibility. The power relationships in Wodehouse show that just as "the carnivalesque is not equipped to topple the dominant order neither is the dominant able to silence the carnivalesque "(Stott 36) Epitomising all this we have the character of Rupert Baxter, a middle-class secretary who not only thought of himself very highly but held his employer in contempt, often being outright rude to the second rungs of aristocracy like the sons and nephews of the Lords and Earls:

Can't you look where you're going? He asked

Eh? said Ronnie.

Clumsy idiot!' said the Efficient Baxter, and was gone.

("Summer Lightning" 380)

In both *Something Fresh* and *Sunset at Blandings* Lady Constance Keeble's dependence on Baxter is a comic inversion that "not only makes visible those excluded from the hierarchy ... but also symbolically foregrounds the tensions and desires that are elided parts of the identity of power itself, revealing power not to be the coherent and all- pervasive monolith of new historicism, but constituted of contradictions and unacknowledged dependencies" (Stott 37).

The Butler is a quintessentially English stock character, exhibiting a feudal loyalty to the master and "most of Wodehouse's butlers are simply stage butlers" (Easdale 135). In the *Blandings Castle Saga*, Beach the butler is the archetypal stock character

in the mould of Ariel and Touchstone .Beach is very conscious and proud of his position in the household and brooks no breach of the unspoken but emphatic barriers between him and the rest of the household staff. Scrupulously conscious of maintaining the proper distance and decorum with their masters in their public interactions, “ ‘I was not aware, sir', said Beach, 'that you were in occupation of the museum. I would not have intruded’ ” (“Something Fresh”109) with the younger set, Beach shares a bonhomie and camaraderie rarely seen in the *Bertie-Jeeves* novels, where Bertie is very much the master and Jeeves the servant. Ready to risk his job and reputation for the young master, Ronald Fish, Beach shows an unswerving loyalty and contribution to the cause of young love even to the extent of being enlisted as a co-conspirator by Ronnie. Beach is someone Ronnie, Victoria and Freddie all turn to for comfort, port and cooperation.

The stock character of the poet in all its variants including such stock ones like that of a wan, listless creature given to theatricalities, moodiness and pretentiousness are also employed by Wodehouse in his *Blandings Castle Saga* novels. We have Miss Peavy, Mrs. Banks, and Ralston McTodd in *Leave It To Psmith* and Ricky in *Uncle Fred in Springtime* who are all invested with various stock characteristics. There is the simpering Miss Peavy who is a great admirer of the poet Ralston McTodd and is on a visit to Blandings Castle on the invitation of Lady Constance Keeble, but expectedly knows little about both poetry and the poet she so admires. Ralston McTodd himself is given to talking in riddles and looking enigmatically sombre when questioned about his craft or technique. Then there is the brooding,

temperamental and highly volatile character of the poet Ricky who habitually combines musing on the intricacies of a pastoral with wading in and laying into villains.

The stock character of the *Private Investigator* is also another repeatedly deployed in the novels of the *Blandings Castle Saga*, and include the lovable Psmith who advertises himself as an investigator capable of executing any kind of investigations with finesse and discretion (“Something Fresh” 31). He is hired by Freddie Threepwood to snatch his aunt Constance's diamond necklace as part of an elaborate plan of getting an easy two thousand pounds he needs to pay some bookies. His role is even more clearly defined in the novel *Psmith, Investigator*. The other *Private Investigator* of the *Saga* is the obnoxious Percy Pilbeam who acts as a foil to Psmith. Pilbeam figures prominently in *Heavy Weather* where he is engaged by the duo of Lady Constance and Lord Gregory Parsloe-Parsloe to filch the infamous memoirs of Galahad Threepwood which reportedly contained highly inflammatory facts about family members and their friends including Lord Gregory Parsloe-Parsloe and such others who had prominent positions in society. Mr Jones and Mustard Pott are the other two *Private Investigators* of the *Blandings Castle Saga* novels *Something Fresh* and *Uncle Fred in Springtime* respectively. Jones is engaged by Lord Emsworth to thwart all attempts by his rivals including Lord Gregory Parsloe-Parsloe to either nobble or steal The Empress of Blandings and Mustard Pott is hired by Lady Constance and Rupert Baxter to investigate and observe Lord Ickenham,

Pongo and Polly who were imposters at Blandings and whom they suspect to have come to steal Lady Constance's diamond necklace.

Gangsters, crooks and criminals as stock characters also figure in the *Blandings Castle Saga* novels. Miss Peavy who is on a visit to Blandings Castle on the invitation of Lady Constance Keeble is in fact a criminal in disguise and in cahoots with Edwin Cootes to steal Lady Constance's necklace. Percy Pilbeam who is purportedly a *Private Investigator* also doubles up as an amoral crook ready to make a fast buck by trying to appropriate the scarab and earn the reward announced by Mr Peter. Mustard Pott too has the twin identities of a *Private Investigator* and card-sharp who regularly and happily cheats his opponents at Persian Monarch.

In his fictional world Wodehouse makes light of class distinctions, but that he was fully alive to its infinite nuances of accent, dress and antecedents is seen in his characters. Starting from Lord Ickenham, characters recall their ancient heritage and ancestry with pride. Lord Ickenham, is outraged when his nephew Pongo suggested that they leave before things got out of hand: “ Clear out? That is no way for a member of a proud family to talk. Did Twisletons clear out at Agincourt and Crecy? At Malplaquet and Blenheim? We Twisletons do not clear out, my boy” (“Uncle Fred in Springtime” 104).

With the intermingling of English and American characters in the *Blandings Castle Saga* and settings the scions of the aristocracy are depicted as having little or no class

consciousness. In the Wooster canon Bertie moves in circles where his social peers move and there is no question of class being a problem. Even the girls whom Bertie gets engaged to frequently, belong to his own social class. However in the *Blandings Castle Saga* we have almost all the girls in the romantic sub-plots, middle class girls, often working for a living and not ashamed of it. We have Joan Valentine in *Something Fresh*, Sue Brown in *Summer Lightning* and *Heavy Weather*, Poly Pott in *Uncle Fred in the Springtime* and Eve in *Leave It To Psmith*, who are all from humble backgrounds and whose marriage causes social upheaval in the aristocracy. Wodehouse was of course supremely ironic and often satirical of all this class awareness. In *Something Fresh*, Wodehouse comments tongue-in-cheek “and it is on record that ( a) fellow footman, Alfred, meeting the Groom of the Chambers in a passage outside, positively prodded him in the lower-ribs, winked and said, , what a day we're having.' One has to go back to the worst accesses of the French Revolution to parallel these outrageous.” (“Something Fresh” 176).

Wodehouse who spent several happy hours of his life as a young boy taking tea with the servants understood, better than most of his class, how the servant mind worked and of how rigidly they followed the code of order amongst themselves. *Something Fresh* is told from the point of view of those below the stairs, with the heroine Joan Valentine and the hero Ashe Mardsen impersonating respectively a lady's maid and a valet. Here Wodehouse provides the reader with minute details of the stifling etiquette in the servants hall. “ It was the custom for the upper servants at Blandings to postpone the start of their evening meal until dinner was nearly over above stairs.

This enables the butler to take his place at the head of the table ...”(“Something Fresh” 96) and similar other scattered references to the rigid codes like " those whose ranks entitled them to do so made their way to the House Keeper's Room" (“Something Fresh” 96) while the " upper servants are expected not only to feed but to congregate before feeding in the Steward's Room" and " Ashe miscalculating degrees of rank ... , was within a step of leaving the room out of his proper turn" (“Something Fresh” 99). *Something Fresh* is also full of ironic complaints of the upper servants, who align themselves with their aristocratic masters about “the Lower Classes (getting) Above Themselves” (“Something Fresh" 102). We have Mr. Beach solemnly agonizing over this fact when he complains to Miss Simpson “with things come to the pass they have come to , and with juries-drawn from the lower classes ... what with all this Socialism rampant. .. What it comes to is that Anarchy is getting the Upper Hand, and the and the Lower Classes are getting above themselves” (“Something Fresh" 102 ).

On the other end of the spectrum we have the aristocrats themselves divided in their opinion on class and rank. While Lady Constance Keeble and Lady Julia Fish are outraged and thoroughly against Ronnie marrying Sue Brown, a chorus girl, Lord Emsworth is unaffected, and Galahad Threepwood all the way with the underdog, and felt it was" a shame to inflict these fine old English family vows on a visitor" (“Summer Lightning” 384) and makes his opinion on the aristocracy abundantly clear with his blunt assessment “The Market value of any member of this family,” said Hon. Galahad , who harboured no illusions about his nearest and dearest, “ is

about three pence-a-penny per annum” (“Summer Lightning” 834). The stock concepts of family honour, traditions and loyalty are also important aspects in the novels of the *Blandings Castle Saga*. Lady Constance may not take her brother's sentiments and wishes into consideration, but when it comes to a question of family honour, the notoriously tight-fisted Lady Constance Keeble relents.

*Sunset at Blandings* opens with Sir James Piper all worked up about having to give up his fishing holiday in Scotland and instead compelled to escort Victoria his sister's friend Florence's step daughter who had " apparently got involved with an impossible young man." (“Sunset at Blandings” 13), Jett Bennison, a poor artist. And consequently Victoria was put under house arrest at Blandings until she came to her senses. However she finds at Blandings an instant ally in her uncle Galahad Threewood . /who too had been incarcerated at Blandings “with gyves upon my wrists ... sent to South Africa later, after I had been well gnawed by rats”( ibid 25 ) for having fallen in love with Dolly Henderson, a singer at the musical halls. Distressed by Victoria's depression Galahad confronts his sister only to be stoutly rebuffed by her. Galahad soon finds a way to smuggle in Jeff when Lord Emsworth wistfully informs him that he was unable to get anyone to paint a portrait of his pig, the Empress of Blandings for “all the leading Royal academicians to whom he had applied had informed him rather stiffly that they did not paint pigs. They painted sheep in Scottish glens, children playing with kittens and puppies, still-life representations of oranges and bananas on plates. But not pigs” (ibid 34 ). Armed with a letter from Victoria, Galahad at once sets off for Dame Daphne Winkworth's

school at Eastbouse and at once appoints Jeff Bennison as the Secretary to Lord Emsworth and thus introduces into Blandings “the latest of the long line of impostors who had sneaked into that stately home of England” ( ibid 41 ) under the name of Wibberly Smith. Parallel to the love affair of Victoria and Jeff is the love affair of Sir James Diper and Diana Phipps. Just after Jeff arrives at Blandings Castle, the imminent arrival of Jeffs friend Claude Duff threatens to derail the whole scheme. Once again Galahad saves the day by intercepting Claude and briefing him about the situation. No sooner had things been settled, than they were “plugged more deeply in the soup than ever” ( ibid 61 ) by the news of Freddie Threepwood's imminent arrival at Blandings Castle. “Freddie is a friend of Jeff and you know what a bubble head Freddie is. The chances that he won't call Jeff in front of your step mother are virtually nil” ( ibid.61 ). So Galahad once more heads for London to intercept and divert Freddie's visit to Blandings Castle only to find on his return Victoria plays old English folk songs after having given the “excellent young man pink slip”(ibid 74). Somehow Galahad restores detente. Calm prevails till Lord Emsworth finds Victoria and Jeff in a lip lock and innocently drops a bombshell on his sister:

Do you remember coming to me something sometime ago and kicking up no end of a row because 'a row because your step-daughter was in love with a fellow named Bennison? .. Well, you can make your mind easy. She isn't in

love with Bennison at all. The chap she loves is my friend Smith. I saw them just now hugging and kissing like the dickens. ("Sunset at Blandings" 93).

Thus alerted Florence at once sets about evicting Jeff Bennison from the Castle.

Besides the stock situation of falling in love with the wrong man or woman is the stock response of the senex to such a situation. When Victoria Underwood was "jugged" ("Sunset at Blandings" 25) and made to do "a stretch at Blandings" (ibid 25). Wodehouse pointedly draws attention to this stock element when he has Galahad Threepwood observe ironically "all old English families have their traditions, and the one most rigorously observed in the family to which Vicky belong ruled that if a young female member of it fell in love with the wrong man she was instantly shipped off to Blandings, there to remain until she came ... to her senses" ("Sunset at Blandings" 25). He tells Vicky, that his own romance with Dolly Henderson, a commoner and music hall singer, had resulted in him being imprisoned at Blandings Castle "with gyves upon my wrist" (ibid 25) before he was shipped off South Africa.

The romantic couple form the central pivot around which the plot revolves in almost all of the *Blandings Castle Saga* novels. The romances are presented and developed in the traditional fashion complete with the objections of the person in charge, confinement and separation of the romantic couple, with one of the pair invariably belonging to a different social strata and hence found unsuitable. In *Something Fresh*, we have Aline Peters who is originally engaged to be married to Freddie Threepwood, eloping with George Emerson, a commoner, while in *Summer*

*Lightning* and its sequel, *Heavy Weather*, we have Ronnie Fish who is expected to marry Myra Schoonmaker, the American millionaires, marries the chorus girl Sue Brown overriding the active objections of his aunt Lady Constance Keeble and mother Lady Julia Fish. To add to the stock situation and stock characters of the senex, is the stock character of the aider and abettor in the form of Galahad Threepwood who is all for Sue Brown and Ronnie's marriage. Cast in the classical role of the stock intermediary is Beach, who does his bit for Ronnie and Sue by providing a sympathy and port, and a hand with the theft and subsequent upkeep of the Empress of Blandings.

The stock rituals and traditions of romance and wooing are presented in the classic form in all the novels of the *Blandings Castle Saga*. Love at first sight, even if it is for the umpteenth time is a stock situation, mined both for its utility in carrying the plot forward, as well as for providing humour and even satire in the novels. Psmith falls in love with Eve Halliday at first sight, in *Leave It to Psmith* and when fates give him a chance to pursue her, he gives ethics and morality a miss and follows her to Blandings passing himself off as Ralston Mc Todd. In *Something Fresh*, Ashe Mardsen and Joan Valentine disguise themselves as a lady's maid and a gentleman's valet enabling them to carry forward their romance. In *Sunset at Blandings* after Victoria is kept under house arrest at Blandings Victoria's beau, Jeff Benison is smuggled into Blandings, disguised as an artist, which is yet another stock corollary of romance and wooing. Although in Shakespeare, one of the romantic couple is in disguise even from the other, in Wodehouse the couple are aware of their identities.

Just as Wodehouse's characterization was formulaic his plots also featured variations on familiar themes. Like in Roman Comedy, Wodehouse in his *Blandings Castle Saga* novels *Something Fresh* and its sequel *Summer Lightning* deals with the forbidden love of a young man Ronnie Fish for an ineligible woman Sue Brown and the complications of their romance in the face of fierce parental disapproval of Lady Julia. However unlike in Roman Comedy where through some contortions of plot a recognition scene reveals her true identity as a citizen, Wodehouse gives his novel an unexpected turn. Sue Brown, the chorus girl whom Ronnie Fish, the scion of the Fish family loves and wishes to marry, is smuggled into Blandings Castle as Myra Schoonmaker an American millionaire's daughter and in the recognition scene there is an unorthodox reversal with the discovery of Sue Brown not only as a chorus girl but also as an imposter resulting in Lady Constance's authoritative demand to Lord Emsworth "you are not to consent to this marriage" ("Summer Lightning" 384), countered by Ronnie's determined "I am going to marry you, whatever happens. And that's that. Good heavens! I can work, can't I?" (ibid 384) an ending which debunks the formula of stories in which problems are "always solved in the inevitable happy ending which celebrated and cemented family unity" (Konstan 1995, 167). In *Sunset at Blandings* too Wodehouse reverses the traditional ending where normally "the conflicting claims of private passion and social responsibility are neatly reconciled" (Konstan 1983, 24) by unexpectedly allowing parental disapproval and authority to triumph when Lady Constance Keeble ends the novel with "I have of course told

Victoria that Mr. Bennison is leaving the Castle immediately” (“ Sunset at Blandings” 103) .

In Wodehouse’s representation of characters, those from the upper classes are presented as marginally superior through a subtle use of language, references, albeit sarcastic, to social standing in his *Blandings Saga* where Wodehouse was bolder in his intermixing of the classes by having the scions of the aristocratic families marry middle class girls by over-riding stern parental disapproval. Marking a swerve away from the *Blandings Castle Saga* in the *Bertie-Jeeves* novels Bertie invariably moves in socially sanctioned circles and his numerous fiancées do not come from outside that invisible glass wall of social class and standing. Bertie is also ever conscious of his position as the master and hence somehow superior to Jeeves , but through twists of plot Wodehouse time and again proves the error of it.

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## Chapter IV

### *The Bertie-Jeeves Series*

Here the primary aim would be to situate Wodehouse's work in the tradition of comic prose writings and to establish him as a writer who was both continuing and contributing to such aspects of the traditions of comedy as the use of stereotypes, conventions, situations and the formulaic in plot and technique. This will be done through an analytic look at Wodehouse's techniques of character delineation in respect of his set primary characters Bertie Wooster and his valet Reginald Jeeves and other recurrent characters and character types of the series like the aunts, pals, fiancées, unpredictable females and the menaces.

It is generally agreed that the *Bertie-Jeeves* stories concern the most popular of Wodehouse's fictional characters and account for approximately fifteen percent of his output. Unlike in the case of the *Blandings Castle Saga* where the novels preceded the short stories in the *Bertie-Jeeves Series* the short-stories preceded the novels. Wodehouse began to explore the genre of the humorous short story and experiment with a new kind of narrator who would narrate his own adventures for these stories. It is worth noting that "all the original short stories in the *Bertie-Jeeves Series* were written before the first of the novels"(Ring and Jaggard ix).The two later short stories *Jeeves Makes an Omlette* and *Jeeves and the Greasy Bird*

represent a *mélange* of several earlier sources. Although the time span in fictional years between the first of the *Bertie-Jeeves* stories and the last *Bertie-Jeeves* novel is approximately five years, by the novels both Bertie and Jeeves have undergone considerable changes in personality, as have such supporting members of the cast like Madeline Bassett , Gussie Fink Nottle and Bingo Little. The ogre of the short stories, Aunt Agatha “my tough aunt, one who eats broken bottles and conducts human sacrifices by the light of the full moon”(“Joy in the Morning” 9) does not actually appear in any of the novels, but her wraith is always lurking just round the corner, as Bertie says “ all the while, unsuspected by Bertram , the shadow of Steeple Bumbleigh was creeping nearer and nearer, and came a day when it tore off its whiskers and pounced” (“Joy in the Morning” 5), Steeple Bumbleigh being the lair of Aunt Agatha. Given the constraints of a short story, an author has the time to fully develop the character of his creations only in the novels and this is particularly true of *Bertie-Jeeves Series* in which several of them started as minor characters in short stories before they ran away with the story and fuelled whole series of books by themselves. The case of Jeeves himself is the most pertinent, Jeeves’ only contribution in his first story *Extricating Young Gussie* was to tell Bertie Wooster that his aunt was on the phone.

*Thank You, Jeeves* is the first full-length *Bertie-Jeeves* novel, although Jeeves' is not in Bertie's employ during much of its action. Here we are introduced to Pauline Stoker, Marmaduke “Chuffy” Chuffnell, J. Washburn Stoker, Roderick Glossop, Brinkley, Police-Sergeant Voules, Constable Dobson, Seabury and Dwight. Set in

Chuffnell Regis the country house of Bertie's pal Marmaduke "Chuffy" Chuffnell the story is about the escapades of Bertie Wooster, Roderick Glossop, Brinkley and Pauline Stoker. Pauline Stoker escapes from her father's yacht and spends the night in Bertie's bed and to make things worse dressed in his heliotrope pajamas. After his valet Brinkley burns down his cottage and runs amuck with carving knives, choppers and potatoes, Bertie is forced to sleep in potting sheds and summer houses. Bertie and Roderick Glossop have their face covered in burnt cork before Glossop and Bertie reach détente.

Also published in 1934, *Right Ho, Jeeves* or *Brinkley Manor* is the second *Bertie-Jeeves* novel. Set in Brinkley Manor the home of Aunt Dahlia the major characters in this novel are Augustus "Gussie" Fink-Nottle, Madeline Bassett, Angela Travers, Aunt Dahlia, Uncle Thomas, Hildebrand "Tuppy" Glossop, and Anatole. Gussie, originally engaged to Madeline, gets engaged instead to Angela infuriating both Aunt Dahlia and her ex-fiancé Tuppy. Much to his horror Bertie is directed by Aunt Dahlia to be the guest speaker at the prize-giving function of the Market Snodsbury Grammar School and when he demurs is threatened to be barred from Anatole's table. Bertie with Jeeves' help somehow persuades both Aunt Dahlia and Gussie that Gussie would be the right choice. Both Bertie and Jeeves spike Gussie's orange juice with gin only to realize to their horror that the teetotaler Gussie was already roaring drunk on whisky and what follows is one of most priceless scenes in comic literature ever written. The novel ends with Bertie's eighteen mile bicycle ride in the night that too without a lamp.

Revolving around the theft of a cow-creamer *The Code of the Woosters* which appeared in 1934, has Bertie accidentally stealing Bassett's umbrella and Gussie losing a leather-bound book containing insults, to disastrous results. Set in Tottleigh Towers the home of Madeline and Sir Watkyn Bassett, besides having the major characters from *Right Ho, Jeeves*, Aunt Dahlia, Gussie Fink-Nottle and Madeline Bassett the other important characters present here are Sir Watkyn Bassett, Stephanie "Stiffy" Byng, the Rev. H. P. "Stinker" Pinker, Roderick Spode, Constable Oates, and the dog Bartholomew

The fourth novel of the series *Joy in the Morning* or *Jeeves in the Morning* is set in Steeple Bumpleigh and revolves round the need for a secret meeting between Bertie's uncle Lord Worplesdon and J. Chicester Clam who after a lot of vicissitudes and comic bungling meet surreptitiously at a costume ball. Zenobia "Nobby" Hopwood, Boko Fittleworth, D'Arcy "Stilton" Cheesewright, Florence Craye, Lord Worplesdon, J. Chicester Clam, and Edwin the Boy Scout make up the cast of this novel.

A novel about the adventures at Deverill Hall involving Cora "Corky" Pirbright, Esmond Haddock, Claude "Catsmeat" Pirbright, Gertrude Winkworth, Madeline Bassett, Gussie Fink-Nottle, Constable Dobbs, Queenie, "Uncle" Charlie Silversmith, and the aunts of Deverill Hall the *Mating Season* is the fifth in the *Bertie-Jeeves Series*. In it we have a slew of impersonations: Bertie impersonates the incarcerated Gussie, Gussie impersonates Bertie, and Catsmeat impersonates a

valet. The sub-plot is about Corky's fascination for Gussie, Bertie's theft of a letter from Madeline, Esmond being a hit at the village concert and Gussie rescuing a dog from Constable Dobbs.

*Ring for Jeeves* or *The Return of Jeeves* is the only novel involving Jeeves but not Bertie. Set in Towcester Abbey the major characters include Bill Towcester, Jill Wyvern, Sir Roderick "Rory" Carmoyle, Monica "Moke" Carmoyle, Rosalinda Spottsworth, Captain C.G. Brabazon-Biggarr. Bill gets chummy with Mrs. Spottsworth to sell her Towcester Abbey, much to fiancée Jill's dismay. Captain Biggar hunts down miscreant bookie "Honest Patch Perkins" Bill while Tubby Frobisher and the Subadar try to dissuade Captain Biggar from proposing to Mrs. Spottsworth.

Once again set in Brinkley Court *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit* or *Bertie Wooster Sees It Through* is notable for the near absence of Jeeves. In this novel Bertie, is obliged to share a table in a nightclub with Florence and after a series of mis-adventures is arrested. Besides the almost *di rigueur* acts of larceny and getting engaged it involves Bertie stealing Mrs. Trotter's fake pearls and Florence being engaged to the poet Percy. The characters include some of the regulars: Stilton Cheesewright, Florence Cray and Roderick Spode or Lord Sidcup besides Percy Gorringe, L. G. Trotter, and Mrs. Trotter

*Jeeves in the Offing* or *How Right You Are*, *Jeeves* is also set at Brinkley Court with Reginald "Kipper" Herring, Roberta "Bobbie" Wickham, Aubrey Upjohn, Willie Cream, Phyllis Mills, Roderick Glossop, Aunt Dahlia as its main characters. Aunt

Dahlia employs Bertie to stop Willie from proposing to Phyllis; Upjohn threatens to sue Kipper's periodical for slander; Glossop goes undercover as the butler Swordfish and Bertie is caught searching Willie's room twice for a cow-creamer while Jeeves disappears for most of the novel.

*Stiff Upper Lip, Jeeves* reunites the cast from *The Code of the Woosters* : Stiffy Byng, Stinker Pinker, the dog Bartholomew, Madeline Bassett, Roderick Spode (Lord Sidcup), Gussie Fink-Nottle, Emerald Stoker, Sir Watkyn Bassett, and Major Plank for another go-around, with agreeable but sometimes mixed results. Here, a black amber statuette is repeatedly stolen and returned; Gussie becomes a vegetarian before rebelling and eloping with the cook, Emerald. Jeeves presents Bertie as the dangerous criminal Alpine Joe. The novel ends with Stiffy securing a vicarage for Stinker; and Spode's engagement to Madeline.

Set in Market Snodsbury, Harold "Ginger" Winship, Florence Craye, Aunt Dahlia, L. P. Runkle, Bingley, Madeline Bassett, Roderick Spode or Lord Sidcup are the principal characters who people *Much Obligated, Jeeves* or *Jeeves and the Tie That Binds*. Florence forces fiancé Ginger to run for Parliament and Bingley, who is mysteriously rechristened after being called "Brinkley" in *Thank You, Jeeves*, steals the infamous Junior Ganymede club book with an eye toward blackmail and Aunt Dahlia inexplicably pinches L. P. Runkle's porringer.

*Aunts Aren't Gentlemen* or *The Catnappers* (1974) is the last of the *Bertie-Jeeves* novels, it is set in Maiden Eggesford. With E. Jimpson Murgatroyd, Vanessa Cook, Orlo Porter, Aunt Dahlia, Major Plank, a cat, and a horse named Potato Chip for its

main characters. The novel centers around Bertie being commanded by various members of the cast alternately to steal and to return a cat.

Almost all critics of Wodehouse have commented on his use of formulaic devices but have looked at them as merely a small-scale stylistic device. However a close analysis of his novels, particularly the *Bertie-Jeeves* and *Blandings Saga* novels show that Wodehouse used these conventions throughout his oeuvre in a “systematically self-conscious way”(Thompson 10) and that he personalized these conventions by stamping them with his own inimitable style, instantly recognised brand of wit , distinctive humour and narrational tone. Wodehouse worked with a limited number of small interchangeable units of situations, characters and phrases, combining and recombining them in ever new permutations and combinations. This compositional method shows us how Wodehouse manipulated a limited repertory of stock characters, language and situations after the initial creation of an intricate plot into which he fitted in his stereotype characters, stock situations and formulaic plots. To Wodehouse the plot was the thread he used to string like beads the discrete units of language, jokes, quotes and clichés and in the process drew upon stock characters, situations and language suited to his plots. Wodehouse took the concepts of “character relations and narrational tactics from Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes series”(ibid) jettisoning the mystery element and casting Jeeves in the role of the problem solver and Bertie as the less astute of the duo. Similarly he took the traditional happy ending of a romance but comically inverted it with Bertie always successfully escaping marriage rather than achieving it in the final scene. It is through this technique of recombining the familiar and the formulaic that

Wodehouse created the framework for creating his own set of conventions, devices, characters and situations. Wodehouse orients his entire writing process to his deployment of all aspects of the stock in his fiction.

The repeated use of a character type, literary device, clichés and formulaic plots essentially robs it of “its power to *defamiliarize* and makes it *automatised*” (Eikhenbaum 95). Even though he concentrated minutely on the conventional Wodehouse effectively evaded this trap not by attempting to camouflage it all but by deploying a wide variety of stylistic tactics and devices to *foreground* it. In both the *Bertie-Jeeves Series* and the *Blandings Saga*, Wodehouse’s use of the formulaic or stock pervades all levels-genre, character, narrative structure and style and their use was not accidental but intentional.

That Wodehouse too used stereotypes in his fiction is indubitable. Wodehouse’s originality did not consist in his invention of genres, it consisted in his recombination, manipulation and intermingling of existing genres associated with popular magazines. His originality lay in his skilful manipulation of language and “characters as stereotypical figures and as units that function for certain repetitive purposes within the tiny set of narrative patterns Wodehouse had worked out” (Thompson 12). He further states that Wodehouse used “characters and incidents as movable pieces that could be substituted easily for each other ” (ibid15).His credit lies in the fact that he was able to turn that tactic in to a complex and original system uniquely his own.“At the level of plot, characters fall into a small number of similar

groups and are often virtually interchangeable . Individual incidents and entire plot patterns come back over and over. One of the most intriguing things about Wodehouse is the fact that his readers are well aware of this repetition and yet delight in the return of familiar elements...” (Thompson 8).No doubt writers of the detective stories and romances also use formulae and their readers too are conscious of the repetitive qualities in these works, “ they would probably not seriously defend them as great writers, as so many knowledgeable people have done with Wodehouse ” (ibid). While romances and mysteries use the formulaic and have predictable stories and narrative patterns, Wodehouse’s original use of language, narrative techniques and his method of *defamiliarizing* the formulaic distinguishes him from the run-of the mill. Equally indisputable is the fact that there are several novel and noteworthy aspects to Wodehouse’s use of stock characters which sets him apart from his predecessors and contemporaries. Dickensian characters had a particular character trait exaggerated and marked out to individualise them, a blend of the macabre, grotesque and pathetic they did not display any markedly comic elements. Jane Austen and Shaw added the elements of realism and an ironic humour to their characterisation. Paradoxically though he successfully transformed the traditional stereotypes into uniquely individualized Wodehousian character types.

The dim-witted upper-class stereotype had been a popular English figure of fun since the early Victorian times and initially Wodehouse simply appropriated this stock comic aristocrat of musical comedy and named him Reggie Pepper, a rough and selfish character who made his debut in a *Collier’s* story, *Disentangling Old Duggie*,

in April 1912. Wodehouse wrote seven Reggie Pepper stories in which he developed the new narrative voice to the point from which “an earthbound fiction took wings” (McCrum 98). Reggie Pepper was later invested with a baffled inner monologue and transformed into the debonair Edwardian butterfly Bertie Wooster. Two of Wodehouse’s most famous creations—Bertie Wooster and Reginald Jeeves, came to life unobtrusively on 18<sup>th</sup> September 1916 when the *Saturday Evening Post* published his short story *Extricating Young Gussie*. The publication of his undisputed classic collection of short stories *The Inimitable Jeeves* in 1922 which marked the beginning of his golden years also saw Wodehouse once more exploiting the formulaic by dedicating short story collections to Bertie and Jeeves and turning them into stock and series characters. The stories in *Very Good, Jeeves* while continuing the emphasis on the conventional by reducing his plots to the demands of the aunts, the plight of old pals and the influences of women Bertie thinks he wants to marry show a continued development of the relationship between master and servant as well. The theme of Bertie’s growing independence from Jeeves that Wodehouse had been exploring in these short stories became the central theme of the first novel the duo had to themselves, *Thank You, Jeeves*.

In the *Bertie-Jeeves Series* Wodehouse used traditional stock characters like the *female menaces* in Aunts Agatha and Dahlia, the *long suffering husband* in Uncles Tom and Percy and the *iron* and *alazon* in Bertie and Jeeves. What is unique about Wodehouse’s use of stock characters is that not only did he make them the centre of focus with the plots and narratives structured around them but that he invested them

with comedic traits. A shrewd mixing of genres and stock traits enabled him to create a wide variety of fresh and original characters who were an amalgam of the old and new. The *iron* of classical comedy is transformed and transmuted into one of Wodehouse's greatest character stereotype in Bertie Wooster. The character of Bertie which is a unique combination of the stage-dude and the innocent fool of medieval comedy is further individualised with linguistic quirks of a burler whose language is a mix of slang and classical allusions, his code of loyalty to his friends, his intense desire to be considered a *preux chevalier*. A close relative of the loser is the fool, a dim, clumsy idiot who caused chaos where ever he went but a character who was sweet-natured, with a strong sense of right and wrong, and in the end, he always triumphed over the villain and won the heart of the pretty girl he shyly fancied. In a very similar mould was Bertie who would get into calamitous scrapes, to the despair of his long-suffering butler Jeeves but the critical difference was far from fancying girls he was petrified of getting even engaged to them though engaged to them he would get in deference to his code. This Wodehousian kind of fool, none too bright, but well-meaning, and with no greater ambition than to be well fed and loved had no trouble winning sympathies.

In the character of Jeeves are seen shades of a second type of fool, the descendant of Shakespeare's 'wise fools'. They are knowing entertainers, whose clowning around disguises a brilliant and original mind, had an instinctive understanding, not just of comedy, but of the absurdity of life. As with the character of Bertie in the *alazon* Jeeves Wodehouse combined the character traits of the fool, the trickster and the

clever servant. But in a masterly twist makes him an amoral character who quotes Shakespeare and the Bible in a staid and pompous manner. Everybody turns to Jeeves for solving their problems and he obliges by hook and mostly by crook.

Contrast lends distinctiveness to the characters particularly when set in juxtaposition in similar situation. The archetypal example of contrast and juxtaposition can be seen in Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, where the contrast between the Knight of Mancha, Don Quixote's follies and impractical idealism and Sancho Panza's wisdom and blunt common sense is accentuated through a close juxtaposition of these two characters. The foolish master and clever servant motif was exploited in the English novel as early as the seventeenth century and is particularly in Fielding's *Tom Jones* where we have the pair of Tom and Benjamin Partridge, followed by Dickens's Mr. Pickwick and Sam Weller, Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson among others, following in this tradition are the *Bertie-Jeeves* novels where we have the contrasting characters of Bertie and Jeeves. "I find" says Wodehouse, "the most difficult thing in writing is to describe a character. Appearance, I mean" ("Performing Flea" 117) but this difficulty is nowhere noticeable in the entire Wodehousian oeuvre, for Wodehouse's characters are portrayed with such consummate skill and so graphically that both physical and intellectual traits merge into character traits. These traits while giving individuality to the characters contribute both to the development of action and in stereotyping the character. Bertie is loquacious, prone to bungling and simple minded, his conversational style is in complete contrast to Jeeves' laconism, intelligence and his formal, stately and even

verbose language which is further accentuated by their close juxtaposition and interdependence in the development of the plot. Without doubt “Bertie, Jeeves and the series’ other characters have their origin in stock figures ”(Thompson 120).

The prototype for the character Bertie Wooster was a character called Reggie Pepper, “Wodehouse the great adapter fashioned the character of Reggie Pepper from that of the standard stage dude, and then modified this figure to create Bertie Wooster”(Easedale 141). The comic stereotype of the dude provides the most recurrent, familiar and trademark characteristics of Bertie’s personality. With his monocle, dress code of spats and flashy accessories, his ardent desire to be a *preux chevalier*, his dialogue peppered with ‘ don’t you knows’ and his sketchy education is instantly identifiable as this comic stock character. But the similarities end there. Wodehouse’s creation Bertie “the narrator with an informal style full of abbreviation, colloquialisms, clichés and half remembered quotations and long words” (Sharma 164) is obviously is not merely just a stage dude. This transformation takes place in slow stages right through the entire series. In the initial stage of his creation Bertie was a frivolous young man under the thumb of an aunt or uncle. A heavy drinker who is never at his best in the morning, Bertie fritters away his time at clubs, bars and country houses. In the second series of short stories Bertie and Jeeves have both grown up a bit. “The Bertie Wooster who appears in this second sequence of the Wooster stories is,” as Kristin Thompson has pointed out, “rather different from the Bertie who made his debut in the first series of 1916-17” (Thompson 159). Bertie still is the Edwardian knut and bachelor playboy but he has “floated free into the

idyllic world of the author's imagination" (McCrum 149). Wodehouse was fully alive to the importance of Bertie's wonderful innocence and naivety, so the young-man-about-town is no longer presented as a brainless drunken never-do-well. With Jeeves' help Bertie defies his relatives and by and large retains his independence. Bertie soon metamorphoses into a self-assured young man increasingly capable of defying his valet. Of course when faced with a crisis he reverts to classic adolescent behaviour where ignorance is followed by denial and finally a cry for help. When Jeeves describes him as 'mentally negligible' his pride is so injured that he strikes out on his own, refusing to ask for help, even though he faces the ghastly prospect of marriage to Honoria Glossop. Bertie's defiance of Jeeves is almost gloating :

'Jeeves, ' I said, ' I'm in a bit of difficulty. '

'If I could be of any assistance, sir'

Oh, no. No, no. Thanks very much, but no, no. I won't trouble you....'

("The Inimitable Jeeves" 47).

The 1920's was one of the greatest alcoholic decades of the twentieth century, and almost none of Wodehouse's characters is indifferent to the temptations of a quiet snort. So Wodehouse's Drones who made their debut during these years made for the bar like a buffalo for a watering hole. The Drones' term for hangover include the *Broken Compass*, *Comet*, *Atomic*, *Cement Mixer* and the *Gremlin Boogie*. Their euphemisms for inebriated include *stewed to gills*, *stinko*, *tanked*, *tight as an owl* and *woozled*. Any Drone identified by one of these adjectives is deeply affiliated to the

Pickwick Club, to Falstaff, Master Justice Shallow and the inhabitants of the Boar's Head Tavern, and, further back to the lost pastoral society of Robin Hood and his *Merrie Men*. Appropriately it is, Bertie Wooster, Drone-in-chief, who had the perfect antidote to a hangover, in Jeeves' famous pick-me-up.

In his *Comedy and Culture*, Roger B. Henkle points out that the Victorian bourgeois is represented in fiction as laughing at itself, albeit laughing uneasily. He further states that nineteenth century comic writing from Thomas Love Peacock and Douglas Jerrold down to Oscar Wilde and Mar Beerbohm "developed from the engagement of the writer with his social position" (Henkle 349). The majority of the Victorian comic writers were so entangled in ambivalent social class attitudes that they could not maintain a consistent comic outlook. For instance Thackeray's, comic masterpiece on social climbing, *Vanity Fair*, ends by more or less affirming bourgeois class values and conventions, for Thackeray fails to or is unable to give free rein to Becky Sharp to liberate herself from the class conventions that shape the behavior of the other characters. Unlike the embittered and satiric comedy of Butler, Thackeray and Shaw, Wodehouse's comedy is gentle, self mocking and ironic, rarely straying into the realms of satire, even when it does stray into satire it is not the bitter satire of the Victorians but a genial and highly comic satire all his own. His *The Code of the Woosters*, *Something Fresh* and *Heavy Weather* sometimes break the comic form and spill into a mildly satiric attack against upper class values, for while Bertie Wooster sheds the hypocrisies of religion and family, what he turns to for salvation is money, material comfort and self-indulgence. By the late nineteenth century, comedy or the comic spirit had gradually begun to include in its ambit

journals, newspapers, novels, the new forms of popular and working-class comic culture in the form of musicals and music hall comedies while continuing to be explored in stage comedy. These traditions exercised a very potent and very telling influence on the works of Wodehouse who tended to ignore generic distinctions subsumes several different kinds of humorous writing into the single vast category of the comic novel. His comic fiction is thus both shaped by and critical of class structure. Social class anxieties and the ambivalences of the decaying upper classes are parallel strands in Wodehouse's fiction. Wodehouse deals with middle class myths and sublimations, but he does this with relish and respect perhaps because he understands that all culture "is both shaped by capable of criticizing and even changing the machinery of social order (Brantlinger 187). No one understands better than Wodehouse that "laughter has always been one of the most effective weapons in culture's liberating arsenal" (ibid).

Stretching back to Xanthias of Aristophanes and extending through such figures as Sancho Panza and Sam Weller, Jeeves as several critics have pointed out, belongs to a general literary tradition of clever servants and is as conventional in origin as his master. It was however Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson who raised the stock pair of the foolish master and clever servant to new heights. Initially Bertie was presented as an amalgam of the dude and frivolous young man. It was however with Bertie's pairing with Jeeves that the foolish traits of his nature began to be emphasised. Jeeves who belongs to a general literary tradition of clever servants is also conventional in origin like his master. Benny Green has suggested that Jeeves is

modeled on Phipps in Wilde's *An Ideal Husband* (Green 218) but as Kristin Thompson says "Jeeves is not as supercilious as Phipps" (Thompson 120). Barrie's *The Admirable Crichton* is widely assumed to be a major source, but it is refuted by Kristin as "there is virtually no resemblance between Crichton and Jeeves beyond the fact that each is more competent than the people he serves" (ibid 121). Wodehouse himself admits to drawing inspiration for Jeeves from Harry Leon Wilson's *Ruggles Red Gap*, in an interview to Richard Usborne he said:

I read *Ruggles* when it first came out in the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1914 , and it made a great impact on me and in a way may have been the motivating force behind the creation of Jeeves , for I remember liking the story very much but feeling that he had got the English valet all wrong. I felt that an English valet would never have been so docile... I thought he had missed the chap's dignity. I think it was then that the idea of Jeeves came into my mind.

(P.G. Wodehouse to Richard Usborne, 13 January 1965, Heineman).

One of Bertie's typical description of Jeeves is " Jeeves was there , messing about at some professional task"("The Code of the Woosters" 174) or " Jeeves was in my room when I got there , going about his gentleman's gentlemanly duties" ("Stiff Upper Lips, Jeeves" 45). Jeeves's duties as a servant include answering the phone, taking care of Bertie's clothes and cars and attending to Bertie's food. Bertie and Jeeves have differing attitudes to the concept of master-servant itself. According to Bertie Jeeves's motto should be service and according to Jeeves it is "Resource and

tact” (Ring & Jaggard 6:136). It is Bertie who always laments the lack or absence of the feudal spirit in Jeeves. Jeeves is not merely a clever valet, loyally protecting and assisting Bertie, but a thoroughly pragmatic and even “occasionally Machiavellian figure” (Thompson 129). On the surface Jeeves’s devotion to the feudal spirit parallels Bertie’s code, noblesse oblige for Bertie and selfless service for Jeeves. While Bertie honestly believes that Jeeves is content to play serf to his chevalier, Bertie on several occasions laments the death or lack of the spirit of service before self :

It was a disquieting thought that in the heat of the argument about , say , soft bosomed- shirts for evening wear he might forget the decencies of debate and elect to apply the closure by hauling off and socking me on the frontal bone with something solid. One could but trust that the *feudal spirit* would serve to keep the impulse in check. (“The Mating Season” 214)

And again in *Joy in the Morning* (5) Bertie says “ I applauded this watch-dog spirit , showing as it did both the kindly heart and the feudal outlook ” and again towards the close of the novel Bertie questions Jeeves’s actions by asking “ I want to know what you did it for. Was it kind , Jeeves ? Was it feudal ? ” (ibid 167).

On the other hand we have Jeeves telling Madeline Bassett “and I find myself in a somewhat equivocal position, torn between loyalty to my employer and a natural desire to do my duty as a citizen” (“Stiff Upper Lip, Jeeves” 176). Bertie-Jeeves

relationship is one that can not be neatly classified into any one category, nor is it a static one, intricately linked to the dynamics of plot construction, it is a relationship which evolves and progresses from novel to novel. Overtones of class distinctions and social commentary are established early on in the series but as the series develops, Bertie and Jeeves come a long way from the dismissive “ what is Jeeves after all ? A valet. A salaried attendant” (“Thank You, Jeeves” 9) in the first novel the duo had to themselves. While Jeeves is faultlessly deferential in his verbal interaction with Bertie and Bertie is outwardly the master in control, in the numerous conflicts over items of clothing, moustaches and musical instruments, obstinacy on the part of Jeeves and capitulation on the part of Bertie endures throughout the series. It is always Bertie who ultimately gives in despite his regular attempts to stick to his stand. This trend is set in the first novel of the series, *Thank You Jeeves*, itself where after Bertie angrily dismisses Jeeves in the first chapter saying :

The Wooster blood boiled over. Circumstances of recent years have so shaped themselves as to place this blighter in a position which you might describe as that of a domestic Mussolini ...There comes a moment when he must remember that his ancestors did dashed well at the Battle of Crecy and put the old foot down . This moment had now arrived.

Then, leave, dash it !

(“Thank You, Jeeves” 9)

Bertie's attitude to Jeeves is ambivalent, ranging from the preemptory "be at the main gate of the Hall from half-past nine onwards. I shall be arriving about then, and shall expect your report" to a wistful desire to confide in Jeeves while at the same time reminding himself of his position as the master "I would have liked to put him abreast of this latest development, but as I say, there are things we don't discuss" ("Stiff Upper Lip, Jeeves" 103). The other subtly nuanced difference between the two classes can be seen in the contrast between the idealism of the upper crust Bertie and Jeeves's cynical, even amoral pragmatism. Although Bertie ultimately succumbs to the emotional blackmail and loyalty to his code: "Well, of course, if a man you've been at private school, public school and Oxford with says he's relying on you, you have no option but to let yourself be relied on" ("The Mating Season" 18) and preux chevalier image: "If a girl thinks you're in love with her and says she will marry you, you can't very well voice a preference for being dead in a ditch. Not, I mean, if you want to regard yourself as a preux chevalier, as the expression is, which is always my aim" ("Much Obligated, Jeeves" 7). Even when he is compelled to commit larceny, he puts up a spirited protest to Aunt Dahlia's various underhand schemes like stealing the cow-creamer. Bertie may be reluctant, but his generosity and the code never allow him to resist for long. But Jeeves has absolutely no qualms as he frequently resorts to trickery and blackmail to solve the problems at hand and to get his way. In *Jeeves in the Offing*, he steals Aubrey Upjohn's speech for Bobby Wickham to use as a blackmail tool against Upjohn. In *The Code of the Woosters* and *Much Obligated*, Jeeves defying the Junior Ganymede club's rules, he gives out information that permits Bertie and Aunt Dahlia to blackmail others. Equally

casually, Jeeves resorts to violence too, in *The Mating Season*, he uses Thomas's cosh to put Constable Dobb's out of commission, while he uses a *Mickey Finn* on the villainous Bingley in *Much Obligated, Jeeves*. Bertie is profoundly shocked when he finds that Aunt Dahlia has stolen a porringer and when his all his moral appeals to her fall on deaf ears, he appeals to Jeeves to persuade her. Dahlia who was unmoved by Bertie's moral appeals, gives in to Jeeves's practical argument that the porringer's value is too low for it to be an effective bargaining weapon. Yet another indication of Jeeves's pragmatism is that although he is willing to go out of his way to help Bertie, he never once in the entire series does so, if his efforts would require a real sacrifice on his part. Whenever there is a conflict between Bertie's goals and his own, Jeeves invariably takes the self-interest route.

Wodehouse used different narrative strategies to both utilize and personalize his use of the stock so that his characters bear traits of traditional stereotypes but form a class all their own. "Jeeves is a close parallel to Holmes and Bertie resembles Watson in several ways" (Thompson 105). As far as their narratorial and narrative functions are concerned Jeeves is cast in the role of the problem solver and Bertie the slow-witted bungler. However, the parallels end there. Unlike Holmes and Watson who are two social equals sharing a flat, Wodehouse brings in class distinction and humour by making Bertie the master and Jeeves the servant, and then going on to prove time and again that Jeeves is really the one in charge. Humour and class distinctions are also accentuated in the innately domestic relationship between Bertie and Jeeves. Two intricate and opposite sets of factors are at work in the Bertie -

Jeeves relationship, one is about power and control and the other is the pair's mutual dependence and affection. In *Thank You, Jeeves*, the first novel of the series itself, Pauline Stoker reports that Jeeves had told her that "Mr. Wooster, Miss," he said, "is, perhaps, mentally somewhat negligible, but he has a heart of gold" ("Thank You, Jeeves" 56). Bertie goes through a period of jealousy of and rebellion against Jeeves in the early novels. As the series progresses, the master-servant relationship gradually evolves into a closer, more equal partnership. "Symbolically the Bertie-Jeeves relationship functions as a marriage, and ultimately, of all the disasters that threatened Bertie, loss of Jeeves is the worst" (Thompson 142). Bertie and Jeeves's mutual dependence and affection creates a cosy bachelor establishment which Jeeves protects at all costs. Whenever Bertie gets engaged to a girl and the possibility of a marriage arises, Jeeves can be trusted upon to break up the relationship. The premise that, for Bertie, keeping Jeeves and getting married are incompatible alternatives becomes explicit in their very first novel where Jeeves makes it clear that he would leave whether or not the wife wanted him to for "... it has never been my policy to serve in the household of a married gentleman" ("Thank You, Jeeves" 195). By linking it frequently to clichéd imagery, Wodehouse makes this functional and symbolic marriage implicit in the Bertie-Jeeves relationship obvious. The recurrent images include Jeeves as shepherd and Bertie as sheep and Jeeves as nanny, Bertie as child. It is equally significant that Bertie invariably links Jeeves with the idea of home.

Wodehouse himself emphasized his use of the formulaic or the stock in his narratives by clubbing his characters into recognizable groups like the male menace, the unpredictable female, the pals, the long suffering husband and the domineering wife and then further accentuates their stock character and similar narrative functions by giving them names that almost rhyme. We have Zenobia Hopwood(“Nobby”),Stephanie Byng(“Stiffy”),Cora Pir Bright(“Corky”),the unpredictable females. We have the aunts Agatha , Julia, Dahlia, Angela; Tom, Henry, George, Clive the plain vanilla uncles while his pals have elaborate, pretentious and pompous surnames and amusing nicknames like Claude Cattermole Pir Bright(“Catsmeat”),George Webster Fittleworth(“Boko”). “With Wodehouse the genius lay in what he did with his raw materials, not the raw materials themselves. He just took what was already readily at hand and fashioned something on which was left his own imprint ”(Easedale 136). He was not a great originator, like Shakespeare Wodehouse too preferred to be an adapter, whether of plots, scenarios, phrases or characters. “Wodehouse’s reputation rests very much on the opposite on the expectedness of his plots...” , for as Easdale continues, “he liked always to have some form of template to work from” (ibid 61).

Wodehouse mixed character traits of different stereotypes to come up with interesting new character types like the melodramatically jealous hero who has shades of a male menace, a determined father-in-law and finally the chivalrous self-sacrificing Knight all rolled into one in the character of Roderick Spode. Madeline Basset has the paradoxical traits of a typical sentimental romantic comedy heroine

but is also highly intellectual. In Gussie too we have an atypical romantic hero who is more interested in newts than the girl he is supposedly in love and he caps it by eloping with his fiancée's cook, Emerald Stoker. Disapproving parents as obstacles in the path of love is replaced by a displaced and disapproving lover in Roderick Spode who in a typical Wodehousean twist has the whole hearted support and approval of the stand-by- fiancé Bertie!

The code of the Woosters being to never let a pal down, Bertie always rushes to the assistance of his friends invariably causing more trouble than help and more often than not ends up losing his fiancé to his friend. Often Bertie's attempts to help his friends are not appreciated and they go through familiar and expected rounds of animosity and misunderstandings before all is resolved. Bertie's schoolmates virtually exist to place responsibility for solving their problems, be it marital or financial, on his shoulders. We have Chuffy in *Thank You, Jeeves* who expects Bertie to help him in clinching a deal to sell his ancestral property, in *The Code of the Woosters* we have Gussie Fink Knottle expecting Bertie to put right his problems with his fiancé Madeline Basset, while the hopelessly clumsy Rev H.P. Stinker Pinker in *Joy in the Morning* wants Bertie to solve both his financial and marital problems and remove the obstacles to his prospective marriage to his uncle's ward, Nobby Hopwood. This premise of Bertie's eternal willingness to help a pal keeps the narrative going in all the novels.

Into the unpredictable female category also fall the young women who are the female equivalents of his schoolmates, these women including Stiffy Byng in *The Code of the Woosters*, Corky Pirbright in *The Mating Season*, Nobby Hopwood in *Joy in the Morning* and Pauline Stoker in *Thank You, Jeeves* assume they have right to Bertie's time, help and money, they trustingly expect Bertie to help them carry through their dangerous and silly schemes aimed at either avenging some perceived wrong or to further their marriage plans, or often both. In *Thank You, Jeeves*, Pauline Stoker unhesitatingly turns to Bertie for help, takes over his bedroom and pyjamas without a by-your leave and assumes Bertie would approve. These stock characters help out in the unfolding of the action, for their unpredictability and their harebrained schemes cannot be anticipated by Jeeves when he initially plans his strategies, he must simply adjust his maneuvers to the problems they create in the course of the narrative. Wodehouse himself often points out and emphasizes their nature, function and as stock characters, for instance in *The Code of the Woosters* after failing to get his point accepted by Stiffy, he says: 'I gave it up. I could see plainly that it would be mere waste of time to try to argue her out of her girlish day dreams, she had the *same type of mind*, I perceived Roberta Wickham...' ('The Code of the Woosters' 71).

Another stock character, the unpredictable female was converted into a unpredictable female menace in the character of Aunt Agatha. All the aunts who people the *Bertie-Jeeves Series* are unique creations in that they all have a firm grip over their nephew, be it through Aunt Agatha's notions of correct behaviour, family honour combined with her pointed homicidal threats; or Aunt Dahlia's sugar-coated but thinly

camouflaged threats, both have similar role in creating the narrative dynamics of the stories, “it is no use telling me there are bad aunts and good aunts. At the core, they are all alike. Sooner or later out pops the cloven hoof.....” (“The Code of The Woosters” 27). In the same novel Bertie compares Stilton Cheesewright to Glossop and Stoker, whereby Wodehouse openly points out the strongly functional similarities among his groups of characters.

While no one doubts that Wodehouse used stock characters in his works, it is in the manipulation, deployment and exploitation of their comic potentialities and investing them with comedic characteristics where none exist, that Wodehouse’s characters form a class of their own. The unpredictable pal, a new stock character category with a comic twist, making it a stock comic character is Gussie Fink Nottle. Among Bertie’s pals Gussie is spectacularly unpredictable and goofy. Unlike the other pals, Gussie unwittingly thwarts all Bertie and Jeeves’s efforts to help him and all the happy endings they arrange for him unravel by the next novel in which he figures. In *Right Ho, Jeeves*, Jeeves plan to send him to propose to Madeline at the fancy-dress ball is scuttled by Gussie’s forgetfulness and incompetence which makes him miss the ball. Later after Bertie and Jeeves both lace Gussie’s orange juices with gin, they discover that the life-long teetotaler is already roaring drunk on whisky. In *The Code of the Woosters*, Jeeves suggests that Gussie could get through a speech by *thinking* about how much he despises his auditors, Gussie takes the advice a step forward by *writing* his contemptuous thoughts down and tops that off by losing the notebook. Finally in his last appearance in *Stiff Upper Lip, Jeeves*, he just as unpredictably

saddles Bertie with Madeline as a fiancé by eloping with Emerald Stoker. Sir Roderick Glossop who was cast in the form of a male menace in the short stories changes from a menace to a pal in *Thank You, Jeeves*. Roderick Glossop was presented in the stock figure of the angry and reluctant prospective father-in-law, but Wodehouse provides this stock character a comedic twist by presenting Bertie as the unwilling suitor and Sir Roderick Glossop as a prospective father-in-law who did not want Bertie to marry Honoria. The traditional stock figure of the angry-prospective-father-in-law was a character who got the prospective son-in-law to marry the daughter even at gun-point. When Sir Roderick Glossop realizes Bertie's true intent is to avoid marriage rather than enter the state of matrimony he metamorphoses into a pal and thereby Wodehouse creates the paradoxical comic stock character of the happy prospective father-in-law. From Sir Roderick Glossop the mantle of the male menace is passed on to Stoker and Watkyn Basset and yet again to Roderick Spode after the exit of Stoker who appears only in *Thank You, Jeeves*. Sir Watkyn Basset and Roderick Spode who are introduced to the readers in *The Code of the Woosters* remain the premiere menaces for the rest of the series.

Within the broad framework of the established traditional British stock characters Wodehouse took the creative writer's liberty of intermingling the traditional character traits to create characters who were traditional and at the same time uniquely Wodehousian. For instance, we have in the character of Roderick Spodes a character who plays the traditional role of a father-in-law, even when he is just a friend of the father-in-law, and he is also a menace threatening Bertie with physical

violence, again he is the self-sacrificing knight who is willing to give up the love of his life to a man he dislikes intensely, so that his love can be happy and finally we have him playing a detective. This creative intermingling of stock character traits was uniquely Wodehousian.

Described by Wodehouse as “*the* supreme Jeeves novel of all time” (McCrum 328) *Joy in the Morning* has all the classic elements of a *Bertie-Jeeves* novel. “The super-sticky affair ...or as my biographers will probably call it, the Steeple Bumbleigh Horror” (“*Joy in the Morning*” 3) weaves together many of his best characters and themes around the plot of Florence Craye’s matrimonial design on Bertie. It contains some of Wodehouse’s favourite comic situations: a blazing cottage, a nocturnal confrontation and a fancy dress ball and achieves the perfect union of style and content. As a love affair goes off the rails, imperiling Bertie’s status as a bachelor and all his efforts to right things boomerang and Bertie finds himself engaged once more to Florence Craye. Set in Steeple Bumbleigh, the lair of Aunt Agatha, the ogre of the short stories, who does not actually appear in any of the novels, but whose ominous shadow hovers all the time over this novel, it revolves round the need for a secret meeting between Bertie’s uncle Lord Worplesdon and J. Chicester Clam, who after a lot of vicissitudes and comic bungling meet surreptitiously at a costume ball. Wodehouse’s manipulation of language and his use of linguistic motifs through recurrent use of the same phrases like fretful porpentine reaches its acme here. *Joy in the Morning* also has some of Wodehouse’s most celebrated similes:

‘ As I paused to disentangle myself from a passing bus, he picked up his feet, tossed his head in a mettlesome sort of way, and was through the door like a man dashing into a railway-station buffet with only two minutes for a gin and tonic before his train goes’  
(“Joy in the Morning” 20).

*Aunts Aren't Gentlemen* or *The Catnappers*, 1974, the last of the *Bertie-Jeeves* novels is set in Maiden Eggesford and centers around Bertie being commanded by various members of the cast alternately to steal and to return a cat. Wodehouse's originality lay not only in his using stage conventions like mistaken identity, impersonations, theft and disguise as his central motifs but also in the fact that he constantly drew attention to the formulaic aspects of his craft. In *The Code of the Woosters* and *Aunts Aren't Gentlemen* not only is the motive of theft the pivot around which the plot of the novels are constructed we also have primary characters like Bertie and his Aunt Dahlia directly are involved in the thefts.

Beginning with *The Swoop* in which Wodehouse parodies the specific subgenre of the war fantasy novel, the British invasion fantasy, each of Wodehouse's books explores a different contemporary genre. Similarly Wodehouse deliberately has one of the many engaged couples closely follow the conventions of the romantic genre as *The Code of the Woosters*.

Wodehouse mixed select conventions from multiple genres and used conventions of the stage farce, romance, comedy, the musical comedy, and the detective story,

specifically the Holmes-Watson series of Doyle. In his depiction of the Bertie-Jeeves relationship Wodehouse was not only using the comic potential of a domestic relationship by ensuring that Bertie would not get married, it also allowed the series to go on indefinitely. The emphasis on courtship places the series, apparently, squarely in the romance genre but it is seen that even when Wodehouse uses the conventions of the romance he mocks it by structuring the action of the narratives around tiffs regarding something ridiculous or absurd. Similarly he also deliberately has one of the many engaged couples closely follow the conventions of the romantic genre. We see that in Wodehouse's scheme of things Bertie's long-range goal is to avoid marriage, and although his friends too are successfully engaged, they seldom walk down the aisle. Again the comedic elements put the series in the comic romantic fiction genre, which was not an established genre in the popular magazines of the times. Strong plot lines and effective strategies for delay are also created by Bertie's jealousy of and rebellion against Jeeves. Bertie's fascination for the banjolele and his stubborn refusal to give it up. Despite Jeeve's threat to resign sets the tone for conflict and delay in *Right Ho, Jeeves* and *Thank You, Jeeves*. The comic parallel to a romance is also emphasized in Bertie and Jeeves' quarrels, separation and eventual reunion, all with little acrimony after the initial clash of wills in *Thank You, Jeeves*. This comic parallel is in evidence in *Right Ho, Jeeves* too when Bertie suggests that Angela is heartbroken and hence Tuppy should apologise to her, and Tuppy replies that she does not look it, Wodehouse draws an avert parallel to the lovers tiff and the quarrels between Bertie and Jeeves, "wearing the mask, no doubt. Jeeves does that when I assert my authority" (*Right Ho, Jeeves*, 67).

The plot of *Thank You Jeeves*, the first novel of the series, is constructed like a classical romance in which a couple quarrel, separate and are finally reunited. It opens with Bertie Wooster developing a sudden fascination for the banjolele and to playing it at all hours, resulting in protests from other members of the housing society he lives in. Bertie's refusal to give up playing the banjolele and his decision to retire to a seaside cottage, Chuffnel Regis results in Jeeves' resignation and Bertie's haughty acceptance of it. The second line of the plot now comes into play. Bertie Wooster is surprised and upset by the presence of J.W. Stoker, his daughter Pauline, Sir Roderick Glossop at his friend Chuffy's house, for Bertie had been once engaged to Pauline Stoker and he now finds that she is the love of Chuffy's life. Bertie has to reassure both Pop Stoker and Chuffy that all he now feels for Pauline is pure brotherly love, a fact neither of them are willing to accept. Bertie now finds himself thrown together with Pauline in progressively embarrassing circumstances. Things go downhill for Bertie when Pauline Stoker escapes from her father's yacht and spends the night in his bed and to make things worse dressed in his "heliotrope pyjamas with the old gold stripe" ("Thank You, Jeeves" 54). After which Pop Stoker holds Bertie hostage on board his yacht insisting that Bertie marry his daughter, for she loved him. Jeeves then arranges for Bertie's escape from the yacht by disguising him as a negro minstrel. Bertie arrives at his cottage, his face covered in black boot-polish, only for a drunken Brinkley to mistake him for the devil and chase him all over the place with a carving knife. Jeeves who is replaced by Brinkley, whose role from that point onwards is confined to chasing Bertie, Roderick Glossop and J.W. Stoker with a carving knife, a chopper and potatoes respectively. As Bertie tries to

catch his forty winks he is roused by Sergeant Voules and Constable Dobson first from his car , then the potting shed and finally the lawns of Chuffnell Hall , before he finds peace and respite in the Summer House. In farce of a high order Bertie's cottage and banjo are burned to the ground, Sir Roderick is arrested, Pauline and Chuffy engaged and Jeeves returns as Bertie's valet once more. Right from this first novel itself Wodehouse self-consciously and pointedly uses the conventional as seen in the manner in which Jeeves and Bertie narrate a series of set pieces which owes everything to the conventions of classical Greek theatre. Not only does *Thank You, Jeeves* unite the levity and verve of comedy with the intricacy of a short story and Wodehouse's experience in musical theatre, Voules and Dobson, the two policemen also allusively connect the farce of Dogberry and Verges in *Much Ado about Nothing* and Constable Dull of *Love's Labours Lost*.

Wodehouse had oriented his work to the world of the stock company, the English equivalent of the commedia, he constantly turned novels into musical plays and back again into novels because his plots and the majority of his characters were suited to both. The comic aspects of Wodehouse's romance formulas can be said to have come from musical comedy and romantic farce, as no less an authority than Wodehouse himself asserts "I believe there are two ways of writing novels. One is mine making the thing a sort of musical comedy without music" ("Performing Flea"313). Supremely demonstrative of what Wodehouse called "making the thing frankly a fairy story and ignoring real life altogether"("Performing Flea" 36) *The Code of the Woosters*, or *The Silver Cow*, as it was originally called, established Wodehouse's status as a writer of brilliant comic prose for all times to come. A masterpiece of

narrative bravura , the action in *The Code of the Woosters* is packed into one long hectic day and night revolving around the theft of a cow-creamer and Gussie losing a leather-bound book containing insults, to disastrous results it tells the story of Bertie Wooster's the inspired lunacy and triumph over Roderick Spode. Here with the marriage of high farce with the inverted poetry of his mature comic style and of suburban vernacular with classical syntax Wodehouse forges his universally recognised English style. In *The Code of the Woosters* Bertie is still the Edwardian clubman with a flat in Mayfair and a stuttering emotional vocabulary, uniquely innocent, wholly good with an innate moral compass. While continuing to dread the snares of matrimony and Madeline Bassett, Bertie also shows a new maturity when he acknowledges that love is universal and that even at the blackest moments the human spirit can find comfort in the loyal support of pals and relatives.

Like in the musical comedies Wodehousian lovers too fall into each other's arms at the end of the novel but for most part of the novel they are kept apart by plot and subplot and Wodehouse does this by using intervention from another stock character - a person in a powerful situation. "Wodehouse was a man of theatre. It is often said his world no longer exists, but it never did except in musical comedy" (Donaldson 9) to her , "Aunt Agatha and Aunt Dahlia are stock characters in a long line of British humour. . . and the inheritors of a long tradition of British comedy usually played by a female impersonator"(Donaldson 10-11). Wodehouse's plots closely follows the structure of the sophisticated stage farce of the nineteenth century French writers of comedies like Scribe, Labiche and Feydeau. A look at the conventions of the stage comedies will show how closely Wodehouse adapted the structure of his plots to his

genre. Like the musicals which Wodehouse incorporated into his scheme of things , the stage farce or stage comedy , as it is sometimes called , downplays social critique, realism and psychological expositions, but instead depended on superficial premises like mistaken identity , theft , jealousy, high drama clashes and encounters in bedrooms , even couples switching partners. These stage comedies also had a primary serious couple and a secondary frivolous and comic couple, disapproving parents putting up obstacles in the path of young love completed the conventional scene. That Wodehouse closely followed and sometimes embellished or altered these stage farce and musical comedy conventions is amply apparent.

In *Thank You, Jeeves* , Bertie and Stoker in black face are mistaken for intruders , thieves and even the devil himself ; Pauline Stoker is discovered in Bertie's bed dressed in his heliotrope pyjamas to boot, igniting the jealousy of Chuffy until Jeeves comes to the rescue and calm is restored to Bertie's life. Wodehouse has introduced a few innovations to the conventional stage force comedy by introducing the negro minstrels , getting Bertie and Stoker black-faced , introducing the homicidal Brinkley and of course his master-piece Jeeves.

In *The Code of the Woosters* , the central motif is the theft of the cow-creamer, and the subsidiary motif is the theft of the policeman's helmet. Again a stage convention and stock situation, but Wodehouse's originality lay in his using this stage convention as his central motif , besides twisting the stock situation whereby several primary characters are embroiled in the theft. In *Joy in the Morning* too the musical

comedy conventions used in the narrative is emphasized by the frequent overt references to the stage conventions and theatrical terminology and by structuring his dialogue so that it somewhat resembles a script.

In *Joy in the Morning*, when Worplesdon sends his butler to fetch Jeeves, Bertie remarks “during the stage wait, which was not of long duration, the old relative filled in with some *ad lib* stuff about Boko, mostly how much he disliked his face” (“Joy in the Morning” 197). Again in describing Madeline’s reaction to the news that Gussie has knocked out Spode “‘I hate you, I hate you!’ cried Madeline, a thing I don’t know anybody ever said except in the second act of a musical comedy” (“Stiff Upper Lip, Jeeves” 119). Lengthy stretches of his novels consist of dialogue with Bertie’s comic comments filling in with clichés and slang, which is reinforced by the slapstick rushing about that is typical of the narratives in the novels.

The traditions of the Romantic Comedy of Shakespeare like a sub-plot, disguise and impersonations, thefts, the suspension of the operation of laws and the use of the topos of the green world to play out the plots are all present in Wodehouse too but in a uniquely transfigured manner. While Shakespeare brings all his characters from the narrower area of the city to the wider area of the Forest of Arden in *As You Like It* to create an atmosphere of ease and leisure, Wodehouse too transports his characters to rural retreats which are stately country homes but they are infested with bumbling policemen and menacing magistrates who not only throw the book at, arrest and fine their guests at the slightest pretext but also themselves indulge in theft and violence.

Wodehouse brings his characters from London to the narrower confines of a country house so that their actions and reactions acquire an emotional colour, thrill and excitement. In *Thank You, Jeeves* we have Bertie in disguise relentlessly pursued by the incompetent and bumbling Dobson and Voules. Equally relentlessly pursued by a determined father, Stoker, intent on compelling Bertie to a shot-gun wedding neither of the couple wants. In Wodehouse, as in Shakespeare, the character of the hero Bertie is valued on account of his capacity for human happiness despite his comic behavior and comic setbacks. Finely balanced between the moralizing comic hero of the Sentimental Comedies and the licentious wit of the Comedy of Manners, the character of the comic hero in Wodehouse is a combination of moral goodness and wit. Wodehouse respected impulse but he also respected society and social order, while holding up the absurdities and feelings of both society and the hero for the readers to arrive at their own individual opinions and conclusions. Realistic touches helped Wodehouse to make his quaint ideas plausible within his fantasy world. The working out of the plot then involved piling up repeated or familiar devices and coming up with something new through recombination. “The creation of new artistic forms is not an act of invention, but one of discovery,, because these forms exists latently in the form of preceding periods” ,says Boris Eikhenbaum (13 ) echoing the views of the Russian Formalist critics that all innovation in literary history , even the most original and revolutionary sort , derives from the reworking of existing literary devices and functions. Several critics of Wodehouse including Thompson and McCrum too feel that Wodehouse’s originality did not lay in his invention of genres associated with the popular magazines. Wodehouse’s originality lay in his self-

consciously and deliberately making the reworking of existing literary devices and functions , the essence of his craft , in adding his own distinctive dimension to the originals. These originals were transmuted into something Wodehousian and hence original.

Yet another aspect of Wodehouse's plots in the mixing of select conventions from multiple genres , for instance in the *Bertie-Jeeves Series* , Wodehouse not only used conventions of the stage force , romance , comedy , and the musical comedy , he used the conventions of the detective story , specifically the Holmes- Watson series of Doyle. Here again while picking up aspects like the unreliable narrator (Bertie) who has a somewhat rebellious and uneasy relationship with a smarter character (Jeeves) and the marriage-like aspect of the Holmes-Watson relationship , Wodehouse jettisons the mystery element and combines these with the other genres just mentioned. In this selective mixing of conventions Wodehouse was not only using the comic potential of a domestic relationship , ensuring that Bertie would not get married , allowed the *Bertie-Jeeves Series* to go on indefinitely. The structure and domestic routine of Doyle story and a Wodehouse novel are similar. Just as with Holmes, Bertie's friends and relatives come to him with their problems either while he is still in bed or at breakfast. Similarly the final resolution in both the series often happens in the evening.

Earl F. Bargainnier points out that Wodehouse also used another aspect of the specifically British detective story , the subgenre of the Cosy Crime novel in which

comedy in which comedy is an important aspect , Wodehouse novels are categorized as Cosy Comedy novels by Bargainnier:

One method of solving the uneasy relationship ( between crime and comedy ) is most evident in British classical detective fiction and is indicated by the epithet “Cosy”. This cosiness prevents a clash between crime and comic action. It owes a great deal to the novels of P.G. Wodehouse and the early ones of Evelyn Waugh , especially as to characterization . One can be comfortable at house parties with silly-ass young men and bubble headed , though tilted, damsels... (Bargainnier 2).

Besides drawing upon extant stock situations that are available as native resources of a literature to all writers of that language and literature, Wodehouse created a large number of original stock situations, incidents and plot patterns that were to be trademarks of his oeuvre. His stock characters were “interchangeable markers” (Thompson 72 ) for whom he created situations and plots and then tried casting his plot with different stock characters. Besides drawing upon extant stock situations that are available as native resources of a literature to all writers of that language and literature , Wodehouse created a large number of original stock situations , incidents and plot patterns that were to be trademarks of his oeuvre. What Wodehouse did was to create small groups of variants of the same stock characters, assigned them similar

functions and then substituted one for another to provide variety and at the same time this technique allowed him to retain the broad formulaic framework of his plots.

The most well known of these stock situations within the *Bertie-Jeeves Series* which his readers immediately recognise and relish are that of Bertie and Jeeves falling out over something trivial to which Bertie has developed an intense fascination and Jeeves an instant and equally intense distaste for , their clash of wills set the plot moving and the story usually ends with Bertie eventually sacrificing his new found interest as a reward for Jeeves' help in extricating him from some hopeless tangle or the other. In *Thank You, Jeeves* , much to Jeeves' horror Bertie has developed a sudden fascination for playing the banjolele and when all Jeeves' effort to get Bertie to give up the banjolele fails he hands in his resignation to Bertie. Caught in the throes of his new found fascination, Bertie grandly accepts Jeeves' resignation , the entire plot of the novel hinges upon this conflict. In *Joy in the Morning* , Jeeves wants to go fishing to Steeple Bumbleigh , but Bertie is adamant that he did not want to go within miles of Aunt Agatha and Bumbleigh Hall . Finally Bertie is manipulated into going by Jeeves using the threat of not wanting to antagonize Aunt Agatha. Similarly , the Sinbad Costume which Bertie had so happily picked and packed for the Fancy Dress Ball is given away by Jeeves to Uncle Percy and Bertie is instead given a stolen police man's uniform. Yet another stock situation is where Jeeves slyly manipulates things in such a way that Bertie is cajoled and coerced into a situation where he invariably gives up his object of fascination in sheer gratitude for Jeeves' help and foresight, often not realizing that he has been neatly manipulated

by Jeeves. At other times Bertie realizes that he has been manipulated but gives in, like going on the World cruise in *The Code of the Woosters*.

Another cliché from literature and films which Wodehouse habitually employs in the series is the *last-minute rescue cliché* and he even goes to the extent of pointing out the fact to the readers, in case they have missed noticing it. For instance , after Jeeves dramatically rescues Bertie from a speeding taxi Bertie recalls similar other rescues:

“Its amazing how you always turn up at the crucial moment like the United States Marines . I remember how you did when A.B. Filmer and I were having our altercation with that swan , and there were other occasions too numerous to mention.”(“Much Obligated, Jeeves,” 29).

A famous Wodehousian stock-situation is that of an aunt of Bertie’s calling him up at an indecently early hour , or when he has had a night out on the town or when he has not had his fortifying tea and breakfast or when he is having a leisurely bath just thinking how bright and easy life is, with some according to Bertie, perfectly outrageous request. Invariably the aunts firmly believe that it is a perfectly reasonable request and invariably they are ready to stop short of only murder to get their demands fulfilled. Bertie’s response to his aunts is also predictably plaintively outraged “ why me ? I asked , speaking with a touch of acerbity, for I rather resented this seeming inability on the relative’s part to distinguish between a nephew and a district messenger boy ”( “Joy in the Morning” 38 ) but equally predictably he

succumbs to their demands. Aunt Agatha and Aunt Dahlia have both their own inimitable but predictable styles of functioning and have their own stock ways of dealing with their nephew. As Bertie puts it so appropriately “ behind every poor , innocent, harmless blighter who is going down for the *first time* in the soup , he will find , if you look carefully enough the aunt who shoved him into it.” (“The Code of the Woosters” 27). While Aunt Agatha threatens murder and mayhem and brooks no argument from Bertie nor does Bertie ever dare to contemplate refusing Aunt Agatha, with Aunt Dahlia it is a different stock situation. Dahlia’s threats are couched in a velvet and usually centre around her chef non-pariel Anatole “ for this ruthless relative has one all powerful weapon which she holds constantly over my head... by means of which she can always bend me to her will-viz. the threat that if I don’t kick in she will bar me from her board and wipe Anatole’s cooking from my lips ” (“The Code of the Woosters” 26). One of Bertie’s greatest weakness is good food and he is particularly devoted to Anatole’s cooking, the mere thought of which has him salivating and faced with the ultimate threat capitulates. Most of Bertie’s troubles are initiated by menacing Aunt Agatha or the genial but amoral Aunt Dahlia , as we see in *The Code of the Woosters* its Aunt Dahlia and in *Joy in the Morning* its Aunt Agatha in absentia whose sudden whims propel Bertie into the Gumbo.

Equally well known to readers of Wodehouse are Bertie’s legendary fiancées and the engagements he is almost always bulldozed into by his lifelong ambition to be a ‘preux chevalier’ and his congenital inability to say no to a pretty girl when she offers herself in marriage to him . The trauma his engagements cause him, both

mental and physical, are also well-known stock situations central to the *Bertie-Jeeves Series*. Most of Bertie's engagements are result of his adherence to his code and result in frequent reengagements. Wodehouse's tactic is that as long as these women remain single, they can at any given time, retroactively agree to marry him , and the Code means he must accept them. These umpteen engagements provide the plot twists in *Thank You, Jeeves* where his past brief engagement to Pauline Stoker stirs the jealousy of Chuffy and the suspicious fury of Papa Stoker , providing much of the action in the novel in *The Code of the Woosters*, the specter of a reengagement to Madeline Basset along with the motif of theft are the prime novels of action while in *Joy in the Morning* his earlier brief engagement to Florence Craye provokes Stilton into a jealous rage A corollary to this stock situation is the stock response and role of Jeeves to Bertie's numerous engagements. Jeeves systematically maneuvers things in such a way that in the end we have Bertie almost bursting with gratitude for Jeeves having rescued him from a fate worse than death. Here it is worth mentioning that till the end of the series Bertie remains a bachelor, always escaping matrimony by a whisker.

In any study of the novel and drama, characters, plot, theme and imagery were the dominant areas of study but these ideas rarely appear in contemporary character criticism. Political and cultural factors that influence writings are the criteria for understanding a text today and these in turn have been influenced by the changes in the philosophical and political view points in the universities since the late 1960s. Character criticism is often based on a number of assumptions, the primary one being

that “characters are supposed to be accurate portraits of imaginary real people who can be treated as unified wholes”(Mc Evoy 3). The notion that Hamlet is an intellectual who thinks so much that he cannot make up his mind and that Othello is a ‘noble’ and ‘valiant Moor’ who is undone by jealousy are typical of this approach to character. These assumptions ignore the complex mass of feelings and desires that constitute a person. On the other hand, critics who laid emphasis on the subconscious have also suggested that we are created as individuals by the forms of language in which we think and express ourselves. Language being always shared and social, individuals can be understood only by understanding their milieu and social relations. In traditional criticism it is often suggested that the action of a play or novel flows out of the character rather than role being seen as an expression of the society and culture presented in the text. Therefore, while character critics opine that Macbeth killed Duncan because he was over-ambitious, social critics feel that Macbeth does so because he lived in a society where status and manliness were determined by acts of daring and courage, where loyalty was determined by the constantly shifting balance of power between rivals. The versatility of Wodehouse lies in the fact that his *Bertie-Jeeves* and *Blandings Castle Saga* novels are an amalgam of the varied traditions that preceded Wodehouse’s writing career. While essentially remaining within the broad ambit of comedic prose Wodehouse experimented with all the aspects of his craft- plot, characters, language and genre, mixing them in ever new permutations and combinations.

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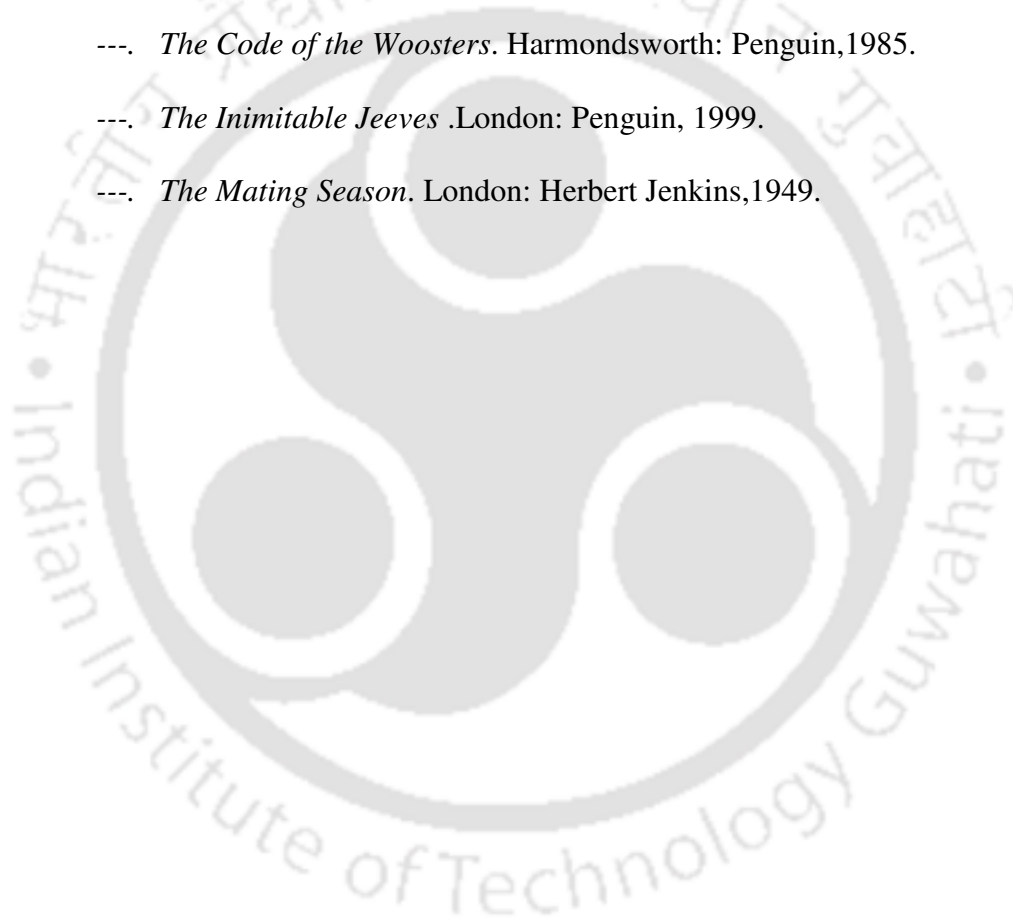
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## Chapter V

### The Perfect Soufflé

It is almost a cliché to say that Wodehouse's chief claim to fame rests on his ingenious use of the English language and his use of its repertoire of stylistic devices are legendary. "Wodehouse's three great achievements are plot, character and language and the greatest of these by far is language. Wodehouse's language lives and breathes in its written, printed form. It oscillates privately between the page and the reader" (Fry, "It is enough to be funny"). As gifted at it as Mozart was with music, there have been few writers in the history of written English who can manipulate the language like Wodehouse can. To Bergson, the difference between the comic in situations and the comic in words is that "between the comic *expressed* and the comic *created* by language. The former could, if necessary, be translated from one language into another. .. But the latter ... owes its entire being to the structure of the sentence or to the choice of words" (Bergson 103, emphasis mine). The absurdity, even triviality of plots and themes is more than compensated for by the exquisite phrasing and presentation and if such a plot seems frothy and insubstantial, it is, just like the perfect soufflé. The beauty of his plots lies in the way Wodehouse used language to effortlessly evoke an era and a stratum of society unknown to most of us.

Famous for his brilliant comic novels, written in a style which was a unique amalgam of vernacular and high-flown allusion everything in Wodehouse's education and career “his grammarian's grounding in Latin and Greek, his irony-tinged affection for Victorian poetry, his apprenticeship in journalism, his exposure to Jazz Age slang, his work in the buoyant, sentimental realm of the musical went into his style” (Parker, “Jeeves vs Pooh”). Wodehouse was always fascinated by language, be it English, French, Spanish or German.

He was, at his best, a superb writer of English. His sentences are beautifully balanced and, in an age when punctuation often seems an optional extra, many could learn from reading Wodehouse ... At his best, Wodehouse made the English language dance. (Easedale 190)

Plato in his *Republic* establishes a historically dogged distinction that opposes the vulgarity of laughter and clowning to the sovereignty of reason. The comic is believed to exist outside the subject rather than being an inherent quality leading to the concept that humans are essentially serious creatures for whom the comic is a temporary identity, even an aberration. Wodehouse circumvented this pitfall by expressing the comic through language and characterization rather than through the mere presentation of comic stereo-types. So successful has Wodehouse been at this that this in turn has led to fears that such implicit association of a comic character with language that his comic identity is realized through his language can result in

the debased transformation of both the subject and the language into an object of ridicule. This has in turn led to complaints that Wodehouse through the character type represented by Bertie Wooster would perpetuate an inaccurate image of the Englishman. We see that, on the contrary, this is also debunked by Wodehouse's use of language. To see Wodehouse's characters as mere comedians is a gross misunderstanding of not only comedy and character but also of the comic potentials of language and the capabilities of a gifted writer. The otherwise staid and dull character types of the Lords and Earls are enlivened and elevated through the comic exaggeration of both their language and idiosyncrasies for these characters come to life through their language.

The value judgments of Plato are echoed by Aristotle's laws of narrative diction. "*Poetics* the most influential work of literary theory in Western culture" (Stott 19) implicitly establishes the idea that comedy is an imitation of the ridiculous or unworthy aspects of human behavior and amounts to a failure to uphold moral values. Wodehouse's use of language demonstrates not only the fact that Wodehouse never had any pretensions of didacticism but also the fact that in Wodehouse neither the mode of comedy nor the language employed is used for propagating high or low ideals. He propounds a symmetrical literary system that reflects a conception of character as an amalgamation of two competing facets best exemplified in descriptions like "an aunts love oozed out in every syllable. Hello, you revolting object, she said..." ("Much Obligated, Jeeves" 7). A similar coexistence of opposites

is noticeable in the union of loyalty and self-agrandisement of Jeeves and in the amoral impersonation and blasé infiltration of Lord Ickenham into Blandings Castle.

Wodehouse's true genius with language comes in an inexhaustible stream of bold, vivid images, often complex, sometimes strange, always hilarious:

‘Ever heard of Captain Bligh of the Bounty?’

‘Yes, Sir. I read the book ....’

‘... Ever heard of Jack the Ripper?’

‘Yes, Sir.’

Put them together and what have you got? Cook’

(“Aunts Aren't Gentlemen” 68)

Wodehouse repeatedly breaks the conventional register and for Hensher “the mastery of Wodehouse is a linguistic mastery and nowhere more dazzling than in the ways he uses linguistic register” (Hensher “The Music of language” np). We can see it at play in the funny exchange of telegrams in both *The Code of the Woosters* and *Joy in the Morning* but the biscuit or mottled oyster, as Bertie would have said, goes to Madeline Basset, who under the erroneous impression that Bertie has invited himself along to woo her asks “surely twisting knife wound” (“The Code of the Woosters” 20).

Charles Baudelaire's concept of irony as an inter subjective concept postulated in his essay *The Rhetoric of Temporality* and Paul de Man's view that irony is an internalized relationship, a “relationship, within consciousness, between two selves” (De Man 212) do not support the view that comic relationships often imply positions of superiority and inferiority, and that it is not possible to think of one as superior and more knowledgeable. Wodehouse's use of irony clearly demonstrates just the opposite for it enabled him to simultaneously recognize social order and comically subvert it.

That the matter of fact comprehensibility of language is compromised by linguistic contortions that produce parallel or nonsensical forms of meaning is nowhere, more explicit than in Wodehouse's manipulation of language. It is a testimony to Wodehouse's genius that he can so confidently get his characters to say exactly the wrong thing at the wrong moment and not break the spell, but intensify it. Here Bertie has as usual managed to inflame a jealous lover, Stilton Cheesewright, who wants him to leave the place at once and Bertie obviously could not because he has promised a young couple that he would plead for them:

‘This will of course, involve my remaining *in statu...* what is it?’

‘Pah!’

‘No, not pah . *Quo* ’

(“Joy in the Morning” 65)

At times one can analyse and understand, how Wodehouse brings the reader to a pitch of delirious laughter, but often his “luminous hilarity” (Hensher “The Music of language”) defies analysis as in Bertie’s solemn assurance to Jeeves’ request that Bertie treat the matter as confidential “wild horses shall not drag it from me. Not that I suppose they’ll try” (“Joy in the Morning” 31). Exotic conceits like “a dry fluttering feeling in the pit of the stomach ,as if I had swallowed a heaping tablespoonful of butterflies” (ibid 108) to far fetched images: “I might, that is to say, be safe from the dragon, but what about the hippogriffs ? That was the question I asked myself. What price the hippogriffs?” (ibid 109) which are commonplace in Wodehouse are in fact “moments not just of high comedy but of high poetry” ( Hensher “The Music of language”).A mistake a newcomer to Wodehouse can be forgiven for making is that of thinking that Wodehouse's humour rests on his use of the conventional devices of British literary humour. Instead his humour relies chiefly on his defying established conventional usages and creating newer ones specifically his own. “Wodehouse seldom leaves conventional material in its original form; instead he devised a wide repertory of devices for *defamiliarizing* the most outworn type of language. The result is almost invariably funny, mainly through incongruities between familiar language and strange forms into which it is twisted” (Thompson 277). Wodehouse's most original methods of *defamiliarizing* familiar material is through the use of language and quotations. A measure of his skill is the expert way Wodehouse handled clichés. He knew just how to deploy them for maximum humour. His mastery of the cliché was inseparable from his celebrated bathetic use of quotations mainly from the Bible: “Ha! Let her first pluck out the Pom which is in her own eye”

(“Thank You, Jeeves” 6). Pope, Browning, Tennyson, Keats, Shelley, Wordsworth and Shakespeare who are all quoted and misquoted with impunity by him. For instance we have Shakespeare taken apart in this description of Nobby “she came leaping towards me , like Lady Macbeth coming to get first-hand news from the guest room” (“Joy in the Morning” 199).

Its use is even more elaborately distorted in *The Code of the Woosters* :

‘That is the problem which is torturing me, Jeeves ... You remember that fellow you've mentioned to me once or twice, who let something wait upon something ? You know who I mean - the cat chap. Macbeth, sir, a character in a play of that name by the late William Shakespeare. He was described as letting 'I dare not' wait upon 'I would,' like the poor cat i' th' adage’

(“The Code of the Woosters” 28).

In his *The Novel Life of Wodehouse*, Easedale refers to the fact that the Oxford English Dictionary cites Wodehouse 192 times as “the inventor or first recorded user of a phrase or particular choice of a word in a specific sense or with a certain nuance” (Easedale 191). These include in 1923, ‘one-up’ (“Leave it to Psmith”), meaning to be ahead; in 1934 ‘non-starter’ (“Right Ho, Jeeves”) and such phrases as ‘down to earth’, ‘pain in the neck’ and ‘loony bin’. Easedale who was as great an admirer of Wodehouse as Waugh, Belloc and Sharpe says that while working on his

book, *The Novel Life of P G Wodehouse* , he would hastily scribble down quotes or passages from Wodehouse's work, often anticipating a word or two , but on verification “I frequently found that Wodehouse had used a different one. On every occasion this had markedly improved the sentence. That one word could make such a difference was a great personal revelation regarding his craft as a writer. ..” (Easedale 191).

The felicity, humour and beauty of Wodehouse's prose does not fully emerge in short quotations, for his was not an epigrammatic style. Wodehouse's real genius lay in his ability to invest patently absurd situations with momentary conviction “he couldn't have looked at me with more loathing if I had been the germ *dementia praecox*” (“Thank You, Jeeves” 5). Or the even more absurd:

‘And I refuse to believe that Edward the Confessor really looked like that. Nobody presenting such an obscene appearance as J. Chichester Clam could possibly have held the throne of England for five minutes. Lynching parties would have been organized, knights sent out to cope with the nuisance with battle axes’.

(“Joy in the Morning” 230)

What is particularly remarkable about Wodehouse is his sensitivity to idiom and to the music of grammar. A grammarian of genius:

What entrances him, and what he uses for his most unforgettable effects, is exactly that, grammar, the unique ambiguous potential of English grammar. Plenty of writers can pun. But take one of Wodehouse's jokes and this is something rather more subtle. "Oh, Bertie, you know your Shelley. Am I?" This is not exactly a pun, but a joke about grammar, about the way that the genitive can, with the help of hopeless ignorance, transform a complete sentence in English. (Hensher, "The Music of Language")

While insisting on distinguishing between Wodehouse's august play with grammar and the ordinary humorist's punning, Hensher says that Wodehouse attains greatness through the linguistic freedom he acquired and employed in his writing and this is amply evident in these two instances from Wodehouse. "Edwin? My son? Yes, I know, I said sympathetically. Too bad. Yes, he's your son alright .." ("Joy in the Morning" 79), and "You have disappointed me. I thought you had guts. I have, and I don't want Roderick Spode fooling about with them" (ibid 107).

Wodehouse freely inverted the grammatical order of words and the most celebrated example of this form of hyperbaton is the description of Bartholomew, the Aberdeen terrier "looking from under his eyebrows like a Scottish elder rebuking sin from the pulpit" ("The Code of the Woosters" 127) which are "phrases perfect enough to become quotations in themselves" ((Thody xxiv). It is Wodehouse's powerfully creative ability with language that gives his prose a Shakespearean quality, "the

greatest writers in English aren't those who have mastered the dictionary; they are those like Wodehouse , with a profound feeling for the music of the language” (Hensher “The Music of Language”). Originality and inventiveness are the hallmarks of Wodehouse's language. At times it is a brilliant, mad postulation of etymology, as when Bertie says “he spoke with a certain *what-is-it* in his voice , and I could see that; if not actually disgruntled , he was far from being *gruntled*” (“The Code of the Woosters” 3). At times it is the ability to conjure up an extravagant word from some other, very unlikely part of speech “there was a distinctly death-*where-is-thy-stingfulness* about her manner” (“Joy in the Morning” 99). At others it is jabberwocky coinages like “... and yet here I was, beyond any question of doubt, *umbrellaed* to the gills” (“The Code of the Woosters” 12) and “and it was at this point that I suddenly came over all *cat-in the-adage-y*” (“Joy in the Morning” 110).

Comic exaggeration was used to brilliant effect by Wodehouse in numerous ways, sometimes as part of physical description, “ this Voules was a bird built rather on the lines of the Albert Hall, round in the middle and not much above. He always looked to me as if Nature had really intended to make two police sergeants and had forgotten to split them up" (“Thank You, Jeeves” 64).Or in the even more absurd description of Stilton Cheesewright as “ a fine figure of a young fellow as far northwards as the neck, but above that solid concrete. I could not see him as a member of the Big Four” (“Joy in the Morning” 61).Sometimes to accentuate the lunacy of an action “what he really wanted was to see me sprinting down Park Lane with the mob after me with dripping knives” (“Thank You, Jeeves” 54).At other

times in the form of a subtle comeback as in this response of Bertie to Pauline's suggestion that his sleep on the sofa after she had appropriated his bed “Isn't there a sofa downstairs? There is. Noah's. He brought it ashore on Mount Aravat” (“Thank You, Jeeves” 66).As a device for injecting an element of humour into his novels as when Bertie describes the reaction of a scullery maid who on opening the door and saw him in blackface:

‘It was opened by a small female-a scullery maid of sorts, I put her down as-who, on observing me , gaped for a moment with a sort of shocked horror, and then with a piercing squeal keeled over and started to roll about and drum her heels on the floor. And I'm not dashed sure she wasn't frothing at the mouth’.

(“Thank You, Jeeves” 117)

Or the hilarious description of Claude Pott whom Pongo was expecting to be a “hawk -faced man with keen piercing eyes and the general deportment of a leopard” (“Uncle Fred in the Springtime” 7 ) but who came as a total shock for “hawks have no chins, Pott had two. Leopards pad. Pott waddled” (ibid 7). At other times comic exaggeration was used to intensify the acknowledged element of cowardice inherent in Bertie as in this instance where Bertie is describing the possibility of irritating “a slavering” Uncle Percy and bringing Aunt Agatha “the old relative leaping after me with her hatchet, like a Red Indian on the war path, howling for my blood” (“Joy in the Morning” 109 ).The mere mention of his aunts brings out the superlatives in Bertie:

‘Mrs. Tavers’ , he announced formally

‘An, 'Oh , golly!' broke from my lips. ‘I had known of course, hearing that formal announcement, that she was coming, but so does a poor blighter taking a stroll and looking up and seeing a chap in an aero plane dropping a bomb on his head know that's coming, but it doesn't make it any better when it arrives’

(“The Code of the Woosters” 91)

Equally effective is his use of meiosis or understatement:

In describing this public servant as ugly, she was undoubtedly technically correct. Only if the competition had consisted of Sir Watkyn Basset, Oofy Prosser of the Drones, and a few more fellows like that, could he have hoped to win to success in a beauty contest. But one doesn't want to rub these things in. Suavity is what you need on these occasions. You can't beat suavity’.

(“ The Code of the Woosters” 64)

Lord Ickenham's dubious response to the Duke of Dunstable’s news that Lord Emsworth wanted to enter his pig for the Derby is one of the best in Wodehouse, “I doubt if the Stewards would accept a pig. You might starch its ears and enter it as a greyhound for the Waterloo Cup, but not the *Derby*” (“Uncle Fred in the Springtime” 108). Wodehouse also used exaggeration as a technique for comedic variation. Jeeves' erudition and intelligence are made funny through exaggeration in *Ring For Jeeves*, a

novel sans Bertie. Otherwise it is Bertie who normally provides the comedy in the *Bertie-Jeeves* novels just as Lord Ickenham and Pongo do in the *Blandings Castle Saga*. In the case of Bertie, exaggeration is almost second nature, here it is in operation in his response to Jeeves' news that there was no butter available to remove the boot polish from his face until the next day:

'No butter?'

'No butter, Sir'.

'But, Jeeves, this is frightful'.

'Most disturbing, Sir'.

At a moment like the present, the adjective 'most disturbing' seemed to me to miss facts by about ten parasangs'. ("Thank You, Jeeves"138)

Like Bertie, Lord Ickenham too is a character prone to exaggeration as is evident in his outraged response to Pongo's suggestion that they leave Blandings Castle before they are discovered as impostors:

'Clear out? That is no way for a member of a proud family to talk. Did Twistletons clear out at Agincourt and Crecy ? At Malplaquet and Blenheim? When the Old Guard made their last desperate charge up the blood-soaked slopes of Waterloo, do you suppose that Wellington, glancing over his shoulder, saw a Twistleton sneaking off with ill-assumed carelessness in the direction of Brussels? We Twistletons do not clear out, my boy'.

("Uncle Fred in the Springtime"104)

Almost paralleling the re-emergence of New Historicism was Bakhtin's attempts to bring to the fore of comedy criticism the idea of a specific language and culture associated with comedy. Wodehouse by assigning specific speech patterns and linguistic quirks to his characters foregrounded this concept of character delineation through language in his novels. By making language the focus of his craft and comedy, Wodehouse opened up new ways of representing the stock and the traditional in both language and character. Wodehouse's use of language shows both convergences and divergences with Bakhtin's concepts of comedy and language. "The language of the market place ... (which was in many ways) the expression of natural feeling, coarse, unlettered and unedited by the expectations of formality" (Stott 33) is the language of Bertie, Lord Ickenham and the youngsters of the *Blandings Castle Saga*. The Bakhtinian concept of carnival is central to Wodehouse's concept of comedy. Bakhtin's theory of carnival epitomizes the response of the proletariat to the oppression of the ruling classes. Wodehouse's novels are "marked by the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and provisions" (Bakhtin 10) and best exemplified by the interactions between character pairs in Wodehouse like Bertie and Jeeves; Lady Constance Keeble and Baxter and Lord Ickenham and Pongo. In the visibility of characters from the lower social ranks and in the inversion of roles and suspension of power and authority permitted by Bertie to Jeeves, Galahad to Beach, Lady Constance to Baxter and to a certain extent Galahad to Sue Brown and Joan Valentine, Wodehouse's novels reflect the spirit of festive and

carnival traditions as well as his attempts to collapse the distinctions of class and rank.

Just as in the *Bertie-Jeeves Series*, the action pauses as Bertie ponders over or tries to recall an appropriate word or quotation, which he either has heard or learnt from Jeeves , or he needs Jeeves' help to recall in the *Blandings Saga* too we have both Horace Davenport and Lord Bosham , groping for the right word, producing different words, before getting it right- "what's that word beginning with "O" ?. "Opal? Oval? Ha! Got it overt" says Lord Bosham. ("Uncle Fred in the Springtime" 163). Again we have Horace in trying to clarify that his intentions were pure, unlike Don Juan "at present , he's got the idea that I'm a kind of...Who was the chap who was such a devil with the other sex? ... Donald something. Donald Duck? " (ibid 57) Like Bertie too almost all the youngsters in the *Blandings Saga* freely use a mixture of slang, cliché and quotation which range from the classics to the popular jingles. With a view to catering to popular tastes and in keeping with his leaning towards popular fiction, Wodehouse often used slangs and exclamations both to accentuate character flaws and to particularize character with a specific mode or pattern of speech. For instance we have the in the *Blandings Saga* the Hon. Freddie Threepwood , ever ready to quote from the films he is forever watching: "Pals, pardner. Pals! Pals till hell freezes! cried Freddie deeply moved...That was a sub-title from a thing called Prairie Nell, you know" ( "Leave It to Psmith" 239). Pongo Twistleton's trademark expressions like *what ho, old top, right ho, old egg* and *tinkerty tonk* are scattered throughout *Uncle Fred in Springtime* , then there is the infamous *Coo!* of Edwin in

*Joy in the Morning*, the *Cor!* of Cootes in *Leave It to Psmith*, and the tendency of Uncle Percy “to say 'what' and keep on saying it. He did so now. what? what? what? what? what? he ejaculated making five in all. ' what?' he added, bringing it up to the round half dozen” ( “Joy in the Morning” 120).

The use of colloquialisms like *tycoon*, *tenner*, *bloke* and *soppy* also give Wodehouse's language a tinge of informality which is further reinforced by his use of a blend of American slangs like *guy*, *sap*, *hunky-dory* and English slangs like *bally*, *bobbish*, and phrases like “*loony to the eyebrows*” ( “Joy in the Morning” 117 ) and *loopy to the tonsils* ( “Uncle Fred in the Springtime” 12 ). The novel and incongruous use of comic phrases interwoven with popular literary expressions also contribute to the humour: “My contribution to what I have heard all the feast of reason and the flow of soul had been, as I have indicated about what you might have expected from a strong, silent English man with tonsillitis” ( “Aunts Aren't Gentlemen” 41 ).

Bertie's language sometimes falls into the category of “dense allusive utterance” (Cockburn 374). Similar coinages of Bertie include her eyes became a bit *souplatey* ( “The Code of the Woosters” 204); “old Basset, looking *Buster-street-y*” (ibid 207), “something *butlerine* vibrating inside it” ( ibid 212) and “so you were a *ear witness*” ( “Aunts Aren't Gentlemen” 67).

It is pretty generally recognized in the circles in which he moves that Bertram Wooster is not a man who lightly throws in the towel and admits defeat. Beneath the

*thingummies of what-d'-you-call-it* his head, wind and weather permitting, is a rule bloody but unbowed, and if the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune want to crush his proud spirit, they have to pull their socks up and make a special effort. (“Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit” 161 ).

Throughout his oeuvre Wodehouse adeptly moulds his diction and style to hundreds of situations and moods and scores of characters to reflect differing temperaments and registers. The use of contrast with a trace of ironic amusement to highlight a situation is one of Wodehouse's favourite devices, and is in evidence in this comparison of the stations of Waterloo and Paddington "at Waterloo, all is hustle and bustle and the society tends to be mixed. Here a leisured peace prevails, and you get only the best people- cultured men accustomed to mingling with basset hounds and women in tailored suits who look like horses" (“ Uncle Fred in the Springtime” 84).

“Wodehouse's use of novel compounds invariably lend brevity, vividness and humour to his writings" (Sharma 69) as is exemplified in Bertie's description of his meeting with Madeline Basset as "we had one of these *deaf-mutes-getting-together* sessions" (“The Code of the Woosters” 165). Even when these compounds strain grammar almost to breaking point and language in them runs riot they convey ideas more picturesquely than concrete words, Wodehouse's “*blood stain-and-magnifying glass* bloke” (“Uncle Fred in the Springtime”146) is much more effective than detective .Often these novel compounds which constitute “not so much a triumph of language as a victory over language” ( Murry 111) reach a height of absurdity and

intensify the comic effect as in, “I had completely forgotten the *Stephanie-stooping-picking-up* incident” (“The Code of the Woosters” 62 ).

Wodehouse is legendary for his original and picturesque similes, “she said I *danced like a dromedary with the staggers*”(“Uncle Fred in the Springtime” 5) is Horace's reason for taking up dancing lessons. In the same novel Duke Dunstable's moustache is described as “rising and falling *like seaweed on an ebb tide*”.(ibid19) “Wodehouse's true brilliance doesn't lie in his razor-sharp plotting. The man's deepest genius lies in the making of perfect sentences, and then brightening them further with dazzling original similes” (Tharoor “Wodehousian Magic”). Similes are an aspect of Wodehouse's style that have drawn eulogies from practically every writer who has written about him. They are so much a part of his style and so ubiquitous in nature and original that" to canvass Wodehouse for quotable similes is to be in the position of a child in a candy store" (Kimball, “The Genius of Wodehouse” np).When Bertie informs Uncle Percy that Chichester Clam would be attending the Ball as Edward the Confessor Wodehouse couches Uncle Percy's response in one of his best similes: “I shall keep my eye open for something that looks *like a burst horse hair sofa* and that will be Clam” (“Joy in the Morning” 210 ). Similarly when Bertie meets a pale and trembling Seppings who claimed to have narrowly escaped being hit by a tomato Bertie describes Seppings as trembling “*like a badly set blancmange*” ( “Much Obligated, Jeeves” 158). Such apt parallelisms add to the appeal of Wodehouse's similes.

Parasitic humour which “consists in getting fun out of something written” (Leacock 47) and results from a juxtaposition of the lofty idea of the original with a new commonplace association is also abundantly used by Wodehouse. "If Scotties come can Stiffy be far behind" (“The Code of the Woosters” 64 ) and “you must always remember, however” says Lord Ickenham to Pongo paraphrasing Shakespeare “that there is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so”(“Uncle Fred in the Springtime” 102 ) are two of the best examples of parasitic humour in English language.

Considering Bertie's lack of learning, we would have expected Wodehouse to make extensive use of malapropisms, yet there are very few in the entire series. *Joy in the Morning* provides us a couple, “my Aunt Agatha, for many years a widow, or *derelict* as I believe it is called ...”(“Joy in the Morning” 9) and again “he is a mere ,uncouth Cossack”. A *cossack* I knew, was one of those things clergymen wear and I wondered why she thought Stilton was like one” (“Joy in the Morning” 151). Bertie's tastes in jokes expectedly runs to the most banal sorts, but Wodehouse transformed this traditional humourous device of British literary humour by providing it with a twist. He has Bertie stopping short of telling jokes, instead he has him frequently refer to standing jokes, allude to them, build up elaborate leads into these jokes and then stop short unexpectedly. On the other hand when Bertie does try to make a joke his attempts are so clumsy and botched up that it is Bertie's attempts that are more funny than the jokes themselves:

'Bertie, he said at length'

'Hullo?'

'Bertie'.

'Yes'.

'Bertie'.

'Still here'.

'Excuse me for asking, but have you any cracked gramophone record blood in you? Perhaps your mother was frightened by one'.

(“Much Obligated, Jeeves” 25)

Similar is the case with Jeeves too. Jeeves seldom tells an actual joke, and when he does the joke is rendered funny by the fact that it is mangled in the telling. On the other hand we have Lord Emsworth coming up unexpectedly with sarcastic come backs like “are you under the impression ... that I want to enter my pig for the Derby?” (“Uncle Fred in the Springtime” 24).

The hallmarks of comic characterization from the late seventeenth century onwards like irony, camp and bathos were transposed by Wodehouse onto his narratives through his ingenious use of the English language. Like in the Restoration Comedy, in Wodehouse too, wit, quick inventiveness in language and taking liberties with meanings is noticeable. “Comic conventions postulates a society that is rigidly hierarchical. By the laws of decorum carefully formulated by such Roman rhetoricians as Cicero and Quintilian, different social classes have their prescribed

styles, both of manners and of speech”(Charney 51 ) in Wodehouse there is an ironic reversal of these prescribed styles in this that, Bertie the Oxford scholar has been given the vocabulary of an upper class twit.

An extraordinary, systematic and careful introduction and development of verbal motifs is noticeable throughout the *Bertie- Jeeves Series* and the *Blandings Saga*. Wodehouse has created much of the series' humour through standing the familiar on its head, and the seemingly casual spontaneity only serves to make the imagery livelier and more hilarious. Among Wodehouse's characters Lord Ickenham, Bertie and Jeeves are the three who are most greatly fascinated with language. Although the distinctive Wodehousian prose which is the hallmark of all his works, is in evidence throughout the oeuvre, it is Lord Ickenham, Bertie and Jeeves who linger, tinker and ponder over the conventions and nuances of the language, particularly the English language, so much so that their character and narrative functions are reflected in their differing attitudes to language.

Jeeves is conservative, predictable and restrained in his use of the very same devices of language which in the others take on such a colourful and humourous note. Within the overall dynamics of the narrative, Jeeves stands for closure and his language is essentially static, staid and pedantic. In spite of the fact that Jeeves' range of knowledge is wide and includes Shakespeare, Pope and Keats, his knowledge and language do not have the smoothness and vividness of Bertie and is almost mechanical and has an element of rote learning ,with a tendency to pile on the

clichés, “Mr Cheesewright's robustness would enable him to crush you like a fly .... He would obliterate you with a single blow. He would break you in two with his bare hands. He would tear you limb from limb (“Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit” 126).

In Lord Ickenham too, we have a character whose narratorial function is delineated by his language, a language with its judicious mixture of slang, satire and subtle humour, all underscored by his assertive and authoritative tone and demeanor “don't stick on such a beastly side Mister. You and your bally dignity! I never heard such swank” (“Uncle Fred in the Springtime” 65). Bertie often translates Jeeves' learned observations and long sentences into shorter versions,

“I can conceive that after what occurred in New York it might be distressing for you to encounter Miss Stoker, sir. But I fancy the contingency need scarcely arise. ‘Avoid her?’ ( “The Code of the Woosters” 26)

At other times repetition may stem from Jeeves' refusal to accept Bertie's slangs, and he goes to great lengths to make his point and veiled displeasure clear:

‘You agree with me that the situation is a lulu?’

‘Certainly a somewhat sharp crisis in your affairs

‘Would appear to have been precipitated, sir’.

(“The Code of the Woosters” 27)

The use of foreign terms when there is an equivalent in English is technically known as Barbarism but we can see how far from barbarism is Wodehouse's use of the foreign term can be seen from this example of its use; which also illustrates Bertie's fascination with language which leads him to link two synonyms; in *Thank You, Jeeves*, Bertie dithers over the use of the right adjective to signal his acceptance of Stoker's invitation to dinner:

'I regard it as ...'

'The *amend honorable*, sir?'

'I was going to say olive branch.'

'Or olive branch. The two terms are virtually synonymous ...'

'Ah, yes. Very well then. I shall accept his invitation-whether as an olive branch or an *amend honorable* is wholly immaterial ...'

(“Thank You, Jeeves” 92)

Keeping with their role in the narrative dynamics the language of Bertie and the youngsters in the *Blandings Saga* is elaborate yet spontaneous~ if not always correct and appropriate, but in the process they create bizarre juxtapositions. The technique of Bertie searching for the appropriate word, or qualifying it because he is unsure, besides being pervasive throughout the series takes on a number of forms. When faced with the necessity of choosing between interchangeable words, Bertie settles on both, “the alternative word device” (Thompson 324) was very effectively mined as a source of humour. “Jeeves had spoken airily-or glibly-of busting in and making

myself at home for the night ...” ( “Thank You, Jeeves” 140). In *Joy in the Morning*, we have Bertie using the correct word but unsure of himself “it was as if some sort of telepathy, *if that is the word I want*, had warned him that the young master had lost his grip and could do with two penny worth of feudal assistance” ( “Joy in the Morning” 248). A variant of this technique is that of Bertie asking Jeeves for the correct phrase:

‘Hell’s foundations are quivering, what do you call it when a couple of nations start off being all palsy-walsy and then begin calling each other ticks and bounders?’

‘Relations have deteriorated would be the customary phrase, sir.’

‘Well relations have deteriorated between Miss Basset and Gussie.’

(“Stiff Upper Lip Jeeves” 97)

Lord Ickenham and Bertie sometimes create their own comic twists, as when in describing Gussie, Bertie says, “Mr. Fink-Nottle has a strong newt complex” (“Right Ho, Jeeves” 4) instead of an inferiority complex or when Lord Ickenham talks of the absence of “lipsticky sophistication”( “Uncle Fred in the Springtime” 68).

Deliberate obtuseness on the part of Bertie also produce hilarious results:

‘I don't suppose you have read Lord Chesterfield's *Letters to His Son*?’

‘Well of course I hadn’t. Bertram Wooster does not read other people’s letters.

If I were employed in the post office, I wouldn’t even read the postcards.’

(“Aunts Aren’t Gentlemen” 74)

Wodehouse used certain distinctive words and phrases as motifs in the *Bertie-Jeeves Series*, using them frequently in successive novels. For instance, we have the phrase *recede from your position* first used in *Thank You, Jeeves* .” No, sir. I fear I cannot recede from my position” (“Thank You, Jeeves” 8), resurfacing in *Right Ho, Jeeves* “did he recede from his position?” (188) and twice in *The Code of the Woosters* “I could not recede from my position” (138) and “you won’t recede from your position?” (“The Code of the Woosters” 149). The phrases *le mot juste*, which was first used by Jeeves in the short stories, remains a dominant and recurring phrase in the novels of *Bertie-Jeeves Series* right up to *The Mating Season* is also used in a few of the *Blandings Saga* novels but in the later it is not a motif .The phrase *of the essence* introduced in *Thank You, Jeeves* , the first *Bertie-Jeeves* novel, where it’s a motif, repeatedly recurs in most of the subsequent novels. The single most common phrase of the series of course is *the psychology of the individual*, again originally introduced in the short stories but quickly assimilated into the novels, occurring in almost every single of the *Bertie Jeeves Series* and repeated several times in some of them. In fact the psychology of the individual becomes an element in Bertie’s actions, in his rebellions against Jeeves and predictably his attempts to find solutions based on the psychology of the individual invariably boomerangs.

The free use of French and Latin terms like *rapprochement*, *bijouterie*, *rem acu tetigisti*, *sangfroid nolle prosequi*, *joie de verve* and *obiter dicta* throughout his work serves a two-fold purpose of imbuing his language with a cultured gracefulness besides imparting humour through incongruity either in its context or with the character. Lord Ickenham is also given to using as was the wont of both Bertie and Jeeves, “for the moment, I will be putting you *au courant* with the position of affairs at Blandings Castle” (“Uncle Fred in The Springtime” 170). Or the even more bombastic “Let our motto be that of the great *Roi Pausole-Ne nuis pas a ton voisin*” (“Uncle Fred in The Springtime” 128). Comic variations to learned language and foreign phrases, often by making Bertie provide slang renderings or combining the learned with the ludicrous is a device Wodehouse employs to good effect. Two of the most well known foreign phrases of the *Bertie-Jeeves Series* are *nolle prosequi* and *rem acu tetigisti*, first introduced in *Right Ho, Jeeves* and *Joy in the Morning* respectively.

Here Bertie explains to Nobby his inability to stand up to Florence,

‘And if you think I've got the force of character to come back with a *nolle prosequi*.’

‘With a what?’

‘One of Jeeve's gags. It means roughly ‘Nuts to you’!

(“Joy in the Morning” 98)

Wodehouse combines this phrase with spiritual learning to create a ludicrous and comic effect:

‘Jeeves.’

‘Sir?’

‘To settle a bet, wasn't it Balaam's ass that entered the *nolle prosequi*?’

‘Yes, Sir’.

(“Jeeves in the Offing” 168 )

Wodehouse twists language to greater comic effect with *rem acu tetigisti* , a motif in *Joy in the Morning*.

‘Exactly, I said: you have touched the matter with a needle’.

‘Done what?’

‘One of Jeeves' gags, I explained. Rem something. Latin stuff.’

(“Joy in the Morning” 243)

Finally “ as always, he had tetigisti-ed the rem” (“Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit” 168)

Like words and phrases, Wodehouse uses quotations too to telling effect, they too become motifs which are repeated and varied across the series. As with phrases, Bertie juxtaposes formal language and slang by varying a few strategic words and putting it in a comic context: “ Butter, Chuffy, old man I said, slabs of butter. If you

have butter, prepare to shed it now” (“Thank You, Jeeves” 124). Many a time idioms are twisted into something fresh and lively, recalling Aunt Dahlia's threat to withhold Anatole's cooking Bertie remembers" this is not the first time she had displayed *the velvet hand beneath the iron-glove-or* rather, the old way round" (“The Code of the Woosters” 25 ).At times Bertie quotes in the original form and then paraphrases it in colloquial language as he does here:

‘Stoker was one of those fellows who get their backs up the minute they think their nearest and dearest are trying to shove them into anything; a chap who as the Bible puts it , if you say Go, he cometh, and if you say come, he goeth; a fellow, in a word, who, if he came to a door with Push on it, would always Pull.’ (‘Thank You, Jeeves”174)

Jeeves sometimes breaks up the familiar rhythm of the poetry by tagging on a "sir" or a "madam" to it:

‘There's not the smallest orb which thou beholdest,’  
‘Sir, but in his motion like an angel sings, still’  
‘Quiring to the young- eyed Cherubims.’

(“Joy in the Morning” 115)

At other times the verse is broken up and rendered as dialogue , “possibly the reflection that the quality of mercy is not strained, sir. You mean it droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven?” (“The Mating Season” 78).

Wodehouse uses the *defamiliarizing* technique of providing the original quote in *Thank you, Jeeves* :

‘I fancy the individual you have in mind, sir, is the poet, Keats, who compared his emotions on first reading Chapman's Homer to those of Stout Cortez when with eagle eyes he stared at the Pacific.’

‘The Pacific ,eh?’

‘Yes, sir. And all his men looked at each other with a wild surmise, silent upon a peak in Darien’. (‘Thank you, Jeeves’ 3 )

And then completely transforming it with slang and colloquialism in its most celebrated comic variant in prose to describe Bertie's reaction when the stolen cat wanders in when Cook and Plank are also on the premises, “I looked at it with a wild surmise, as silent as those bimbos upon the peak in Darien ...”(“ Aunts Aren't Gentlemen “155).

Shakespeare's fretful porpentine passage from *Hamlet*, which is first introduced in *The Code of the Woosters* , where it begins as a minor motif to describe Gussie's reaction to Stiffy's plans of giving the dynamite note-books to Sir Watkyn Basset is

picked up in Bertie's description of Roderick Spode , “ his face was flushed, his eyes were bulging, and one had the odd illusion that his hair was standing on end-like quills upon the fretful porpentine ...” (“The Code of the Woosters” 117). To reappear when Sir Watkyn is in hot pursuit of Gussie whose .” spectacles were glittering in a hunted sort of way, and there was more than a touch of the fretful porpentine about his hair” (ibid, 196). *Joy in the Morning* picks up the allusion more prominently. Bertie is annoyed that Jeeves has got him entangled in a scheme involving Lord Worplesdon:

‘Entirely through your instrumentality, I shall shortly be telling Uncle Percy things about himself which will do something to his knotted and combined locks which at the moment has slipped my memory.’

‘Make his knotted and combined locks to part and each particular hair to stand on end like quills upon the fretful porpentine, sir.’

‘Porpentine?’

‘Yes, sir.’

(“Joy in the Morning” 166)

In the same novel the phrase crops up again “if I could show you that list Boko drafted out of the things he wants me to say ... your knotted and combined locks would part all right, believe me” ( ibid 169). Porpentine makes its fourth appearance in Bertie's reservations about wearing Stilton's police uniform to the costume ball:

'I am not a weak man, Jeeves, but when I think of what will happen it makes my knotted and combined locks ... what was that gag of yours?'

'Part, sir, and each particular hair'.

'Stand on end, wasn't it?'

'Yes, sir. Like quills upon the fretful porpentine'.

(“Joy in the Morning”224)

The novel ends with the same quotation in slang form, when Bertie says that he preferred to sometimes see Jeeves' “knotted and combined locks do a bit of parting” ( ibid 248 ) rather than his trademark deadpan response. The motif of the fretful porpentine also runs through *Jeeves in the Offing*, *Much obliged*, *Jeeves* and *Aunts aren't Gentlemen*. After Bertie jumbles the whole quote into a unrecognizable mess : “ Do you recall telling me , once about someone who told somebody he could tell him something which would make him think a bit? Knitted socks and porcupines entered into it, I remember” (*Jeeves in the Offing* 11). Our thoroughly piqued curiosity is sated by Jeeves when follows it up with the full quotation for the first time. The two other pervasive phrases of the series are “*cat in the adage*”(Macbeth) and “*the lark's on the wing, the snail is on the thorn*” (Browning's *Pippa Passes*) which occur and recur in *Right Ho, Jeeves*, *The Code of the Woosters*, *The Mating Season* and *Stiff Upper lip, Jeeves*\_. An example of each will further accentuate the fact that Wodehouse used stock phrases and clichés in his *Bertie-Jeeves* novels and also Wodehouse defamiliarized familiar stock phrases .

‘What's that thing of yours about larks?’

‘Sir?’

‘And I rather think, snails’

‘Oh yes sir ... the hill-side's dew-pearled ... ‘

‘But the larks, Jeeves? The snails? I am pretty sure larks and snails enter into it’

(“ The Code of the Woosters” 230)

Abbreviation as a stylistic device is pervasive in Wodehouse. It is seen as Bertie frequently abbreviates a word or phrase he has just used but needs to repeat. Chased all over the house by Brinkley, as Bertie furtively looks about

“... a shadowy form was in the far corner, wrestling with the grandfather clock ... a sudden twist of the combatants had revealed to me the face of the s.f. , and with a considerable rush of emotion I perceived that it was Brinkley” (“Thank You, Jeeves” 111). Sometimes abbreviations become so complicated that it compels the reader to skip back for verification:

‘Well, then, sir, his lordship informs me that he is in the process of concluding the final details of a business agreement of great delicacy and importance’.

‘And he wanted you to vet the thing for snags?’

‘ Not precisely, sir. But he desired my advice’.

‘They all come to you, Jeeves, don't they-from the lowest to the highest?’

‘It is kind of you to say so, sir’.

‘Did he mention what the b.a. of great d. and i. was?’

(“Joy in the Morning” 32)

Not all abbreviation in Wodehouse are as complicated or lengthy and original as the one just cited, however the novels are strewn with abbreviations for familiar phrases and clichés which readers recognize without difficulty, like when Bertie says he “emitted a hollow g” (“Thank You, Jeeves” 103 ) or when Bertie describes a conversations between himself , Nobby and Boko after Jeeves' departure: “He oiled off and we settled down to an informal debate in which the note of hope was conspicuous by it's a” (“Joy in the Morning” 219 ), likewise “her words, as you may well imagine, were m. to my e” ( “Stiff Upper Lip, Jeeves” 36 ), says Bertie in response to Madeline's news that she was in love with Gussie.

Wodehouse's literary genius is seen both in his use of a very subtle narrative strategy, the use of the first person narrative and the fact that the narrator is also a participant. The *Bertie-Jeeves* novels are all written in the first person, which is both a minor handicap and a major strength. The drawback lies in the fact that nothing can happen for the reader unless Bertie or the specific narrator sees or hears of it and the readers need to interpret Jeeves' motives and intentions while they themselves remains

oblivious to it. However the strengths lie in the facts that with his primary characters as narrators and participants, Wodehouse has several options for the delineation and development of his plots. In some of the novels, the action starts off very promptly, in others Wodehouse takes a leisurely stroll around his primary characters before setting the scene and drawing together the various strands of the plot. It also allows the readers to know and relish the fact that Bertie, Lord Ickenham, the Hon. Galahad Threepwood, Freddie or Rupert Baxter are always only a few pages away from imminent disaster wherever one might be in the novels. However, what Stephen Greenblatt writes of Shakespeare in his essay *Invisible Bullets* can be seen at play in Wodehouse too. Greenblatt asserts "that during the process of transgression and inversion authority is subjected to open, sustained and radical questioning before it is re affirmed, with ironic reservations, at the close"(Greenblatt 29). Nowhere is this more in evidence than in the Ashe- Peters and Bertie-Jeeves relationships. In an ironic reversal in Wodehouse it is Jeeves the servant who is in the position of power and it is Bertie the master whose initial *open, sustained and radical* questioning of Jeeves's authority and wishes that makes him end reaffirming it at the close of the novel with Jeeves always getting what he wants by hook and mostly by crook.

Equally applicable to Wodehouse is a radically materialist reading of Bakhtin's concept of carnival postulated by Peter Stallybrass and Allan White in *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*. The upheavals caused by the inversion of "the relations of subject and object, agent and instrument, husband and wife, old and young, animal and human, master and slave" (Stallybrass and White 56) reformulate,

for a short while, socially sanctioned power relationships and bring the margins to the centre endowing it with a voice and visibility. The power relationships in Wodehouse show that just as “the carnivalesque is not equipped to topple the dominant order neither is the dominant able to silence the carnivalesque”(Stott 36 ) In *Thank you, Jeeves* when Bertie tries and fails to elicit a feudal submission to authority from Jeeves, he grandly accepts his resignation. Though Jeeves betrays no distress at the situation his subsequent manipulation of events enabling him to re-enter Bertie's services is an affirmation of Bertie's dominant position of power and authority. Bertie knowingly and willingly overlooks Jeeves' manipulations tacitly re-establishing their relationship to its former equal footing. Bertie is more or less happily engaged to Florence Craye who has put Bertie's devotion to test by demanding that he destroy the manuscript of Uncle Willoughby's *Recollection of a Long Life*. Bertie fails the test as Jeeves sees to it that the manuscript safely reaches the publishers. Bertie's outrage is mollified only when Jeeves points out at “it was her intention; Sir to start you almost immediately upon Neitzche. You would not like Neitzche, sir. He is fundamentally unsound” (“Joy in the Morning 93).The story ends with this exchange.

‘Oh, Jeeves, I said, about check suit’.

‘Yes, sir?’

‘Is it really a frost?’

‘A trifle too bizarre, sir, in my opinion’.

‘But lots of fellows have asked me who my tailor is’.

‘Doubtless in order to avoid him, sir’.

‘He's supposed to be one of the best men in London’.

‘I am saying nothing against his moral character, sir’.

(“Joy in the Morning” 213)

Silly. Preposterous. Even absurd. But as Wilde's Algernon said about a similar absurdity, perfectly phrased. In many ways, Wodehouse, “achieved what Flaubert aspired to do: to write a novel about nothing. Wodehouse achieved his effects through a combination of flawless diction and fastidious plotting ...” (Kimball “The Genius of Wodehouse”). The splendid hilarious play of register, the endlessly comic allusions, the violent freedom with parts of speech; as Bertie might have said, others abide our question, but Wodehouse is free. “The idiomatic style of many of his best books; a sort of idiolect one-tenth observed, nine-tenths invented; has a powerful charm, but beneath the period flavor a true linguistic fantasist may be observed to be at work ..”(Hensher, “The Music of Language”).

It was through his definitive use of the English language that Wodehouse’s use of stock characters is most distinctive for the identity of Wodehousian characters lies in their trade-mark language. In keeping with his absent-minded character Lord Emsworth is given a monosyllabic vocabulary which he uses sparingly. The romantic heroes and their friends in the *Blandings Castle Saga* speak the language of the Knut, with Psmith being the Knut-in Chief. The Knut language, like other generic slang used substitution for the sake of substitution and is the language of the school-boy.

The Knut with the eye-glass and faultless clothes was a stock in Frank Richards stories but Psmith is the only example of the Knut with clever talk. “Buzzing is a conversational excitement-inciter. It is a Wodehouse proprietary patent medicine, and Psmith is its first dispenser”(Usborne 81). Talkative and gregarious by nature, Psmith, the first major conversational parodist in Wodehouse, has a vocabulary with distinct echoes of both Sherlock Holmes and Babu Jabberjee. The Psmith buzz which was originally a blend of three distinct styles was a rich mixture of parodies, quotations, word muddles and false concords which was isolated by Wodehouse and used to personalize the diction and style of Galahad and Uncle Fred in the *Blandings Castle Saga*, who were maestros of racy conversation, invective and persiflage. The unconscious humour of Bertie’s language and the pompous circumlocutory language of Jeeves too define their character. Apart from Aunt Dahlia’s stock role in the novels it is her loud voice and language strewn with words from the sphere of hunting that distinguishes her from the numerous aunts who throng Wodehouse’s novels.

In his novels, Wodehouse collapses the boundaries of genre and characterization by his use of diverse narrative techniques, recombination of genres and manipulation of language. The genres are numerous: romance, quasi-detective, screwball comedy and pure farce and so are types of characters deployed, the plots and motifs recurrent. What sets it all apart is that the genres are recombined to come up with unique genres like a romance that never ends in marriage. Similarly stereotypes are endowed with uniquely individualized character traits and quirks through a personalising of

qualities and attribution of trademark language which then become embodiments of that character which are foregrounded but escape from becoming automatized. This strategic use of language, character and narrative techniques enables Wodehouse to make his form and content as well as narrative and narration to coalesce seamlessly. In his novels, Wodehouse took the formulae and conventions from Victorian farce and melodrama and added to it his trademark ultra sophisticated stylization and polished wit. His use of stock characters and situations, his stylization and witty dialogue is best exemplified in the *Blandings Castle Saga* and the *Bertie-Jeeves Series*. Here Wodehouse projects the society of upper class leisure as a world so emptied of earthiness and genuine emotional reality that it is pure style alone that sustains it, in a world where action exists in order to make the appropriate conversation possible.

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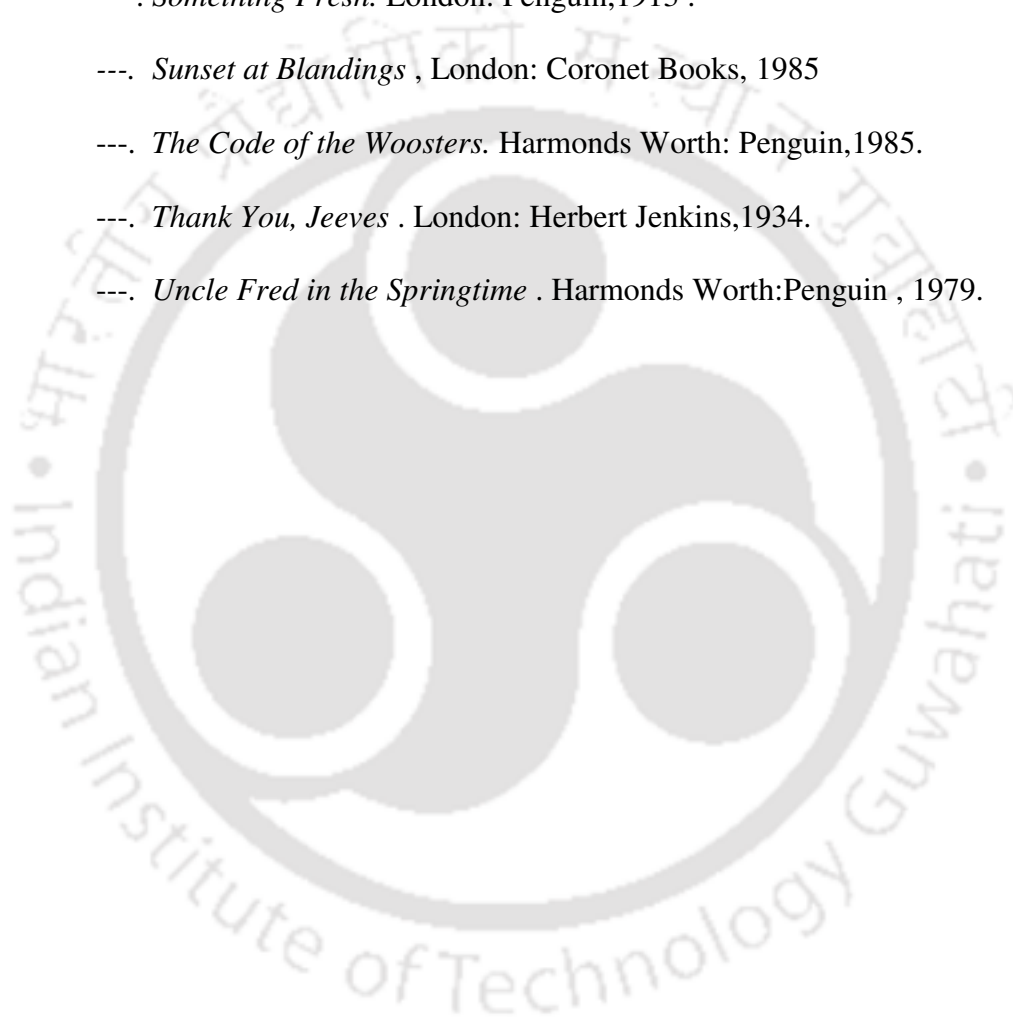
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## Chapter VI

### Re-visioning Wodehouse: *rem acu tetigisti*

Wodehouse was both continuing and contributing to the traditions of English comedy of using stock comic characters through his specific use of these characters, both as they existed and evolved down the ages. Wodehouse himself drew pointed attention to this inherent duality in his use of stock traits throughout his works. Wodehouse transformed the traditional stereotypes by investing them with comic traits, through his unique and definitive language, technique and trademark mixing of genres. Wodehousean stock comic characters thus added a unique character type to the traditional stereotypes.

Wodehouse's long literary career flourished at a time when high literary modernism was sweeping the English literary scene but he remained firmly grounded in popular literature. It is a tribute to the great stylist that Wodehouse was, that he used conventions and at the same time gave them a sheen of originality and uniqueness through his instantly recognizable brand of wit, which was neither parodic nor satiric, but sublimely genial.

That Wodehouse used stereotypes in his fiction is indubitable. Equally indisputable is the fact that there are several novel and noteworthy aspects to Wodehouse's use of

stock characters which sets him apart from his predecessors and contemporaries. Dickensian characters had a particular character trait exaggerated and marked out to individualise them so that they were a blend of the macabre, grotesque and pathetic, with just a hint of the comic. Likewise the characters of Austen and Shaw showed elements of realism and an ironic humour but not the all-pervasive humour of Wodehouse. No doubt in both his *Blandings Castle Saga* and the *Bertie-Jeeves Series* Wodehouse used traditional stock characters like the dreamy and absent-minded old man in Lord Emsworth, the dotty peer in Duke Dunstable, the *senex* in Lady Florence and Lady Julia, the matriarch in Lady Constance Keeble, the romantic heroes of the *Blandings Castle Saga*, the aid to the young lovers in Galahad Threepwood, Beach the butler, Psmith the private detective and the female menaces in Aunts Agatha and Dahlia, the long suffering husband in Uncles Tom and Percy and the *eiron* and *alazon* in Bertie and Jeeves. What is unique about Wodehouse's use of stock characters is that not only did he make them the centre of focus with the plots and narratives structured around them but that he invested them with comedic traits. A shrewd mixing of genres and stock traits enabled him to create a wide variety of fresh and original characters who were an amalgam of the old and new. Lord Emsworth and the Duke are not only absent-minded and dotty, but are also shrewd and irascible. The *eiron* of classical comedy is transformed and transmuted into one of Wodehouse's greatest character stereotype in Bertie Wooster. The character of Bertie which is a unique combination of the stage-dude and the innocent fool of medieval comedy is further individualised with linguistic quirks of a burler whose language is a mix of slang and classical allusions, his code of loyalty to his friends, his intense

desire to be considered a *preux chevalier*. Likewise in the *alazon* Jeeves , Wodehouse combined the character traits of the fool, the trickster and the clever servant, but in a masterly twist makes him an amoral character who quotes Shakespeare and the Bible in a staid and pompous manner. Everybody turns to Jeeves for solving their problems and he obliges by hook and mostly by crook.

In comedy crisis is temporary and illusory, a mere shadow over the happy events and eventual happy ending where as modern literature, to use Johan Huizinga's phrase, has completed "a fatal shift towards over-seriousness and imbued with the tragic sense of life, in which tragic and realistic are normally applied as terms of praise, comedy is bound to be mistaken for a vehicle for naïve optimism and facile evasion" (Mooneyham 4). Perhaps this is what that prevents viewing comic endings and Wodehousean comedies as even remotely mimetic of experience. The traditions of the Romantic Comedy of Shakespeare are all present in Wodehouse in a uniquely transfigured manner. Wodehouse too transports his characters to rural retreats which are stately country homes but they are infested with bumbling policemen and menacing magistrates who not only throw the book at, arrest and fine their guests at the slightest pretext but also themselves indulge in theft and violence. In *Thank You, Jeeves* we have Bertie in disguise relentlessly pursued by the incompetent and bumbling Dobson and Voules. Equally relentlessly pursued by a determined father, Stoker, intent on compelling Bertie to a shot-gun wedding neither of the couple wants. Likewise in Shakespeare impersonation is a minor aspect of plot with the couples remaining unknown even to themselves. In *Uncle Fred in the Springtime*

impersonation is the central motif with all the major characters: Lord Ickenham, Pongo, Polly, Claude Pott and Rupert Baxter under false pretences at Blandings. Theft is the pivot around which the plots of *The Code of the Woosters* and *Aunts Aren't Gentlemen* revolve around.

It was through his definitive use of the English language that Wodehouse's use of stock characters is most distinctive, for the identity of Wodehousean characters lies in their trade-mark language. In keeping with his absent-minded character Lord Emsworth is given a monosyllabic vocabulary which he uses sparingly. The romantic heroes and their friends in the *Blandings Castle Saga* speak the language of the Knut, with Psmith being the Knut-in Chief. The Knut language, like other generic slang used substitution for the sake of substitution and is the language of the school-boy. The Knut with the eye-glass and faultless clothes was a stock in Frank Richards stories but Psmith is the only example of the Knut with clever talk. "Buzzing is a conversational excitement-inciter. It is a Wodehouse proprietary patent medicine, and Psmith is its first dispenser" (Usborne 81). Talkative and gregarious by nature, Psmith, the first major conversational parodist in Wodehouse has a vocabulary with distinct echoes of both Sherlock Holmes and Babu Jabberjee. The Psmith buzz, which was originally a blend of three distinct styles, was a rich mixture of parodies, quotations, word muddles and false concords which was isolated by Wodehouse and used to personalize the diction and style of Galahad and Uncle Fred, Bertie and Jeeves. In the *Blandings Castle Saga* the Psmith - buzz makes Galahad and Uncle Fred maestros of racy conversation, invective and persiflage. It is again echoed in the unconscious

humour of Bertie's language and the pompous circumlocutory language of Jeeves. " 'Uncouth' about sums it up. I doubt if I have ever seen an uncouth kid than this Glossop ... And he's just the same today. It's the old story. The boy is the father to the man ..."( *Right Ho, Jeeves* 139) and then a subtle twist makes it originally Wodehousean :

'The point I am trying to make, I said, is that the boy Glossop is the father to the man Glossop. In other words, each loathsome fault and blemish that led the boy Glossop to be frowned upon by his fellows is present in the man Glossop-I am speaking now of the man Glossop-to be a hissing and a byword at places like Drones ...' (ibid)

Similarly it is Aunt Dahlia's loud voice and language strewn with words from the sphere of hunting that distinguishes her from the numerous aunts who throng Wodehouse's novels.

It is a paradox that needs a careful analysis, of how Wodehouse is both a major literary figure and a product of the popular magazine market. Not only was Wodehouse well aware of the constraints of the market place, he tailored his writing methods and the form of his works to it. Forming currents and eddies, popular culture represents a complex of mutually interdependent perspectives and values that influence society and its institutions in various ways. It might be a minority pursuit associated with a folk culture or a class culture. Hence the term popular culture

encompasses both the value and role of the culture industries as well as the reception and use of popular cultural products. According to Brooker , the popular is viewed , whether in relation to the mass media or youth cultures , “ as the positive expression of cultural meanings , as a subversive or carnivalesque rebuff to the homogenizing intent of dominant ideology” (qtd Brooker 195).

Metaphorically speaking, in its early usage, the word culture referred to organic cultivation and by extension it has come to mean a cultivated body of values. While sociologists and anthropologists have used the term to denote the totality of customs and institutions of a human group, community or society, literary criticism has traditionally concerned itself with culture as a body of values, particularly “those values transmitted from the past to the future through the imaginative works of men. Culture in this sense implies the accumulation of discriminations” (Fowler 51). Since it distinguishes between passive recipients of social perspectives and those who cultivate an awareness of such perspectives, this implicitly suggests a selective social structure, which in turn generates theories of a distinctive class with a duty to protect and disseminate traditions. “It becomes simultaneously a code of values and a mode of perception” (Fowler 51). Alternatively from the scientific viewpoint, culture is seen as the totality of human habits, customs and artifacts. It is however seen that despite the apparent central difference that one claims to be evaluatory and the other descriptive, the critical and scientific definitions overlap. Q.D. Leavis , in his seminal work *Fiction and the Reading Public* had postulated a pyramidal structure of high , middle and low-brow culture , but the growth of mass-communication , films ,

television and paperbacks called into question these traditional standards and accepted forms. A cross-fertilization between mass and minority art and between its audiences led to an overlapping of art forms and pigeon-holing became difficult. Increasingly therefore culture has come “to refer to individual style or character , to a stage of artistic or intellectual development, to the expressive life and traditions of a social group, to a socio-historical moment or a broad epoch” (Brooker 59). Raymond Williams' account of the term culture and its usage in the European context over the last three centuries suggests that in its “most wide spread use” and as “a whole way of life” (ibid 59) culture refers to the world of the arts, be it literature, music, painting, sculpture, theatre and films.

Being such a mutable term, culture has necessarily been understood and valued in different ways. “In a traditional perspective it is seen as embodied in a selective canon of works comprising ‘high culture’ and valued above commercial or popular artistic forms ‘low’ or mass culture to which some might wish to deny any genuine artistic status” (Brooker 59). Culture is therefore defined in relation to this historical form of society, in terms that see one as opposed to the others, particularly in the writing of Mathew Arnold, F. R. Leavis and T.S. Eliot who mobilized culture to serve a liberal or radical conservative ideology as opposed to the mass society of the Frankfurt School led by Theodore Adorno. It is seen that in both the traditions, the valued culture is either of a minority or an elite , although the authors, artists ,genres and individual works falling in its ambit may be as diverse as the Greek classics, the realist novels or the contemporary avant-garde, signifying a radical contemporary

shift of definition and terms of valuation. What is common to all the varied views is the assumption that culture has an active shaping influence upon ideas, attitudes and experience. While it would be incorrect to suggest that there is a consensus definition of culture in the contemporary period, Raymond Williams' concept of culture as a signifying system "through which necessarily ... a social order is communicated, reproduced, experienced and explored" (Brooker 60), comes closest to an acceptable definition of culture. The variant meanings of culture are now more easily accepted and culture is today understood as the "necessary experience of a range of signifying practices across different media and discourses" (Brooker 60).

This in turn brings us to another key but ambiguous term in Cultural Theory and analysis, *popular culture*, a term used to designate "the culture of the people" (Brooker 195). A couple of decades ago intellectuals who were still engaged in the "battle of the brows" (Cawelti 165) were distressed about the spread of mass culture, they feared that low-brow tastes catered to by the mass media would eventually overpower the great traditions of high or serious culture. Popular culture is then a term loosely used to designate those cultural forms whose popularity is measured by how conspicuous it is or by its commercial success. Hence popular culture is often equated with Mass Culture and urbanization. The earliest use of the term *popular* in English was during the fifteenth century when it signified something base or low or to do with the common people, and was used in a pejorative sense. The difference between the term popular culture and the 1950's favourite nomenclature of low-brow or mass culture indicates a significant shift in attitude. The negative low-brow connoted stupidity and crudeness and *mass* implied a mechanically standardized

industrial product aimed at the lowest common denominator. It was only from the late eighteenth century that it began acquiring a positive connotation and came to imply something widespread. The distinctions between the exclusive elitist high culture of the ruling social groups and the low or folk culture of the lower classes are no longer valid. The works of writers including Shakespeare, Austen, Dickens and Wodehouse either straddle or often cross the so called boundaries of high and low culture. C.L. Barber in his studies of Shakespeare's comedies for instance, locates much of the characteristic vitality of Shakespearean drama in its participation in Renaissance popular culture. "Popular culture as a phrase symbolizes an attitude ranging between neutrality and enthusiasm for the same kind of cultural products which would have been condemned as garbage by many earlier intellectuals and artists"(Cawelti 166). What distinguishes Wodehouse's fiction is that way back in 1905 he wrote with striking wit in a style which synthesized the intellectual and the colloquial at a time when popular culture was not fashionable. It was perhaps this attitude which fetched him the Mark Twain medal for "outstanding and lasting contribution to the happiness of the world" ("Performing Flea" 10) and recognition, albeit belated, from one of the highest bastions of high brow culture which honoured him with a honorary D.Litt. and fulsome praise.

What is relevant in the context of popular culture therefore is both the consumption of popular culture texts and the process of production of those texts. When newspapers and news magazines began to provide serialized stories for their readers, thus were born the popular short story and the popular novel. Popular novel is a term loosely

used to describe a novel which has a wide readership but had a slightly pejorative connotation implying a middle or low-brow readership and these novels were not supposed to have much literary merit and hence kept outside the purview of the canon. It was mostly the best seller historical novels and the romances that were initially classed as popular fiction.

One of the hall marks of popular culture and literature is the use of formulaic devices, be it stock characters, situations, stylistic devices and narrative techniques. By foregrounding the conventions that epitomized popular literature, Wodehouse boldly remained within the orbit of popular literature while simultaneously exploring and exposing conventionality. Parodying literary conventions is indubitably an aspect of high literature and parody is still a subsidiary part of modernism. On the other hand, Wodehouse avoided parody most of the time.

There is a blending of high art and the popular in Wodehouse, particularly noticeable in both the *Bertie-Jeeves Series* and the *Blandings Castle Saga*. This he does by reversing the traditional class-associations in the Bertie-Jeeves relationship , by blurring the distinction between high and popular literature and their concomitant association between the higher and lower classes. In the *Blandings Castle Saga* all the youngsters like Freddie Threepwood, Ashe Mardsen, Hugh Carmody, Psmith, Sue and Joan as well as Beach, the butler read pulp fiction. On the other hand in the *Bertie-Jeeves Series* we have a comic reversal with reading material, language and diction of Jeeves, the valet's, at par with that of an Oxford educated gentleman, and

Bertie the Oxford educated scholar is given the vocabulary of a “Jazz-age upper-class twit” (Thompson 330 ).

There is an inexplicable reluctance by many critics and academics, stretching back to Dr. Samuel Johnson, for whom a humorist was ‘a mere humourous person’ , to treat humour as real literature , it may be due to the fear that they might be accused of lacking ‘*gravitas*’, a charge dreaded by academics of all hues. One probable reason why there is not much work done on P.G. Wodehouse or even humour, is because research topics are academic or syllabic centric which are in turn canon-driven. It is only of late issues like popular fiction, pulp literature, films, pop music, cartoons, comics and even pornographic literature have come within the ambit of research and study of the social scientists.

Wodehouse who cheerfully accepted Sean O'Casey's derogatory designation of him as English literature's ‘Performing Flea’ contributed much of his best works to the *Saturday Evening Post*, considered the bastion of middle-brow fiction. Not only did he orient his writings to the constricting editorial policies of the *Post* but more importantly, never aspired to move into the more prestigious literary magazines of his times. “Wodehouse was intensely aware of his own participation in the popular literary scene” (Thompson 5) and used the conventions of popular literature to his own advantage. Through a kind of ‘hyper conventionalizing’ (Thompson 330) of the conventions of both literature and society, Wodehouse succeeded in collapsing the distinction between high and popular literature. With his subtle mockery, genial satire

and literary skills, Wodehouse overturned the traditional class-associations and literary conventions while paradoxically focusing specifically on and playing with the formulaic and the conventional in both language and technique. It was in this sense that Wodehouse can be seen as continuing as well as contributing to the traditional conventions and forms of English popular culture and literature. In Wodehouse a new kind of relationship to the traditions of popular genres emerges reflecting his transformed awareness of popular culture.

Although “much of modern literary theory and criticism has moved to eliminate the traditional distinction which holds high literature to be automatically better than popular literature” (Thompson 339). It has to be admitted that some intellectuals on the other hand still subscribe to the view of popular culture as a threat to the traditional artistic and intellectual values and continue to think in terms of a hierarchy of cultural products; there is however an increasing trend, towards a form of cultural pluralism which accommodates different cultures on the grounds that they all fill the same essential needs for those involved. Herbert Gans in his seminal work *Popular Culture and High Culture* argues that culture is divided into a number of interlocking subcultures, loosely articulated along class lines, and that each of these subcultures, in turn, have their own distinctive pattern of artistic and cultural experience. Gans appears to suggest that, in principle, there is no difference between an educated intellectual reading Dickens' *Great Expectations* and a member of the lower middle class subculture watching a cricket match on television. According to Gans the intellectual's involvement in high culture is as much an unthinking reflex as the hard hat's passion for sports. What is to be noted is that cultural products express or fulfill

the emotional and psychological needs of the sub cultures they serve. The actual functions of the arts and other forms of cultural expression should therefore disregard as irrelevant the traditional concepts of quality or excellence , and this is endorsed by the increasing public support of what earlier intellectuals would have called low-brow culture.

Popular culture then is that prevailing group of ideas, perspectives and attitudes that are deemed preferred through an informal system of consensus within the mainstream of a given culture, and this makes it subject to constant change which in turn occur uniquely in place and time. Forming currents and eddies, popular culture represents a complex of mutually interdependent perspectives and values that influence society and its institutions in various ways, it might be a minority pursuit associated with a folk culture or a class culture, hence the term popular culture encompasses both the value and role of the culture industries as well as the reception and use of popular cultural products. What is relevant in the context of popular culture therefore is both the consumption of popular culture texts and the process of production of those texts. With the increase in literacy and the number of reading public, easily accessible reading materials began to have a wide readership. It was in response to this demand for cheaply produced and easily accessible reading material that newspapers and news magazines began to provide serialized stories for their readers, and thus were born the popular short story and the popular novel. Popular novel is a term loosely used to describe a novel which has a wide readership but had a slightly pejorative connotation implying a middle or low-brow readership and these novels were not supposed to

have much literary merit and hence kept outside the purview of the canon. It was mostly the best seller historical novels and the romances that were initially classed as popular fiction.

With this we came to another contentious concept, that of the canon. Canon is a term derived from Greek *kanon*, meaning measure or rule, and was a concept which operated on a principle of exclusion which sought to distinguish between the orthodox authoritative texts of the Bible and the heretical non-Biblical texts. Subsequently, the application of the term was carried over into literary culture and came to designate a “list of great books invariably drawn from the period of classical to modern European literature and identified with named authors” (Brooker 23). These selected texts were supposed to epitomize the aesthetic and universal moral human values but selection clearly implied a process of judgement and discrimination, with their canonic status ratified by an unspoken consensus. Over the last few decades the principles of selection and exclusion on which the canon depends have been increasingly contested.

Certain works by a selected author are preferred to others (Shakespeare's *Hamlet* to his *King John*); a certain Discourse (what counts as literature) is preferred to non literature (popular genre writings, other popular cultural terms, anonymous media texts); certain literary forms, the epic, poetry or poetic drama are preferred to the novel; tragedy is preferred to comedy. These hierarchies are also joined by other exclusions of class, gender, race and ethnicity. The canon therefore emerges as the embodiment not simply of

aesthetic values but of a selective humanist ideology .. .It is on these grounds primarily that the authority of the concept and its contents have been questioned. (Brooker 23)

All this questioning and criticism has led to an “opening of the canon to hitherto neglected authors and forms” (ibid 24). Consequent to this opening up of the canon, along with an increasing access to literary texts, the means to write or produce such texts , the dissemination of popular and mass culture and most importantly their academic study has expanded the “canon's composition and role in cultural history” (ibid 24). With the ever widening scope of the concept of the canon itself there has also been a concomitant increase in both the number and the role of institutions like the press, media and education that make and monitor its operation.

A study of the canon along these lines says Guillory, will not dispense with the notion or its works, but provide a historicized understanding of canonized texts, the regulative constraints under which they are judges and our own positions as self aware participants in this cultural process

(quoted Brooker 24)

Wodehouse who was originally one of a large set of popular authors like Harry Leon Wilson, E M Dell , Fitzgerald , Sherlock Holmes, Evelyn Waugh , Mary Roberts Rinehart was indubitably a product of the popular magazine boom that occurred just at the turn of the century, and remains popular and widely read even today. As Thompson points out , the ground work for Wodehouse's "neglect by most literary critics and historians" (Thompson 20) was laid by his conscious and deliberate decision to publish in mass-market fiction magazines. Whereas modernist literature disdained the conventional while Wodehouse explored and celebrated it. While several of Wodehouse's contemporaries, and major writers of his era did publish in the popular magazines, they were unable or unwilling to keep to the constricting formulaic requirements of this medium for :

Such authors ... convinced themselves that there was no means of compromise between their aims and the editorial requirements of such magazines. With only a few exceptions authors of the 30's and 40's have been printed in the popular magazines on their own terms only-which means rarely

(West, 119)

A significant new phenomena is an awareness of historical traditions in popular culture. Earlier, most popular works were conceived not as lasting art , but as entertainment, and little or no effort was made to preserve or remember these works

once they had served their purpose as entertainment or a means of increasing the circulation of a magazine or a newspaper. The extremely commercial organization of the process of production of popular culture texts was geared to the accrual of high profit from a constant stream of new works rather than in keeping older works available. Added to this was the fact that cycles of fashion and fad with their emphasis on the latest, predisposed readers and publishers alike to ignore popular works that were no longer current. Any historical consciousness involved in the publication or appreciation of popular culture texts rested solely in a sense of traditional conventions and forms shared by the publishers and readers. In all probability, there was in the minds of publishers a repertory of story formulae which had proved popular with the public like detective thrillers, romances and certain kind of comedy. Wodehouse's long literary career flourished at a time when high literary modernism was sweeping the English literary scene, he remained firmly grounded in popular literature. Advocates of modernist literature emphasized the qualities of originality and uniqueness, it is a tribute to the great stylist that Wodehouse used conventions and at the same time gave them a sheen of originality and uniqueness through his instantly recognizable brand as wit, which was neither parodic nor satiric, but sublimely genial.

If scholars or critics are fully to understand works of literary art, they must understand the commercial factors that influenced the composition and publication of these works. The marketplace was only one of several factors that influenced the literary work ... it was never absent from the author's thoughts if that author proposed to earn a living by writing. (West 19)

The policies of the magazines, the demands of the editors and the reading public meant that Wodehouse had to write very regularly and consistently, this in turn encouraged and fostered a formulaic approach to writing. Wodehouse very intelligently combined the use of clichés and repetition to come up with his unique formula that sustained his seventy year long literary career.

One of the hall marks of popular culture and literature is the use of formulaic devices, be it stock characters, situations, stylistic devices and narrative techniques. By foregrounding the conventions that epitomized popular literature Wodehouse boldly remained within the orbit of popular literature simultaneously exploring and exposing conventionality. Parodying literary conventions is indubitably an aspect of high literature and parody is still a subsidiary part of modernism. On the other hand, Wodehouse avoided parody most of the time.

Two of the most important influences on Wodehouse were his simultaneous exposure to the classics and to the popular literature of the late nineteenth century and this allowed him to see its conventions with remarkable objectivity. The rise of the popular fiction magazines both in England and in the U.S.A. was an important factor in the nineteenth century, for many authors including Dickens, Doyle, Poe, Stowe, Cooper, Twain among others serialized their novels and short stories in these magazines before publishing them in book form. Nineteenth century traditions were popularized by the tremendous boom in fiction magazines and novels that marked the turn of the century. The success of *The Public School Magazine*, started in England in

1898 led George Newnes Ltd. to start the rival *The Captain* and *The Strand* in 1891. Wodehouse entered this growing market and by the 1920s had become one of the most successful authors. Using the popular magazine short story and serial to gain and maintain his foothold in the popular magazine market, Wodehouse astutely eschews anything highly narrative but instead concentrated minutely on extant conventions.

Wodehouse did not use any daring devices and structures, nor did he attempt to give them a superficial veneer of realism, instead he stuck to his tried and tested repertory of strategies and patterns to produce quickly and consistently. Wodehouse was fully alive to this aspect of his craft and hence these formulae served as the basis for creation of new works which were carefully calculated to combine new twists with a fundamental similarity to earlier works of the same genre.

According to the Formalist School of criticism, the main function of art is to renew our perception of things, for, they argue the concept of *defamiliarization* lies at the root of all artistic creation:

Habitualization devours work, clothes, furniture, one's wife and the fear of war. And art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things to make the stone stony. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects "unfamiliar", to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. Art is a way of

experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important.

(Shklovsky 95)

Going by this definition of *defamiliarization*, any literary device that is striking and original can be *defamiliarizing*, ipso facto the repeated use of the same device robs it of its power to *defamiliarize*, “it becomes *automatized*” (Tomashevsky 95). Clichés are extreme cases of *automatization* for they are easily recognized. It is very interesting to notice how Wodehouse avoided the trap of *automatization* and at the same time made clichés the centre of his work. While most writers either totally avoided clichés or used it to parody and satirize other literary works, Wodehouse did something unique and ingenious, he not only flaunted his use of clichés but *foregrounded* these conventions, stock characters and situations until we are compelled to notice these as clichéd. Stretching the concept of defamiliarization of Russian Formalist Literary Theory, to its maximum, Wodehouse can be seen to be parodying 19<sup>th</sup> century literature and literary conventions themselves.

Wodehouse uses a wide variety of strategies to make the clichés he used extraordinary and strange, making them subtly original and alive. Wodehouse made no attempt to use style or a veneer of realism to camouflage the familiar, on the other hand he pushes us further and further into an awareness of the clichés at work in his narratives. “He is perhaps the best argument we have for taking popular literature seriously” (Thompson 65). It was a conscious and deliberate decision on the part of Wodehouse to publish in mass-market fiction magazines, he was equally clear about the fact that he had absolutely no reformist or didactic intent.

In his novels, Wodehouse collapses the boundaries of genre and characterization by his use of diverse narrative techniques, recombination of genres and manipulation of language. The genres are numerous: romance, quasi-detective, screwball comedy and pure farce and so are types of characters deployed, the plots and motifs recurrent, but what sets it all apart is that the genres are recombined to come up with unique genres like a romance that never ends in marriage, similarly stereotypes are endowed with uniquely individualized character traits and quirks through a personalising of qualities and attribution of trademark language which then become embodiments of that character which are foregrounded but escape from becoming automatised.

It was in this sense that Wodehouse can be seen as continuing as well as contributing to the traditional conventions and forms of British popular culture and literature. In Wodehouse's works a new kind of relationship to the traditions of popular genres emerges, which reflects his transformed awareness of popular culture. Whereas in Dickens we see a deep engagement with the grotesque and the macabre with which he blends humour and pathos, in the comedies of Oscar Wilde there is an attempt to satirize and ridicule. Neither of them manifests a self-conscious awareness of past popular traditions through a running pattern of allusion and ironic commentary on earlier works as Wodehouse does. For instance in *Joy in the Morning*, the self-proclaimed *preux chevalier* faithfully goes through the traditional generic role of the romantic hero, but where the traditional romantic hero works his way through the well established moves, all of Bertie's machinations are calculated to escape the dragnet of matrimony and in the end his relief at having evaded the walk down the aisle is stupendous and on this relief hinges much of the novel's comedy. Novels like

*The Code of the Woosters* and *Joy in the Morning* are ironic reflections on the favourite English legend of the chivalric knight *preux chevalier*.

Wodehouse wrote most of his novels in such traditional genres as the romance, the screwball comedy, the musical or the quasi detective, but his relationship to these generic traditions is quite different. Wodehouse's work reflects his transformed awareness of generic traditions and stereotyping of characters in a manner quite different from that of his contemporaries. None of them manifest a self-conscious awareness of past popular traditions of characterisation through a running pattern of allusion and ironic commentary on earlier character types as Wodehouse does. Thus Wodehouse's works compel us to a kind of double consciousness, on the one hand "we bring to them expectations which reflect our knowledge of the generic tradition, and these expectations are to some extent borne out in the characters and plots" (Cawelti 170) of Wodehouse's novels, and on the other hand his novels undercut and criticise the original formula in a striking way by deviating from the traditional genre.

He took the traditional stock characters and transformed them by an innovative recombination of their formulaic traits by investing them with uniquely individualised character traits and quirks through a personalising of qualities and the attribution of trademark language. He took things a step further by foregrounding these embodiments of character yet preventing them from becoming automatised. It was this strategic use of language, character and narrative techniques which enabled Wodehouse to make his form and content as well as narrative and narration to

coalesce seamlessly. The analysis of his work shows that within the orbit of a defined space Wodehouse was both continuing and contributing to the use and development of stereotypes and conventions. The most fitting epitaph to this great novelist is *The Times*' tribute to the 'Master' on his eightieth birthday that "to strike a comic vein thus far impervious to time and fashion is genius indeed...To the question where does he stand, the only answer is: apart" (The Times , 15th October , 1965).

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