Jeeves Takes Charge Study Guide

Jeeves Takes Charge by P. G. Wodehouse

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Introduction

P. G. Wodehouse's "Jeeves Takes Charge" was first published in 1919 in England in a collection of stories entitled *My Man Jeeves*. Wodehouse wrote dozens of stories and several novels detailing the comical misadventures of Bertie Wooster, a befuddled young Englishman, and his resourceful butler, Jeeves. "Jeeves Takes Charge" is one of the earliest stories in the series. Bertie recounts how he came to hire Jeeves in the story. In "Jeeves Takes Charge," as in all the "Jeeves and Wooster" stories, Bertie foolishly gets himself into a difficult predicament and it is up to Jeeves to save him. Wodehouse's stories were very popular when they were published, and they are still widely read today. His particular brand of humor continues to amuse many people as the numerous fan clubs that are found on the Internet demonstrates.

Author Biography

P. G. Wodehouse was born on October 15, 1881, in Hong Kong, where his father was stationed as a member of the British civil service. He was sent to England along with his older brothers for his schooling in 1884. He attended Elizabeth College and Malvern House, a naval preparatory school. At the age of 12, he began his most important educational experience at Dulwich College. His six years at Dulwich were a major influence on his life and work. His first payment for writing came during his last year there when one of his essays was published in the *Public School Magazine* .

Wodehouse knew early that he wanted to be a writer, but his father did not believe that writing was a sensible occupation. He was forced to become a bank clerk at the London branch of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank. However, he wrote during the evening and sold 80 stories and articles while he worked at the bank. Ultimately, he quit working there and became a journalist for The Globe in 1903, first writing and then editing the *"By the Way"* column. In 1904, he made the first of frequent visits to the United States and immediately fell in love with American culture. On one of his visits, he met the widow who would become his wife, Ethel Newton Rowley. They were married on September 30, 1914.

Wodehouse began writing lyrics for the musical stage in 1904. In1906, his first collaboration with Jerome Kern, *The Beauty of Bath*, was produced for the Aldwych Theatre. Kern introduced Wodehouse to Guy Bolton in 1906. The three men worked together to revolutionize the musical comedy. Wodehouse was a gifted lyricist with a breezy wit and he teamed with Bolton and Kern to write several hit plays, including *Have a Heart* (1917) and *Oh, Lady! Lady!* (1918). One of their plays, *Leave it to Jane* (1917) had a successful revival Off- Broadway in the early 1970s. Wodehouse also worked periodically in Hollywood during the 1930s, making what he believed was an outrageous amount of $2,000 per week as a script doctor for Samuel Goldwyn. However, he experienced greater success with his plays and his fiction. The theater had a tremendous influence on his fiction; he once commented that his books were musical comedies without the music.

Wodehouse's fiction was popular because of the absurd yet complex plots and zany characters. His stories were formulaic, but his formula allowed for a wide variety of situations and characters. His tales of Mr. Mulliner, Blandings Castle, and Jeeves and Wooster shared many of the same plot elements: silly young men seeking or avoiding marriage, mistaken identities, the purloining of some object by successive characters, etc. Many of the characters cross over from one story or novel to another, and the characters make frequent references to events that take place in other stories or novels. Another reason Wodehouse's formula was successful was his masterful command of the English language. He used metaphors, puns, slang, and literary references in his fiction to great effect.

In 1940, Wodehouse was captured by the Germans while living in France and spent much of the war interned in Berlin. He unwisely made a series of radiobroadcasts sponsored by the Germans from Berlin to America in 1941. Although the broadcasts subtly ridiculed the Germans, many right-wing publications in England branded him a traitor. Writers such as George Orwell and Evelyn Waugh, however, defended Wodehouse by pointing out that he was politically naive. Wodehouse did not realize that the broadcasts were valuable propaganda for the Germans. Wodehouse, who dearly loved England, was deeply wounded by the charges and ended up emigrating to the United States, becoming a citizen in 1955. The scandal ultimately blew over, and Wodehouse, to his great satisfaction, was knighted shortly before his death in 1975.

Plot Summary

The story takes place in England sometime between 1910 and 1920. Narrator Bertie Wooster, an idle and rich young man, opens "Jeeves Takes Charge" by admitting that he is much too dependent on his butler Jeeves. However, he is unashamed; after all, in Bertie's opinion, Jeeves is a genius. "From the collar upward he stands alone," says Bertie, and he proceeds to detail how he came to trust the butler with all of his affairs.

During a visit to Easeby, his Uncle Willoughby's estate, Bertie catches his original butler, Meadowes, stealing silk socks. He is forced to return to London to hire a new valet. Bertie is attempting to read a dull book given to him by his fiancee, Florence Craye, when Jeeves first arrives. Bertie, who is nursing a hangover, is immediately impressed when Jeeves concocts a remedy for him. During their conversation, Bertie learns that Jeeves was formerly employed by Florence's father, Lord Worplesdon. Jeeves resigned because he disapproved of Lord Worplesdon's fashion sense. Bertie senses that Jeeves does not approve of his engagement to Florence. Bertie receives a telegram from Florence urgently requesting that he return to Easeby, where she is staying as a guest. He orders Jeeves to pack, and discovers that Jeeves dislikes the suit he is wearing. Bertie disregards the butler's disapproval.

Upon arriving at Easeby, Bertie determines the nature of the emergency. His Uncle Willoughby has been writing his memoirs, "Recollections of a Long Life." It seems that the old man has read some of the manuscript to Florence, and she is appalled. The book details Sir Willoughby's wild adventures with his friends during their youth. Her father is one of many respectable gentlemen who, she feels, will be scandalized if the book is published. She proposes that Bertie pilfer the manuscript before it can be published. Bertie, who is financially dependent on his Uncle Willoughby, is extremely reluctant. He suggests that maybe Florence's younger brother Edwin, who is also a guest at Easeby, might be better suited for the task. After all, Edwin is a Boy Scout who is always looking for "acts of kindness" to perform. Florence threatens to break off their engagement if Bertie does not steal the book. Bertie, flustered, agrees to the wacky scheme. As he leaves the room, he runs into Jeeves, who informs him that someone has used black polish on his brown shoes.

Bertie lurks near his uncle's library waiting for an opportunity to filch the book. Sir Willoughby leaves the manuscript on a hall table for his butler, Oakshott, to take to the post office the next morning. Bertie snatches the book up and returns to his room. He arrives to find Edwin snooping about his things under the pretense of "tidying up." Bertie attempts to hide the book behind his back. Edwin informs him that one of his recent "acts of kindness" was to polish Bertie's shoes. Bertie sends the boy off to trim some cigars and immediately locks the manuscript in a drawer.

Bertie is fearful of trying to destroy the manuscript while he is still at Easeby. He determines that leaving it the drawer for the time being is the best solution. Sir Willoughby is concerned because the publishers have not yet received his book. Bertie attempts to pin the blame on his former butler, but his uncle points out that Meadowes was not present when he finished the manuscript. Bertie becomes nervous and walks around the estate chain-smoking. While passing the library window, he overhears a conversation between Edwin and his uncle. Edwin knows that Bertie has the book and he convinces Sir Willoughby to search Bertie's room. Bertie dashes back to the room only to meet his Uncle Willoughby and Edwin. Sir Willoughby uses the story Edwin has contrived as an excuse to search Bertie's room. The drawer where the book is hidden remains locked and Bertie, to his relief, cannot find the key. Suddenly, Jeeves, to Bertie's horror, appears with the key. The drawer is opened, but Bertie is sur- prised to see that the manuscript is no longer there. After Edwin and Sir Willoughby leave the room, Bertie questions Jeeves and learns that the butler had overheard his conversation with Florence regarding the book. Jeeves determined that it would be more prudent if he took possession of the parcel. Bertie is pleased with his butler's performance and is satisfied that he has done his duty for Florence.

Florence returns from a dance and Bertie tells her that, although he hasn't exactly destroyed the manuscript, he has fulfilled his obligation. At that moment, his happy uncle appears to tell them that the manuscript has arrived at the publisher. Florence, infuriated, breaks off their engagement. Bertie angrily confronts Jeeves. Jeeves tells Bertie that he thinks they overestimated the effect the book would have on the people in it. Bertie fires Jeeves, and Jeeves takes the opportunity to tell him that he believes that Florence and Bertie are a mismatch. Bertie orders him to leave the room. After a nights sleep, Bertie begins to think about what Jeeves has said. He attempts to read the book Florence gave him and realizes that Jeeves was right. He rehires the butler and, in an effort to win his approval, he tells Jeeves to get rid of his checked suit. Jeeves informs Bertie that he has already given the suit to the under-gardener.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

In this chapter Bertram "Bertie" Wooster describes how he first comes to meet and acquire the services of his manservant, Jeeves.

Wooster has been forced to interrupt the week he is spending at his uncle's home in Shropshire. He has discovered that his valet, named Meadowes, is stealing his silk socks and various other unspecified items, and he is therefore obliged to dispense with his services and return to London to find a new valet through an employment office.

A combination of drinking too much the previous evening, and trying to read a cerebrally-challenging book lent to him by his new fiancée, Florence Craye, has given Wooster a headache. He is feeling somewhat fragile when the doorbell rings, and he opens it to find "a darkish sort of respectful Johnnie" standing on the step, who announces himself as a candidate for the position of the new valet.

Although at that moment Wooster feels more in need of an undertaker than a valet, he invites the man in. Without asking any questions, the valet goes directly to the kitchen and prepares a raw egg with Worcester sauce and red pepper that he offers to Wooster, saying that it is beneficial "after a late evening." Wooster swallows it, and after a few moments of suspecting that he might spontaneously combust, he feels perfectly well. Immediately he hires the new man, who introduces himself as "Jeeves."

Wooster tells Jeeves that they will be leaving in two days time to return to the country. Jeeves notices a portrait of Florence Craye, and mentions that he had seen her when he was in the employ of her father, Lord Worplesdon, from whose service he had resigned because of his Lordship's strange taste in clothes. Wooster recalls that Lord Worplesdon was always an extremely eccentric and unpredictable man, of whom he had been afraid, and that unfortunately, if Florence has one fault, it is that she shares her father's temperament and can erupt unexpectedly. However, she has a wonderful profile.

He tells Jeeves that he is engaged to Florence, and from the tone of Jeeves' polite response he recognises that the valet does not approve of Florence. He can understand that, because she can be somewhat high-handed in dealing with the staff. At that moment a telegram arrives from Florence, ordering Wooster to return to Shropshire immediately. Although he finds this strange, as he is already planning to return the day after tomorrow, he does not discuss the matter with Jeeves, (as he would subsequently learn to do), and tells him to arrange for them to leave straight away. Jeeves assures him that he will have no difficulty in getting them both ready to depart.

When Wooster asks Jeeves his opinion of the suit he is wearing, although the manservant replies politely, there is something in his tone of voice again which signals that he does not approve of it. Determined not to be bullied by his new valet, like poor Aubrey Fothergill who was reduced to tears by his man disapproving of his favourite pair of brown shoes, Wooster questions Jeeves as to what is wrong with his suit. While he does not criticise it, Jeeves does tactfully suggest some quieter clothes, which idea Wooster defiantly rejects.

On the train journey Wooster worries as to what has caused Florence's urgent summons for him to return. He cannot imagine that anything untoward could have taken place in his uncle's house. Once they arrive, the butler tells Wooster that Florence and her maid are packing to go to a dance at another house and will be away for several days. When Wooster finds Florence she is plainly irritated, and she sidesteps his attempts to kiss her.

Florence's anger has been caused by an autobiography written by Wooster's uncle Willoughby, and she is not only shocked to read of Willoughby's own behavior, but also by the scurrilous accounts of events involving her father and other aristocrats. The manuscript, of which there is only a single copy, is due to be posted the next day to the publishers for immediate publication. Florence demands that Wooster must steal and destroy this manuscript before it can be published, otherwise she will never marry him. He protests that if Uncle Willoughby catches him stealing the manuscript he'll cut off his allowance, but Florence will accept no protest, nor his suggestion that she uses her obnoxious younger brother Edwin to steal and destroy the manuscript. By a combination of threat and cajoling, she forces Wooster to agree.

Feeling akin to a murderer as he plots his course of action, Wooster manages to remove the manuscript from the table where it is awaiting despatch to the publishers. As he tries to smuggle it into his room he finds horrible young Edwin in there, "doing an act of kindness" by tidying the room. Wooster manages, with difficulty, to encourage Edwin out of the way, and hides the manuscript in a drawer, which he locks, while he tries to think of a way of destroying the thick pile of paper without being seen. He becomes stressed and depressed as he contemplates what he is going to do next.

The following day his Uncle Willoughby announces that the publishers have told him that the manuscript has not arrived, and that he believes it has been stolen. He reminds Wooster that a number of objects have disappeared over the past weeks, and Wooster tells him that it was his previous valet, Meadowes, who was responsible, and whom he has sacked. Uncle Willoughby is utterly baffled by the mystery of the missing manuscript.

Later that evening, Wooster overhears the despicable young Edwin telling Uncle Willoughby that he has seen Wooster trying to hide a large package, and he suspects that it contains the manuscript. Uncle Willoughby decides to search Wooster's room. Wooster races back to his room intending to remove the package from his drawer, but he cannot find the key, which he had left in his evening trousers.

Uncle Willoughby makes up a lie as an excuse for searching Wooster's room, and as he tries to open the drawer, Jeeves arrives and produces the key. Wooster would like to murder Jeeves, but when the drawer is opened, the package has disappeared. After Uncle Willoughby has left the room, Jeeves tells Wooster that he had removed the parcel as he thought it was the best thing to do. Wooster thanks him for his intervention, and says that he will leave Jeeves to take the appropriate action with the manuscript.

The following day Florence returns and asks Wooster whether he has destroyed his uncle's manuscript. As he is trying to explain to her what has happened, Uncle Willoughby announces that he has had a call from his publisher to say that the manuscript has arrived safely. Florence is quite furious, and breaks her engagement to Wooster, saying that his Aunt Agatha was quite right to have a low opinion of him, and that although she had hoped to make something out of him, she sees now that he is impossible.

Jeeves admits to Wooster that he had posted the manuscript to the publishers, and that in his opinion people enjoyed seeing their names in print, and that old gentlemen particularly would be proud to see their youthful misbehavior advertised. Angrily Wooster tells him that Florence has broken off their engagement, and he sacks Jeeves.

Jeeves asks if, now that he is no longer an employee, he might speak frankly, and tells Wooster that he and Florence would have been most ill-matched, because she is a very bad-tempered girl and Wooster would not have been happy with her, nor would he have enjoyed having to read the books she had selected for him, particularly Nietsche. Wooster sends him away.

The next day, however, he finds himself thinking that Jeeves had not been entirely wrong about Florence's real nature. When Jeeves delivers his morning tea, he re-hires him, and asks his opinion again on the suit which Jeeves had tacitly disapproved of the previous day. Jeeves responds that the suit is a trifle too bizarre, and Wooster tells him to give it away. Smiling like a father at a child, Jeeves tells him that he had given the suit away the previous day, to the under-gardener.

Chapter 1 Analysis

This chapter gives the reader a thorough picture of Bertie Wooster. He is a man of some means, because he employs a valet, and wears silk socks. He is a mild-mannered person, who merely discharges the stealing valet, and doesn't have any desire to give him a good thrashing as a less-moderate employer might do.

He employs the language of the social "upper classes," using terms such as "a rather rummy business." He is by his own admission incapable of looking after himself, and lacking in intellect. The sole attraction of the girl to whom he has become engaged is that she has a wonderful profile, which appears to neutralize the fact that she is an intellectual with a volcanic temperament like her father, of whom Wooster is terrified. We might suspect that the engagement was more of the lady's making than Wooster's. He demonstrates his submissive nature when he does not for a moment consider questioning Florence's imperious command that he is to return immediately, and he is quite incapable of defying her. In a nutshell, he could be described as an amiable, upper-class "chump" - and may well describe himself in precisely the same words. He recognizes and accepts his limitations.

Jeeves is exactly what Wooster needs, a combination of manservant, confidante and father-figure, and to Wooster he has an almost magical quality. He arrives like a genie from a bottle and without needing any explanation understands immediately what is needed. Unlike a mere mortal, he "floated noiselessly through the doorway like a healing zephyr." He seemed to have no feet, and he "streamed in," appeared to flicker, and "shimmered out," much as a supernatural being might. His diplomacy is reflected in his referring to Wooster's hangover as "a late night."

From the moment he floats through the doorway, Jeeves is in complete control of Wooster's life. He knows how to make himself instantly indispensable, and can deal with any situation with calm and efficiency. Within moments of taking up his new appointment, he is confidently preparing for the two of them to depart the same day to stay in the country. He is a man who doesn't compromise; he has resigned from a previous employer because he didn't approve of the man's dress. Jeeves has impeccable taste in matters of gentlemen's clothing, and expresses his disapproval of Wooster's suit simply in his tone of voice. Similarly his "Indeed, sir?" in response to Wooster's announcement that he is engaged to Florence, manages to convey a tacit disapproval of the lady in question. Wooster recognizes that, unless he is jolly careful Jeeves will start bossing him. He feels defiant, but there is nothing to defy, because Jeeves is unfailingly polite.

It is soon apparent that nothing escapes Jeeves' notice, and he is at least one step ahead of everybody else as he looks after his master's best interests. While Wooster might pay the salary, Jeeves is very much the dominant partner in the relationship.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Wooster muses on the fact that what he enjoys is a quiet life, with regular meals, an occasional visit to a good musical, and having a couple of friends. He has just returned from France and is feeling that life is going his way, and his troublesome and domineering Aunt Agatha is unlikely to upset him, because she is recovering from an embarrassing incident that had taken place while they were in France. It is while he is enjoying this contented frame of mind that he is dismayed to overhear Jeeves, who is about to go on his annual holiday, telling his replacement that Wooster is exceedingly pleasant, but mentally negligible.

Wooster debates whether he should chastise Jeeves, but he feels it would be a waste of time as Jeeves seems to be immune to any rebuke, and so he calls for his hat and stick in a markedly cold manner to make his feelings clear, and goes to meet Aunt Agatha for lunch.

Wooster stops on the way to have a drink to fortify himself for the ordeal ahead. One drink turns to two, and then he meets his friend Bingo Little. He is surprised when Bingo tells him that he's been living in the country with the Glossop family at Ditteredge Hall, and working as a tutor to the young son, in order to make some money to replace that which he has lost betting on the horses. Wooster doesn't think that Bingo is sufficiently qualified to be a tutor. Bingo tells him that he dislikes the boy he is tutoring, Oswald, but that he has fallen in love with his sister, Honoria Glossop. Wooster is accustomed to Bingo falling in love frequently, but thinks that Honoria is a pot of poison, a large sporty girl with the physique of a wrestler coupled with a serious intellect.

Bingo confides that he hasn't summoned up the courage to declare his love to Honoria, although they walk together in the garden most evenings, and he thinks he can see a hint in her eyes that she reciprocates his feelings. Wooster is most sceptical. Bingo departs to meet Oswald who has had a dental appointment, and Wooster goes to his luncheon with Aunt Agatha.

He believes that after Aunt Agatha's recent embarrassing experience in France, where she had tried to pair him with a totally unsuitable girl, she will stay off the dreaded topic of matrimony. To his horror, she tells him that she has found him the perfect bride, who is none other than Honoria Glossop. Aunt Agatha has discussed the matter with Honoria and assures Wooster that Honoria will welcome his advances, and what is more she will make an ideal wife because she will mould him.

Aunt Agatha brushes aside all Wooster's objections, and insists that he must go to Ditteredge Hall the following day. When he returns home he tells Jeeves that he is in a precarious situation, but doesn't give any further detail. Normally he would have explained his dilemma to Jeeves, but after overhearing the latter's scathing comments, he decides to keep his problems to himself and sort them out himself, to show Jeeves that he is capable of doing so.

When Wooster arrives at Ditteredge Hall he learns that Honoria is away and will return the following day. He goes to walk in the pleasant grounds of the Hall, where he finds Bingo and the odious young Oswald, who is sitting on a bridge fishing, and who replies abruptly to Wooster's attempts at conversation. Wooster and Bingo move away from him, and Wooster suggests that it would be a fine idea to push the boy into the water. Bingo replies that although the boy is difficult, he tries to love him for the sake of Honoria, who adores her brother.

Wooster has a sudden inspiration as to how Bingo can capture Honoria's love. He decides that while Bingo and Honoria are walking together, he will push Oswald into the river so that Bingo can rescue him and earn Honoria's eternal gratitude. It is exactly the sort of scheme that Jeeves would have thought up, he believes. Bingo is impressed by the plan, and pleased at the thought of how wet Oswald will get.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Although he is aware that he is not an intellectual, Wooster is hurt when he overhears Jeeves. This is probably more because of Jeeves' disloyalty than because he is speaking the truth. It is most unusual for Jeeves to put a wrong foot forward, and the reader may wonder what caused him to make this mistake.

The prospect of lunching with Aunt Agatha requires Bertie to have a fortifying drink or two, so we know that she is going to be a difficult woman. With her domineering manner and disregard for Wooster's personal feelings, the reader can surmise that she is the root cause of his fear of women in general and his aversion to matrimony. Although the reader doesn't know Wooster's age, he is obviously a grown man, but his aunt talks to and treats him like a small child, and he responds accordingly.

Confrontation and defiance are quite alien to Wooster: rather than face his manservant, he silently sulks; rather than stand up to Aunt Agatha he buckles. His friend Bingo is a young man who does very little with his life, and whose interests are limited to frittering away his allowance on horse-racing, and falling in love. Like Wooster, Bingo is afraid of women.

Wooster hopes to score over Jeeves by showing him that he can take care of his own affairs. He explains that he is "in a bit of difficulty, on the bring of a precipice, and faced by an awful doom," without going into detail, but assuring Jeeves that he will get himself out of his current predicament. His plan is spoiled when Jeeves doesn't rise to the bait or express any interest in Wooster's circumstances, other than offering any assistance that might be needed. When it comes to a battle of wits, the odds are very much against Wooster.

Wooster's plan to win Honoria's admiration for Bingo by pushing her brother into the water, and Bingo's enthusiasm for this idea, indicate that mentally they are the equivalent of 12-year-old schoolboys.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Confident that nothing can go wrong with his clever plot, Wooster's sole regret is that because Jeeves is away on holiday, he will not be there to witness the successful outcome. All Wooster has to do to ensure the success of his plan, he believes, is to get Honoria to be in the right place at the right time.

Honoria returns to Ditteredge Hall with her friend Daphne Braythwayt. Wooster finds Dapne most attractive because she is nothing at all like Honoria.

Wooster maneuvers Honoria towards the bridge, and tells her that his friend is in love with her, but that unable to tell her so because he is rather shy. As he describes the virtue of her admirer, Honoria laughs, making a noise that Wooster thinks is like a train going into a tunnel. Oswald is irritated by the noise because it frightens the fish. Honoria remarks that she wishes Oswald wouldn't sit on the bridge as he might fall in.

Believing that Bingo is hidden in the bushes, waiting to rescue Oswald and earn Honoria's admiration, Wooster approaches Oswald, ready to push him into the water. As he does so, he recalls a time when he was forced to take part in an amateur dramatic production, and because he had been told to walk slowly, he moved at a snail's pace and felt he would never reach his objective. Oswald seems to get further away the more Wooster approaches him, but he finally reaches the boy and puts a hand on his shoulder, and tries to conduct a conversation. He manages to shove Oswald off the bridge, and then calls for help, expecting Bingo to appear, which he does not. As much as he dislikes the boy, he does not feel justified in allowing him to drown, so taking off his coat he plunges into the water. Once he surfaces he sees that Oswald is swimming strongly for the bank.

Wooster hauls himself ashore, and is met by a laughing Honoria, who tells him how funny he is, proposing to her in such a shy way and pushing her brother into the water to impress her. To his great horror Wooster realises that his actions have endeared him to Honoria, who adopts a proprietorial air and tells him that she is quite sure that she can make something of him, despite his wasted life so far.

After changing out of his wet clothes, Wooster meets Bingo, and asks him why he hadn't appeared to rescue Oswald, according to their plan. Bingo tells him that he has had a change of heart, and is now in love with Daphne Braythwayt and no longer interested in Honoria. Wooster receives a letter from Jeeves, saying that he is enjoying his holiday. Meanwhile, Honoria is waiting downstairs to read Ruskin to Wooster.

Chapter 3 Analysis

As soon as the reader sees the words "The beauty of the thing was that nothing could possibly go wrong," we know without any doubt at all that not only can it go wrong, but also it most certainly will. The fact that Jeeves will not be there to witness his masterplan is a source of great regret to Wooster, and indicates how strong is his need for respect and admiration from his manservant.

While Wooster tries to help Bingo by explaining to Honoria that a young man is in love with her, he is too dull-witted to realise that she thinks he is talking of himself. Had the plan for pushing Oswald into the water been instigated by Jeeves, he would definitely have ascertained first whether Oswald could swim, a thought that didn't cross the mind of either Wooster or Bingo. Inevitably Wooster's plan backfires in multiple ways - Oswald can swim; Bingo is nowhere to be seen; Wooster gets soaked; and Honoria mistakes his intentions. He finds himself unwittingly and unwillingly engaged to Honoria, who is set upon "moulding" him, and Jeeves is enjoying himself on holiday.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Wooster has been engaged to Honoria for two weeks, during which time she has dragged him around picture galleries and classical concerts, and forced him to read educational literature as she begins the "moulding" process. She announces that Jeeves is a bad influence, and that when she and Wooster are married, Jeeves will have to go. Aunt Agatha agrees. Wooster cannot imagine how he will get through the trials of life without Jeeves to look after him.

After lunch Honoria goes shopping, while Aunt Agatha breaks the news to Wooster that a slight difficulty has arisen, as Honoria's uncle Roderick, a nerve specialist, is uncertain that Wooster is a suitable match for his niece. Wooster is ready to relinquish Honoria at the first opportunity, but Aunt Agatha says that Sir Roderick simply wants to know that Wooster is normal, because he has a strange idea that Wooster had pushed Oswald into the water at Ditteredge. Wooster admits that he did push the boy, but Aunt Agatha ignores his confession and says that the problem really centres on Wooster's Uncle Henry, who is decidedly peculiar and once kept eleven rabbits in his bedroom. Sir Roderick wants to see if there is any trace of this eccentricity in Wooster.

Aunt Agatha says she has been told that the twins, Claude and Eustace, are doing extremely well at Oxford, and hope to be elected to an important club called "The Seekers". She imagines that it is a club for people seeking truth or knowledge.

Wooster is dismayed when his aunt tells him that Sir Roderick will come to lunch the next day, and that Wooster mustn't mention gambling; must not offer alcohol or coffee, must not smoke, and must only provide the simplest food because of Sir Roderick's weak digestion. She warns Wooster to behave himself, and says that if anything goes wrong he will have to answer to her.

The following morning Wooster goes for a walk to clear his head, and in the park he meets his two cousins, the twins Eustace and Claude, who are with a third person who has a pink face and whom they introduce as "Dog-face." They say that they have just come from Wooster's flat, and what a great fellow Jeeves is, and they try to make Wooster invite them for lunch at his expense. He tells them that he has a prior engagement at lunchtime, but lends them £5 for a meal.

When he returns to his flat Jeeves assures him that everything is set for the lunch. Wooster tells him not to let his eyes go glassy; otherwise Sir Roderick will have him in the lunatic asylum. The doorbell rings.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Wooster is so dependent upon Jeeves that he cannot imagine being able to navigate life without him, even once he is married to the overpowering Honoria, or especially when he is married to her. Both Honoria and Aunt Agatha recognise that Jeeves is the master in the relationship, and that unlike the malleable Wooster; he will not be controlled or manipulated by either of them. Unless they can get rid of Jeeves, they will not be able to maintain their control. Jeeves isn't going to let that happen, we can be quite sure of that.

In Aunt Agatha's hands Wooster is putty, and he seems to have no control over his own life. Whatever Aunt Agatha says, Wooster must do, and when she warns him to be on his best behavior when Honoria's uncle come to lunch, or else she will be very angry, we already know that the meal will turn into a disaster. Because of his easy-going and generous nature, Wooster is easy prey for Claude and Eustace. In fact, he seems to be easy prey for everybody.

By now, the reader is perfectly aware that if something can go wrong, it will, and so we are ready for whatever disaster is about to happen.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Whenever Wooster had previously met Sir Roderick it was when he was with Honoria, who tended to dwarf everybody else. Now he realises what a large man Sir Roderick is, with a bald head and shaggy eyebrows. He greets Sir Roderick merrily, and then remembers that he is meant to be very solemn. Sir Roderick apologises for being late, but explains that the Duke of Ramfurline who was exhibiting worrying symptoms has delayed him.

He asks if Wooster has a cat, which Wooster denies. Sir Roderick is certain he can hear one in the adjacent room, and says that he positively dislikes cats. He is, he says, disturbed by the ways of the world, and tells Wooster that during the morning his hat had been snatched off his head by somebody in the street. He believes that it was done by a person suffering from the same form of dementia that makes men waylay women and chop of parts of their hair. He mentions that the Duke of Rumferline believes himself to be a canary, and that his fit had been caused by a footman forgetting to bring him his morning sugar lump. Suddenly interrupting himself, Sir Roderick insists that he can hear cats mewing in the adjacent room.

Wooster summons Jeeves, and asks whether there are cats in the house, to which Jeeves replies that there are only the three cats in the bedroom. Wooster and Sir Roderick both rush towards the door, and collide, and Sir Roderick defends himself with an umbrella. All the cats start mewing loudly, and Jeeves suggests that it is the fish under Wooster's bed that are exciting them. At that point Sir Roderick says that he is leaving, and Wooster says that he will come with him to explain matters. As Wooster puts on his hat, it falls down over his eyes, and Sir Roderick snatches it away, saying that it is HIS hat, the one that was stolen from him that morning. Sir Roderick leaves, ordering Jeeves to follow him so that he can question him about Wooster's behavior.

Wooster flings open the bedroom door and is confronted by several cats shooting past him, and a large fish head lying on the carpet looking at him in an austere sort of way. He turns around to find the man with the pink face standing behind him, who has come to find his cats. Wooster asks why the man's cats were in his bedroom, and the pink-faced person explains that Jeeves had let him put them there. He tells Wooster that the fish belongs to Eustace, and the hat to Claude, and explains that in order to be elected to the Seekers Club, you have to steal something. The three of them had wanted to do it in style, and had therefore come to London, where Claude had stolen Sir Roderick's hat, Eustace had pinched a fish from Harrods, and he himself had snatched the three cats. They had intended explaining all this to Wooster when they met him before lunch, but he had been in too much of a hurry to stay and listen to them.

When the pink-faced man named "Dog face" says he'd like to take the hat, and the fish, Wooster tells him that the hat has gone back to its rightful owner, and the fish has been eaten by the cats. Very disillusioned, the fellow asks to borrow £10 to bail Claude and Eustace out of police custody where they are being held for trying to steal a truck.

Jeeves returns, and announces that he has replied very guardedly to Sir Roderick's questions. Wooster wants to know why Jeeves hadn't explained the circumstances to Sir Roderick right from the start. He suspects that Sir Roderick now considers him to be a lunatic. Jeeves thinks that is quite likely. Aunt Agatha telephones, and Jeeves answers, saying that Wooster isn't at home, and he doesn't know when he will return, but that he will give him a message. Wooster surmises that Aunt Agatha has heard from Sir Roderick about the disastrous luncheon, and that she is telephoning because she fears his marriage to Honoria might now be at risk. Jeeves agrees with him, and suddenly Wooster realises that is exactly what he wants, to find a way out of his engagement. He suggests that Jeeves has engineered the whole thing, and Jeeves agrees, as he had been told by Aunt Agatha's butler about Honoria's plans to dismiss him as soon as she was married to Wooster.

Jeeves reminds Wooster that he is meant to telephone Aunt Agatha immediately, and Wooster asks Jeeves for his advice. The manservant suggests that they leave for New York. Wooster tells him to book the tickets.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Wooster's day develops into pure farce as he tries obediently to follow Aunt Agatha's orders to favourably impress Honoria's uncle. It does not cross his mind that circumstances are playing perfectly into his hands. While trying to politely entertain Sir Roderick, he finds himself simultaneously embroiled in fighting a hopeless battle against hordes of cats, a giant fish, and a group of three madcap students - who have been given access to his apartment by the wily Jeeves, who has no intention at all of seeing his master married to Honoria.

Poor Wooster is so dim-witted that it takes him some time to realise that Jeeves' actions have saved him from the unhappy prospect of having to marry Honoria.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Shortly before Christmas, Wooster receives an invitation from Lady Wickham to spend the festive season at Skeldings. He asks Jeeves to pack suitable clothing, and ignores the frosty look that Jeeves is sending his way. When Jeeves reminds him that they had planned to go to Monte Carlo after Christmas, Wooster replies that their plans have now changed.

The telephone rings, and handing it to Wooster, Jeeves announces Aunt Agatha. Aunt Agatha says that she has heard that he will be at Skeldings for Christmas, and that he is to behave himself, because Sir Roderick will be there. She has persuaded Sir Roderick to give Wooster another chance to prove he is not a lunatic. Although Wooster is disturbed at the prospect of having to face the terrifying Sir Roderick again, he does have a valid personal reason for wanting to go to Skeldings. Jeeves is unsympathetic when he's told about Sir Roderick, and clears away the breakfast tray in a chilly atmosphere. Wooster knows that he is sulking because they are not going to Monte Carlo.

For the rest of the week Jeeves is very quiet and aloof, and inserts Wooster's dress shirt studs unnecessarily forcefully. Once they arrive at Skeldings Sir Roderick is not unpleasant to Wooster. He decides to confide in Jeeves his reason for wanting to be there. Wooster explains that he has engineered the invitation to Skeldings because he knows that Tuppy Glossop is going to be there. Tuppy is Sir Roderick's nephew, and some time previously he had played an unkind practical joke on Wooster, who wants to get his revenge. He also reveals that he is in love with Roberta Wickham, and he asks Jeeves to take every opportunity to put in a good word for him with Roberta's maid. Jeeves tells Wooster that he does not think Roberta will make a suitable partner for him, as she is too frivolous and needs a husband with a strong and commanding personality.

Wooster haughtily scoffs at Jeeves' opinion, and later tells him that he has entirely the wrong idea about Roberta. Wooster has confided in her his wish to be revenged on Tuppy Glossop. Roberta has suggested to him that he take a long stick with a darning needle on the end, and creep into Tuppy's room during the night and puncture his hot water bottle. Wooster thinks this is a remarkably intelligent suggestion that proves Roberta is a sensible and serious girl.

He asks Jeeves to supply a stick and a sharp needle, and ignores Jeeves' protests. Jeeves tells him where Tuppy's room is. That night, fearful of what might happen but determined to avenge himself, he finds his way into Tuppy's room and after some blundering around in the dark manages to stab the hot water bottle. As he tries to make his escape from the bedroom his dressing gown gets caught in the door, and the occupant of the room - Sir Roderick, captures him. When he explains that he thought the room was occupied by Tuppy, Sir Roderick says he had changed rooms with his nephew because he is afraid of sleeping on an upper room in case there is a fire. Wooster is scornful of such cowardice.

Wooster is shocked to learn from Sir Roderick that Jeeves was quite aware that he had exchanged rooms with Tuppy. Sir Roderick notices that water has begun to drip from the bed, and announces that he will spend the night in Wooster's room. Wooster cannot sleep in the bed vacated by Sir Roderick because it is soaking wet, so he squashes into an armchair and tries to get some sleep. Thinking about Jeeves' treachery prevents him falling asleep, and when the manservant brings him his morning tray and wishes him a "Merry Christmas," Wooster asks why he hadn't warned him that Sir Roderick and Tuppy had changed rooms. Jeeves explains that he had acted in Wooster's best interests to save him from marriage to Honoria.

Belatedly Wooster understands that Jeeves has saved him from Aunt Agatha's scheming, but then he worries that once Sir Roderick realises that it was Tuppy who was Wooster's intended victim, he will forgive Wooster who will once again be threatened with marriage to Honoria.

Jeeves says that he doubts that will be the case, after Sir Roderick's hot water bottle had been pierced for a second time that night, on this occasion by Tuppy, mistaking Sir Roderick for Wooster. Wooster finds it an extraordinary coincidence that he and Tuppy have both had the same idea, until Jeeves reveals that Roberta had given Tuppy the idea in exactly the same way that she had proposed it to Wooster.

Shocked and stunned by the perfidious behavior of the woman he thought he loved, Wooster is instantly cured of his infatuation. Learning that Sir Roderick is anxious to see him, and is not in good humour, Wooster asks Jeeves' advice. Jeeves suggests that they slip away discreetly from Skeldings, and reveals that their train tickets to Monte Carlo are still valid, as he had, by an unusual oversight, forgotten to cancel them.

Chapter 6 Analysis

For the first time Jeeves displays some human emotion - his disappointment at not going to Monte Carlo, and not getting his own way for once.

Again Wooster is involved in a farce, creeping around in the night like a naughty schoolboy sticking needles into hot water bottles, and as usual the scheme collapses around his ears, just as Jeeves planned. In the end, of course, they go to Monte Carlo, just as Jeeves intended.

We start to wonder whether Jeeves would approve of Wooster marrying anybody, and whether he has his master's best interests at heart, or his own. It could be that he has found the perfect situation, with a master who is good-natured and utterly dependant upon him, and he doesn't intend to allow anything to happen to change that. His Machiavellian nature starts to appear almost satanic.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

While singing his favourite song, "Sonny Boy" in his bath, Wooster is interrupted by the unexpected arrival of Tuppy Glossop. He finds it strange that Tuppy should visit him at a time when he must have know he would be in the bath. In the sitting room he discovers Tuppy playing "Sonny Boy" on the piano. Tuppy tells Wooster that he has fallen in love with a girl named Cora Bellinger, who is studying operatic singing. There is an impediment to their relationship, as Cora is a most serious-minded girl who needs reassuring that Tuppy is not a practical joker. He implores Wooster, for the sake of his future happiness, to tell Cora that the story she has heard about the trick he had played on Wooster, is untrue. Wooster agrees, and Tuppy arranges to bring Cora for lunch.

Once Tuppy has left, Wooster tells Jeeves what has happened, and feels aggrieved that not only did he fail to get his revenge on Tuppy, but now he is obliged to feed him and his new lady love. Jeeves replies unsympathetically that life is like that.

Wooster does not share Tuppy's opinion of Cora, finding her too large for his taste. Tuppy abstains from alcohol during lunch in case Cora doesn't approve. Once she has left to go to a singing lesson, Tuppy reveals to Wooster his plan to win Cora's devotion.

She has agreed to sing at a rough club where Tuppy has been helping out, and he will also sing, impressing her with his voice and the gentle sentiments of the song he has chosen, which is "Sonny Boy." To Wooster, this is sacrilege, but before he can remonstrate with Tuppy, Jeeves announces that Mrs. Travers has telephoned, and Tuppy rapidly vanishes. Jeeves remarks to Wooster that the mention of Mrs. Travers appears to have frightened Tuppy away, and Wooster says that once Tuppy stands up and sings "Sonny Boy" before a roomful of rough market traders and fighters, he will be ridiculed. He asks Jeeves to remind him to go to the club so that he can have the pleasure of witnessing Tuppy's downfall.

Mrs. Travers - Wooster's Aunt Dahlia, arrives, and tells Wooster that she needs his help in a matter concerning Tuppy, who has transferred his attentions from Angela, Wooster's cousin, to Cora, leaving Angela heartbroken. Wooster tells Aunt Dahlia that Angela is better off without Tuppy, and he describes the trick played on him by Tuppy. This makes Aunt Dahlia think that Tuppy is a far better fellow than she had believed. She charges Wooster with asking Jeeves to devise a way of directing Tuppy's affections back to Angela.

When Aunt Dahlia returns the next day, Jeeves describes his plan to have Cora reject Tuppy. He has noticed that Cora is intolerant of failure, and he is certain that if Tuppy's singing at the club is a disaster, Cora will drop him. To ensure that Tuppy is booed off the stage, Jeeves tells Wooster that he too will have to sing "Sonny Boy," ahead of Tuppy, so that Tuppy's rendition of the same song will be met with hostility by the audience. Wooster replies that he has no intention of singing the song, but Aunt Dahlia insists.

On the evening he is so nervous that he has to have several drinks before he can perform. Wooster is certain that once Tuppy has heard him singing "Sonny Boy," he'll sing a different song and the plan will fail, but Jeeves has taken care of that by sending Tuppy to the pub for a few drinks so that he will miss Wooster's performance and not know that "Sonny Boy" has already been sung. With a few sustaining drinks inside him, Wooster does his turn on the stage, feeling that his efforts haven't been entirely appreciated by the audience. Jeeves then tells him that two people had already sung "Sonny Boy" before him, and as Wooster prepares to berate Jeeves for not letting him know beforehand, Tuppy arrives and launches into his act. The audience react predictably, throwing fruit and vegetables at Tuppy, who is forced to flee.

Wooster is dismayed by the announcement that Cora's arrival has been delayed, and so she has not witnessed Tuppy's downfall. Crestfallen, he goes home to have another drink. Shortly afterwards, Tuppy arrives, with a black eye, saying that his performance had been a great success and that Cora had been very pleased, but that he has had a change of heart and would like Wooster to intercede for him to help him re-establish his relationship with Angela. Wooster telephones Aunt Dahlia, who tells him that Tuppy can go around straight away.

When he has left, Wooster questions Jeeves, and tells him that Tuppy and Cora's relationship is over. Jeeves says that he suspected as much when he saw Cora whack Tuppy in the eye. He tells Wooster that the audience had given Cora a very bad reception when she sang "Sonny Boy." Wooster wonders why she had chosen to sing that song instead of the one she had planned to sing, and Jeeves confesses that he had encouraged Cora to sing it to please Tuppy. After the hostile reception she received, and learning that Wooster and Tuppy had already sung it, she believed that Tuppy had played a practical joke on her.

Wooster is reverent in his admiration for Jeeves.

Chapter 7 Analysis

Once again Wooster finds himself hosting a luncheon at somebody else's request. He is so good-natured that even though Tuppy is no great friend of his, he initially agrees to help him in his quest to conquer Cora. It is only when he learns that Tuppy plans to sing, in public, Wooster's most sacred song that he decides to take action. A man has to have some standards.

Although readers know, at the start of each story, that it is going to be much of the same thing - Wooster getting into a scrape, and Jeeves getting him out of it, this does not detract from the pleasure of reading about poor Wooster's difficulties, nor the ingenious machinations of Jeeves to extract him from them.

Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Wooster finds himself dog-sitting for Aunt Agatha's Aberdeen terrier McIntosh, while she is away in France. Despite being awoken each day by the dog at the ungodly hour of 10.00 am - Wooster is quite fond of the animal. However, he is relieved when he receives a letter from Aunt Agatha announcing her return from France that evening, and saying that she expects McIntosh to be delivered to her home between the hours of six and seven. Jeeves remarks that he will miss the little fellow. Wooster confesses that he has found it a strain having the responsibility of the dog, because there is no knowing what Aunt Agatha would have done if any harm had befallen the animal.

At the same time Wooster receives another letter announcing that Miss Roberta Wickham has invited herself to lunch that day. Jeeves indicates his disapproval of this, but Wooster assures him that although Miss Wickham no longer holds any strings to his heart, he can be a gentleman and entertain with lunch. Furthermore, she will be bringing with her two friends, and she asks that the luncheon menu should include oysters, ice cream," roly poly pudding" with lots of jam, and plenty of chocolate with gooey slithery stuff in the middle.

Whilst Jeeves is preparing the luncheon, Wooster takes the dog McIntosh for a walk in the park, and returns home to find Miss Wickham waiting in his apartment, in a state of some anxiety. She explains that the two people she is bringing for lunch are a theatrical manager from America, and his difficult and precocious son. She continues that she trying to soften up the theatrical agent, Blumenfeld, into accepting one of her mother's plays, and that as the man relies on the opinion of his horrid child, it is essential to put the boy into an excellent frame of mind so that he is favourably impressed by the play.

Wooster suddenly remembers that when he was in New York he had met the child who had been exceedingly rude to Cyril Bassington-Bassington, telling him that he had a face like a fish. Wooster promises that if the boy tells him that his face is like a fish, he will clump him. Jeeves suggests that the child might not notice that Wooster has a face like a fish, but Miss Wickham fears that it might be the first thing the boy does notice.

Jeeves suggests that the best plan would be for Wooster not to be present at the luncheon, and his absence will be explained as due to his eccentricity. Thankfully he makes his exit, meeting the horrible boy briefly, before enjoying a leisurely lunch at his club. Later in the afternoon he telephones Jeeves, who assures him that the coast is clear, and that the lunch had been satisfactory. Wooster prepares to return home, but Jeeves says that before he does so, Miss Wickham has requested that he telephone her.

When Wooster speaks to Miss Wickham, she tells him that the luncheon had gone wonderfully, and that stuffed with food, the beastly boy had recommended her mother's play to his father. She is meeting the impresario at five-thirty to sign a contract. Wooster expresses his pleasure at this turn of events, and then Miss Wickham tells him that she had had to give the dog McIntosh to the boy in order to keep him in a good humor.

Too shocked to reply, Wooster rushes home to Jeeves, who has not noticed that the dog is missing, but is not surprised by Miss Wickham's foolish behavior. As Wooster works himself into a panic at the prospect of Aunt Agatha returning to find he has lost her dog, Jeeves calms him with a whisky and soda, while he devises a plan.

Wooster is not prepared to jeopardise the contract by demanding the return of the dog, and he orders Jeeves to go and eat sardines, which are good for the brain and will help him to think of a suitable strategy for recovering the dog.

Jeeves duly returns ten minutes later, and explains his plan, which is that Wooster shall go to the hotel suite where the meeting between Miss Wickham and Blumenfeld is to take place, and will remove the dog before the Blumenfeld's arrive. Wooster is dubious as to whether the dog will come with him, but Jeeves advises him to sprinkle aniseed on his trousers, which the dog will find irresistible. Wooster is astonished to learn that Jeeves has come up with the extraordinary plan without even having to eat sardines.

According to plan, Wooster goes to the hotel and waits in the corridor, looking like a potted palm, and when Miss Wickham opens the door of the suite the dog comes out, is immediately attracted to Wooster's aniseed-flavoured trousers. Wooster grabs the dog and takes it back to his apartment in a taxi. He congratulates Jeeves on masterminding the successful plot, and gives him £5.

Suddenly Wooster realises that by taking the dog from the hotel, he might have jeopardised Miss Wickham's chances with the Blumenfelds, and that they might call off the deal. He reprimands Jeeves for not having taken that eventuality into consideration. At that moment the doorbell rings, and Jeeves tells Wooster that it is probably Mr. Blumenfeld, who had telephoned earlier to say that he was coming to visit Wooster. Jeeves' advice is for Wooster to hide himself behind the settee to avoid Mr. Blumenfeld's wrath.

Blumenfeld enters the room, angrily saying that Wooster has stolen the dog, and demanding to know where he is. He remarks on the strange smell of aniseed in the room, and Jeeves tells him that Wooster sprinkles it on his trousers because he is a lunatic, and dangerous when aroused. He tells Blumenfeld that Wooster particularly dislikes fat men, and that he is probably sleeping behind the settee as he usually does most afternoons. When he offers to waken Wooster, Blumenfeld, by now thoroughly alarmed at the prospect of having to face the angry lunatic Wooster, hurries to leave the apartment.

Once he's gone, Wooster congratulates Jeeves on another well-thought-out effort. He asks Jeeves how Blumenfeld suspected that he had stolen the dog. Jeeves explains that he had taken it upon himself, in order to protect Miss Wickham, to recommend that she told Blumenfeld that she had seen Wooster taking the dog. Wooster agrees that although risky, this action was justified. He notices that Jeeves is holding another £5, and asks why Blumenfeld had given it to him. Jeeves replies that it was given to him when he handed the dog to Blumenfeld.

Wooster is shocked when he believes that McIntosh has been given back to Blumenfeld, but Jeeves explains that it was a similar dog that he had gone out and bought from a pet shop, and that McIntosh is safely in his bedroom. Wooster is overwhelmed by the cleverness and foresight of Jeeves, and gives him three more £5 notes.

The telephone rings, and Jeeves announces that Aunt Agatha wishes to speak Wooster regarding her dog. In high good spirits, feeling absolutely all-right, Wooster takes the phone.

Chapter 8 Analysis

More of the same. It is a foregone conclusion that something awful will happen to Aunt Agatha's dog, as it has been left in Wooster's care, and that Jeeves will deal with the situation. Does Jeeves dislike women simply because they pose a threat to his control over Wooster, or does he just dislike women?

There is a genuinely hilarious section in this chapter, where Wooster says that if the horrible rude child tells him that he has a face like a fish, he will clump him. Jeeves says in his soothing way that perhaps the child will not notice that Wooster does have a face like a fish, and Wooster agrees with him; Miss Wickham adds that they cannot trust to luck (that the child will not notice Wooster's fish-like face), and so Wooster agrees to make himself scarce. It doesn't seem to occur to him to be offended that his manservant and Roberta are both agreed that he does have a face like a fish.

Talking of fish, Wooster places great faith in the power of sardines to stimulate the brain.

Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Returning from a trip to New York, Wooster finds himself in Hyde Park on Sunday afternoon, at Speakers' Corner, where anybody may climb on a box and say anything they like. He feels very pleased to be back in London, and is enjoying the antics of various speakers, including a bunch of people calling themselves "Heralds of the Red Dawn," one of whom, a bearded person, is castigating the idle rich. Wooster meets the uncle of his friend, Bingo Little. The last time he had seen him, the old man had been scruffily dressed, but now he is a picture of sartorial elegance. He asks Wooster the purpose of his visit to New York, but Wooster quickly changes the subject and asks after Bingo. The old man tells him that relations between them have become cool, since his marriage, and he announces that he has received a peerage when the latest Honours List was published. His title is now Lord Bittlesham.

After congratulating him, Wooster realises that Lord Bittlesham is the owner of a fancied racehorse called Ocean Breeze, who is expected to win an important horse race at the end of the month. The two men discuss horse racing for a while, until they notice that all the speakers around them are listening to their conversation. The bearded "Herald of the Red Dawn" starts haranguing Wooster and Lord Bittlesham. The latter is amused when Wooster is vilified, and defends the man's right to free speech, but when the criticism turns to him he turns bright red and bubbles like a kettle, and the two of them leave with quiet dignity.

Next day Wooster meets Bingo at his club. Bingo is once again in love, this time with a lady named Charlotte Corday Rowbotham, named by her anarchist father after the French revolutionary heroine. In order to find favour with Mr. Rowbotham, Bingo has to pretend that he is a Bolshevik, so he wears a false beard to avoid being recognised by his friends and peers, and reveals that it was he who had harangued Wooster and Lord Bittlesham the previous day in Hyde Park.

Bingo is anxious for Wooster to meet Mr. Rowbotham, and arranges for them to all have tea at Wooster's apartment the next day. Wooster mentions the cooling between Bingo and his uncle, and Bingo tells him that since his marriage his uncle has been economizing, to Bingo's detriment. He tells Wooster that Ocean Breeze is a "dead cert" to win the Goodwood Cup horse race, and that he intends to put all his money on the horse, so that he can make enough to marry Charlotte.

Bingo thanks Wooster for the invitation to tea the following day, and when Wooster remonstrates, not having issued any invitation, Bingo tells him to make sure that he doesn't serve delicate sandwiches, but hearty fare fit for Revolutionaries. Wooster protests, but Bingo says that when the Revolution comes, Rowbotham will remember Wooster and spare him. He mentions that Comrade Butt will also be coming for tea.

Comrade Butt is a small shrivelled chap who looks like a haddock with lung trouble, and he is sort of engaged to Charlotte, and a favourite of Mr. Rowbotham.

Bingo asks Wooster if he knows how he could get £50 he needs to bet on Ocean Breeze, and is shocked when Wooster suggests that he works for it. He says he'll have to find another way to get the money.

Wooster is worried about Bingo's plans to marry Charlotte; he feels some sort of paternal concern for Bingo, and doesn't know how he will be able to support a wife without any income. He confides his fears to Jeeves, without giving him any details.

The tea party exceeds Wooster's worst fears. Jeeves is noticeably shaken by the appearance of Bingo wearing the false beard. Wooster thinks that Charlotte is too fat, and she has a gold tooth. Mr. Rowbotham and Comrade Butt both clearly disapprove of Wooster's comfortable apartment, and ask if he yearns for the Revolution. He replies that as the purpose of the Revolution would be to murder people of his class, he isn't entirely enthusiastic, but Bingo assures Rowbotham and Butt that he will sooner or later convince Wooster.

The guests gobble up the food, and Rowbotham admonishes Jeeves not to be servile. Jeeves responds "Very good, sir," in his normal polite manner. When they come to leave, Rowbotham thanks Wooster for his hospitality, and Butt complains rudely that the food he has so greedily eaten has been stolen from the needy poor. Rowbotham promises to send Wooster some literature about the revolution, and hopes to see him again.

Once they have left, Wooster asks Jeeves what he thinks, and the butler replies that he would prefer not to say.

Chapter 9 Analysis

The "revolutionaries" are portrayed as archetypically scruffy, ill-kempt, greedy and hypocritical. Wooster dislikes Charlotte because she is too fat, just like Cora.

Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Wooster sets off to a pre-arranged meeting with Bingo, who wants to know what he thought of Charlotte. On the way he bumps into Bingo and his uncle, Lord Bittlesham. The latter is looking decidedly ill, and tells Wooster that he has received a threatening letter and is in fear of his life. He believes it is the work of the sinister bearded man from Hyde Park. Lord Bittlesham wants to inform the police, but Bingo hurriedly says that he will take the matter into his hands and find the man himself. He bundles his uncle into a taxicab.

Bingo admits to Wooster that he wrote the threatening letter to his uncle, and reveals that his uncle has given him £50 expenses to find the writer of the letter. Bingo is going to bank the money, and put it all on Ocean Breeze to win the Goodwood Cup. Bingo is proud of the tactful way that he has persuaded his uncle to give him the £50. He asks what Wooster thinks of Charlotte, and Wooster is temporarily lost for words. Bingo says that she has that effect on everybody.

Bingo feels that he has won Charlotte's affections away from Butt. Wooster does not see Bingo again for some time, and neither does he hear from the "Sons of the Red Dawn." Jeeves mentions that he has met Butt one evening and had a brief chat with him. Butt had been gloomy and said that he was losing Charlotte to Bingo.

When Goodwood Cup day arrives, Ocean Breeze comes in at the back of the field. Wooster is very upset to have lost money on the horse. He meets Lord Bittlesham, who is looking anxious, not because his horse failed to win (he says it is against his principles to bet on horse-racing), but because he has seen the bearded man whom he fears has evil intentions towards him. He drags Wooster to listen to the bearded man haranguing the crowd, to enthusiastic applause, about the iniquities visited on the working man by the upper classes, and directs his remarks at Lord Bittlesham, calling for his blood to run in the gutters. Lord Bittlesham asks a policeman to arrest the bearded orator, but the policeman declines to take action.

Comrade Butt takes over from the bearded man, but his speech is not well received by the crowd, who boo him. Enraged, Butt retaliates, saying that the nephew of Lord Bittlesham has joined the revolutionary ranks, and in a swift move pulls off Bingo's false beard to unmask him. When Bingo attempts to throttle Butt, the policeman removes the pair of them.

Back at his home, Wooster discusses the day's events with Jeeves, who tells him that Bingo had telephoned earlier to say that he intended to retire to the country for a while. Jeeves had taken the liberty of giving him £10 of Wooster's money to help him out. Wooster is quite puzzled as to how Butt knew that Bingo was hiding beneath the beard, and Jeeves confesses that it might have been his fault, because when he had had the brief chat with Butt, he had inadvertently mentioned Bingo's real identity. Jeeves fears that he has spoiled the relationship between Bingo and Charlotte. Wooster is so delighted at this news that he gives Jeeves all the spare money lying on his dresser.

Chapter 10 Analysis

More farce here, involving false beards and fisticuffs, and the Machiavellian manipulations of Jeeves. Bingo reveals that underneath his rather silly and school boyish nature lies something more ruthless: he is prepared to blackmail his uncle in order to get his hands on more money to fritter away on gambling.

Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

In the stifling heat of London in August, Wooster is trying to pluck up sufficient energy to depart for the country. Jeeves brings him a letter from the twins Claude and Eustace, inviting him to Twing in Gloucestershire, where they are staying at a vicarage studying for their exams. Wooster has a standing invitation to stay at Twing Hall, the home of Lord Wickhammersley, an old friend of his father, where by coincidence Bingo happens to be working as a tutor, after his unfortunate experience at Goodwood. The twins' letter tells Wooster that there is money to be made, in a syndicate, on the biggest sporting event of the season. The details of this event appear to be some sort of handicap race between the local vicars, and is entitled "Sermon Handicap."

Neither Wooster nor Jeeves entirely understand the meaning of the letter, but Wooster is curious enough to instruct Jeeves to pack for an immediate departure. Due to the usual tardiness of the 5:10 train, Wooster arrives only just in time for dinner at Twing Hall, and finds himself seated next to Cynthia Wickhammersley, an old flame with who he is still on the best of terms. She points out the other guests at the table, among whom are a great number of vicars, and Bingo Little.

Cynthia asks Wooster if Bingo is simple-minded, because of the strange way he behaves in her presence, but Wooster reassures her that Bingo is simply in love with her, which explains his odd behavior.

Later that evening Wooster goes to find Bingo, who is in his room lying on the bed, smoking. Wooster reprimands him for having left London without leaving his new address, and Bingo replies that he had been so badly wounded by his experiences with Charlotte and the "Heralds of the Red Dawn" that he had wanted to simply hide himself away. His uncle had stopped his allowance, and Charlotte had rejected him and gone off with Butt, leaving Bingo totally broken-hearted. However, he has now transferred his affections to Cynthia, and is composing a poem to her.

Early the next morning he arrives in Wooster's room to read his poetry, and once Wooster has been fortified with a cup of tea, delivered by Jeeves, he and Bingo are joined by the twins, Claude and Eustace, bursting to discuss their new scheme.

They explain that they are bored with their enforced studies at the vicarage, and to entertain themselves they have devised a betting game. There are a large number of vicars in the surrounding area, and each of them preaches a sermon every Sunday. The idea of the game is to bet on which of the vicars will preach the longest Sunday sermon - which will be timed by trustworthy stewards. Jeeves declines their invitation to participate in the betting, but Wooster is enthusiastic. They discuss the merits of various vicars for several minutes, and Claude explains that neither he, nor his brother, nor Bingo have any money, so they are looking to Wooster to fund the exercise.

Over the following days they try to gather as much information as possible about the various preachers, and they decide that the Reverend Heppenstall is the man to beat. To make certain, Wooster pays him a visit and asks him as a favour to preach a particular sermon, (which is a particularly long sermon), to which the Reverend agrees. However, Heppenstall goes down with hay fever before the event, and the syndicate put their faith instead in the Reverend G. Hayward.

After the Sunday sermons have been preached, it seems as if Hayward is the winner. Just as the group of gamblers are celebrating their win, Jeeves arrives with a note from the Reverend Heppenstall, addressed to Wooster, saying that in order not to cause disappointment, he had persuaded his nephew, the Reverend Bates, to preach the sermon that Wooster had requested. The note had arrived after Wooster had already left the house, so it had been too late for him to act on. However, the wily Jeeves had read the note, and placed a bet on Bates, winning a handsome sum.

The syndicate are crestfallen, and Jeeves delivers another blow when he announces that the Reverend Bates and Lady Cynthia are engaged to be married; this news causes Bingo such distress that he does not want any lunch.

Chapter 11 Analysis

Dopey Bingo is in love again. Wooster has learned nothing from the previous episode with the twins Eustace and Claude, and is prepared to involve himself in their strange plan, because he cannot resist a bet. Jeeves also shows that he is a betting man, but being very much more astute than Wooster, he makes sure the odds are absolutely in his favour. The reader need not feel too sympathetic towards Bingo, because we know that he will soon fall in love again.

Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

Life at Twing Hall resumes its peaceful flow for some time, and Wooster has little to do apart from trying to avoid the depressed Bingo. However, one day Bingo arrives in good spirits, having recovered from the loss of Lady Cynthia, and now very enthusiastic about a new sporting venture, revolving around the forthcoming village school sports day. One of Bingo's fellow students, a fellow named Steggles, is running a book on the sporting fixtures, and Bingo wants Wooster to take part in the betting. Wooster insists on taking Jeeves' advice first, and when the latter gives the scheme his blessing, Wooster agrees that he will supply the money for the syndicate, Jeeves the knowledge, and Bingo the inside information.

The trio discuss the various races that will feature at the sports day; 50-yard dashes, egg-and-spoon, mixed animal potato race, obstacle race, and mothers' sack race. Bingo reveals that he has good inside information that Mrs. Penworthy will win the mother's sack race, and Jeeves agrees that it is worth betting £10 on it. He recommends a red-hot tip on the Choirboys' Handicap, pointing to a fat boy named Harold who is employed as a page-boy at Twing Hall. Despite his looks, Harold is extraordinarily fleet of foot, as Jeeves had discovered when he tried to thump the boy for insolence. Wooster and Bingo are still doubtful, so Jeeves contrives to have the boy chased by the second footman for making rude remarks about his squinty eye.

Sure enough, Harold is chased by the footman and demonstrates his great running speed. He is unknown in the village, and the syndicate put £100 on him at 100/12. Steggles is rather suspicious and begins making enquiries about Harold, but is unable to find out anything about him.

To protect their investment, the trio try to put Harold onto a strict training regime of regular exercise, healthy eating and no smoking, but they find it hard work as Harold is not enthusiastic. Bingo then drops a bombshell when he announces that Steggles has spotted Harold running. Wooster and Jeeves instantly recognise that in order to stave off a heavy loss, Steggles will try to prevent Harold from taking part in the race, and that they will need to exercise the utmost vigilance to ensure that Harold is not nobbled before the race.

Greatly influenced by novels he has read about racehorses being sabotaged, Bingo obsessively watches Harold to the point where even the mild-mannered Wooster becomes irritated. Bingo has to travel to London with Lord Wickerhammersley's son, and insists that Wooster must attend the Sunday evening church service, where Harold will be singing in the choir. As Steggles will be there too, Bingo fears that some harm will befall Harold unless Wooster is there to protect him. Lulled into a peaceful reverie by the evening air and the pleasant atmosphere, Wooster is almost asleep in the church when a tremendous explosion breaks out, and Harold leaps and squeals and flails his limbs around, bringing the service to a halt.

In the vestry Wooster finds the Reverend Heppenstall very angry with Harold, who says that somebody had put a beetle down the back of his shirt. Heppenstall doesn't believe Harold, and immediately sacks him from the choir, which means he is no longer entitled to enter the Choirboy's Handicap. Steggles denies having put a beetle in Harold's clothing, and commiserates with Wooster that he has lost his money now that Harold is out of the race.

Jeeves reacts to the news quite philosophically, saying that these things do happen in racing and there is no point in complaining. He hopes that they will have a good win on the Mothers' Sack Race, and also has a hot tip for the Egg and Spoon race in the shape of Prudence Baxter, the head gardener's daughter.

Wooster would prefer not to go to the village school fete because he finds it "a sticky business," but as he has an interest in the race results, he steels himself and makes his way to the grounds, where a small podgy girl attaches herself to his hand and explains at length about the rag doll she has won. He is busily trying to shake her off when he learns that she is Prudence Baxter, who is the syndicate's favourite for the egg-and-spoon race, which changes his opinion of the child, whom he encourages to sit and relax and rest before the race. She announces that she doesn't like Harold, who has pulled her hair, and she is glad that he isn't allowed to come to the races.

Just then, the Reverend Heppenstall appears, and expresses his delight at the way the young men have turned out to support the event. When he mentions that he has just seen Steggles escorting Mrs. Penworthy to the refreshment tent, Wooster panics and makes his way to the mothers' sack race, which has just ended. Bitterly, Bingo tells him that Steggles had filled Mrs. Penworthy with tea and cakes just before the race, so that she had fallen over. Bingo is completely crushed when Wooster tells him that Harold will no longer be running in the Choirboys' Handicap. Their remaining hope is that Prudence Baxter will win the egg-and-spoon race.

In the egg-and-spoon race, Prudence Baxter comes in a poor fifth. Wooster gloomily goes to watch the prize giving, where a smug Steggles commiserates with him on the syndicate's losses, particularly Bingo having had a substantial bet on Prudence Baxter at odds of 10/1. Wooster was not aware that Bingo had backed Prudence, and while he is totalling up the syndicate's losses (or rather his personal losses, as he had funded the whole syndicate), a distressed Reverend Heppenstall makes an announcement to the effect that an unnamed manservant of one of the guests at Twing Hall had paid several children five shillings to participate in the race. By accepting the money, it meant that they lost their amateur status and were therefore disqualified. The result is the Prudence Baxter is declared the winner.

Chapter 12 Analysis

An almost carbon-copy of the previous chapter, revolving around a human race and tampering with the entrants. Jeeves to the rescue once again, showing that when necessary, he is quite prepared to go to any lengths to protect his money and interests, and not above doing some rather dirty deeds.

Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

Wooster is visited by Lord Yaxley, his Uncle George, an elderly fat man who is a doctor and talks constantly about the condition of his stomach lining, and Wooster is not particularly fond of this relative. Uncle George stands in front of the mirror and preens himself, telling Wooster that he is in love and contemplating marriage, and that he will not accept any interference from Aunt Agatha.

Once he has left, Wooster asks Jeeves whether he knows the identity of the lady Uncle George intends to marry, and Jeeves replies that she is a young waitress at Uncle George's club, whose name is Rhoda Platt. It doesn't take Wooster any time at all to recognise that Aunt Agatha will be on the warpath, and that she will be descending upon him, so he orders Jeeves to quickly pack their bags. However, Aunt Agatha arrives almost instantly, blocking their escape, and in a state of great indignation. She wants to know the identity of Uncle George's future wife, and when she learns that he intends marrying a waitress she gives a shriek like a train entering a tunnel, and demands that the union should be stopped. Wooster proposes that they ask Jeeves' advice, but Aunt Agatha scolds him for not knowing his proper status and considering taking advice from a servant.

Instead, she decides that the way to break up the relationship is to offer the girl money, £100, and she commands Wooster to go to the girl's house that afternoon and buy her off. It is not the first time that Uncle George has tried to bring disgrace on the family, because some years previously he had been greatly enamoured of a barmaid called Maudie, at the Criterion Club, but his family had bought her off.

Wooster is highly dubious about this plan, but Aunt Agatha is not a woman to be argued with, and that afternoon he reluctantly takes the train to East Dulwich, where the waitress lives. He is shown into a pink-papered room containing a piano and a glass case full of stuffed birds, where he waits uncomfortably until the arrival of a very large, common but friendly lady with bright orange hair and wearing a magenta dress.. She is the aunt of Uncle George's ladylove, who is sleeping off an attack of influenza. At first the very large lady mistakes Wooster for his uncle, who is a doctor, and shows him her painful knee. She would like to show him the base of her spine, also, until Wooster corrects her and explains that he is not a doctor, but the nephew of Lord Yaxley, Rhoda's suitor.

The aunt tells Wooster that Rhoda hasn't decided yet whether to marry Lord Yaxley, because she thinks he might be rather too old for her, although his title is attractive. The maid announces the arrival of the doctor, and Wooster takes his leave, having failed in his mission of paying off Rhoda.

Aunt Agatha is very angry with him, and calls him spineless. Jeeves comes into the room, saying that he thought he had heard Wooster calling him. Wooster decides to ignore Aunt Agatha's objections, and seeks Jeeves' help in the matter of Uncle George and Rhoda. Jeeves knows that Rhoda's aunt plans to continue living with her niece after her marriage, and he recommends introducing the aunt to Uncle George, who will be frightened off.

Aunt Agatha dismisses Jeeves, and again scolds Wooster for not keeping his servant in his rightful place. After insisting that Wooster returns to East Dulwich to pay off the girl, Aunt Agatha departs. Once she has gone, Wooster declares that he intends to follow Jeeves' plan, and invite Rhoda's aunt to lunch with Uncle George the following day.

Wooster anticipates the luncheon with little enthusiasm. The prospect of watching Uncle George eat, and listening to his constant discussion of the state of his stomach lining distresses him considerably, even more so when he imagines Rhoda's aunt at the same table. He learns from Jeeves that Rhoda has had an understanding with another gentleman, a Mr. Smethurst - the relationship is still in existence while she tries to decide if she wants to marry Lord Yaxley.

The jolly aunt arrives for lunch, and tells Wooster that she was once a barmaid at the Criterion Club. Wooster realises almost immediately that she is the woman with whom his uncle was once in love, but who was paid off by the family. He also realises that the pair are a perfect match, that they are kindred souls with a mutual interest in stomach linings.

Uncle George arrives, and he and the aunt, whose name is Maudie, fall into a deep discussion regarding their respective stomach linings. Wooster makes a discreet exit, retiring to his club for the afternoon. Whilst he is playing a game of snooker, Aunt Agatha telephones to say that he can tear up the cheque to pay off Rhoda, because Uncle George has decided not to marry her, but instead to marry a Mrs. Wilberforce. Aunt Agatha is uncertain whether she is of the Cumberland branch of the Wilberforces, or the Shropshire branch, and doesn't hear Wooster mention, *sotto voce,* the East Dulwich branch.

Jeeves confirms that Lord Yaxley had formally announced his engagement between the dessert and cheese courses, and Wooster sternly and coldly censures him for not having foreseen the consequences of his plan, and having failed to recognise that Mrs. Wilberforce was the barmaid with whom Lord Yaxley had once been in love.

Jeeves responds that he knew who she was, and that he had been perfectly aware of what would happen when the two met. He explains that Mr. Smethurst, a close friend of his, had asked him to try and make Rhoda give her affections to him instead of being lured by Lord Yaxley's wealth and position. He continues although Maudie might not be of an elevated social class; she should prove to be an excellent wife to Lord Yaxley, because she has a kind heart and will look after his welfare.

Wooster accepts the wisdom of Jeeves, but wonders how Aunt Agatha will react when she learns that her brother is marrying a barmaid. Jeeves suggests that it is time they found a new horizon.

Chapter 13 Analysis

This is a classic story of a wealthy aristocrat falling in love with a barmaid who has a heart of gold; is thwarted by parental opposition, is separated - only to be blissfully reunited decades later. There is a similarity between Uncle George, and Honoria's Uncle Roderick. Both men are doctors, and both are obsessed with their health.

Jeeves solves the problem in his usual skilful manner, but even he quails at the prospect of Aunt Agatha's wrath, and recommends that it would be prudent to escape for a while.

It is not really the content of these stories that makes their reading so enjoyable, but the interaction between the two characters, Wooster and Jeeves.

Characters

Aunt Agatha

Although Bertie Wooster's Aunt Agatha never actually appears in "Jeeves Takes Charge," the details Bertie reveals about her as he narrates the story suggest that she disapproves of him. Bertie mentions in the beginning that his Aunt Agatha thinks that he is too dependent on Jeeves, going so far as to call the butler Bertie's "keeper." After Florence discovers that Bertie was unsuccessful in preventing his Uncle Willoughby's book from being mailed to the publisher, she breaks off their engagement and informs him that his Aunt Agatha discouraged her from marrying him.

Mr. Berkeley

Mr. Berkeley is an unseen character who leaves Sir Willoughby's estate before Bertie arrives. Edwin convinces Sir Willoughby to pretend that Mr. Berkeley has left a cigarette case in Bertie's room as an excuse to search for the stolen book.

Edwin Craye

Edwin is Florence's devious 14-year-old brother. He is a mischievous tattletale who feigns innocence as he torments Bertie throughout the story. Bertie describes him as a "ferret-faced kid, whom I had disliked since birth." Nine years earlier, young Edwin led Lord Worplesdon to the spot where Bertie was sneaking a cigar, which caused "unpleasantness." Bertie suggests to Florence that Edwin is a perfect candidate for the role of thief in her scheme, but she won't allow it. Edwin, ever the diligent Boy Scout, uses black polish on Bertie's brown shoes. He catches Bertie trying to hide the stolen book. Bertie nearly loses his inheritance when Edwin tries to convince Sir Willoughby that the book is in Bertie's room.

Florence Craye

Florence Craye is Bertie's pushy, snobby fiancee. Bertie has grown up around her family. She forces Bertie to read boring volumes of philosophy in an effort to"mold" him properly. She is staying as a guest of Bertie's uncle, Sir Willoughby, while Bertie isin London hiring Jeeves as his new butler. She is shocked when Sir Willoughby reads her his memoirs, mainly because the book details the boisterous, drunken follies of her father, Lord Worplesdon, in his youth. She fears embarrassment for her family and bullies Bertie into stealing his uncle's manuscript before it can be mailed to the publisher. Ultimately, Jeeves sabotages her scheme as well as her engagement plans.

Lord Emsworth

Lord Emsworth is one of several people Florence thinks will be scandalized by being mentioned in Sir Willoughby's memoirs.

Lady Florence

See Florence Craye

Aubrey Fothergill

Aubrey is Bertie's unseen friend in the story. At the beginning of the story, Bertie proclaims that, unlike his friend Aubrey, he will not let his valet run his life. The irony is that he does indeed end up like Aubrey when he lets Jeeves take charge.,/p>

Sir Stanley Gervase-Gervase

Sir Stanley is another person Sir Willoughby gossips about in his book.

Jeeves

Jeeves is the sly and droll butler of the title. Jeeves is hired by Bertie Wooster after Bertie catches his old butler, Meadowes, stealing socks. As Bertie is narrating the story after the fact, he has already learned his new butler's value. He claims that Jeeves is a genius□"From the collar upward he stands alone." It seems that Jeeves instinctually knows what Bertie needs; he immediately proves his worth after he first arrives when he fetches Bertie a hangover remedy without being asked. However, Jeeves is unafraid to show when he disapproves of Bertie□if not vocally, then in his tone and manner. Bertie is at first suspicious and defiant, but Jeeves twice saves him in the story. First, he removes Sir Willougby's manuscript from Bertie's drawer to cover up the theft and saves Bertie's inheritance. However, he promptly mails the manuscript despite Lady Florence's wishes. Bertie fires Jeeves when she cancels the engagement. Although Bertie doesn't immediately realize it, Jeeves has saved him again, this time from a miserable marriage. Bertie rehires Jeeves after some consideration. He finally gives in to the same impulse that guides his friend Aubrey, allowing the butler to take charge and graciously disowning the suit that Jeeves has already given away.

Meadowes

Meadowes is the thieving butler replaced by Jeeves. He is fired when Bertie catches him stealing socks. Bertie tries to blame him for his uncle's missing book, but Sir Willoughby points out that he was already gone when the book disappeared.

Oakshott

Oakshott is Sir Willoughby's butler.

Sir Willoughby

See Uncle Willoughby

Uncle Willoughby

Bertie Wooster is financially dependent on his uncle, Sir Willoughby. The old man is insistent on publishing his memoirs, "Recollections of a Long Life." He and his friends, now respectable gentlemen, were apparently quite rowdy in their youth. The stories scandalize Lady Florence and she devises a scheme in which Bertie reluctantly steals his uncle's manuscript. Florence's bratty brother Edwin spies Bertie with the book and informs Sir Willoughby. Bertie's uncle is at first skeptical, but Edwin convinces him to search Bertie's room. Jeeves removes the book before Sir Willoughby can find it and sends it to the publisher.

Bertie Wooster

Bertie Wooster is the likable but hapless narrator of "Jeeves Takes Charge." Bertie is a young man of the leisure class who is financially dependent upon his Uncle Willoughby. The story is an introduction to his remarkable butler, Jeeves. Bertie admits at the very beginning that he has become hopelessly dependent on his valet. Jeeves displays his ingenuity soon after he arrives and saves Bertie from his fiancee Florence and her ridiculous schemes. Bertie is seemingly oblivious to what Jeeves recognizes immediately: Florence is a shrew. She is a snob who forces him to read dry philosophy that makes no sense to him, and she puts him in a difficult predicament when she insists that he steal his uncle's manuscript. Bertie foolishly agrees to her plot, even though he knows that it could lead to financial ruin if he is caught. Bertie is not only helpless against Florence; he is bedeviled by her sneaky younger brother, Edwin. The boy leads Sir Willoughby to the scene of the crime, but Jeeves removes the evidence before they can find it. Bertie's admiration quickly goes sour when Florence breaks off their engagement after the manuscript is published despite his efforts. Jeeves has of course determined that it was in Bertie's best interests if the manuscript was published. Bertie fires Jeeves, but after some thought, he realizes that Jeeves was right. Bertie, although somewhat dim, is modest enough to admit his dependence upon Jeeves.

Lord Worplesdon

Lord Worplesdon is the eccentric father of Florence and Edwin Craye. Sir Willoughby writes of his youthful friendship with Lord Worplesdon in his "Recollections of a Long

Life." Florence is scandalized by the revelation that her father, after consuming a quart and a half of champagne, and Sir Willoughby were booted from a music-hall in 1887. This leads to the theft of Sir Willougby's manuscript. Bertie notes that a few years after the events of the story, Lord Worplesdon leaves his family for France after one too many servings of eggs.

Themes

Engagement and Marriage

One of the sub-plots of "Jeeves Takes Charge" is Bertie's engagement to Florence Craye. Readers, like Jeeves, immediately recognize that Florence would make Bertie miserable if they were to marry. Bertie, even though he somewhat dimly realizes that she is a shrew, is too charmed by her "wonderful profile" to fight her attempts to "improve" him by forcing him to read dull works of philosophy. She bullies him into stealing his uncle's manuscript by threatening to break their engagement. Perhaps her greatest offense is that she is in league with his horrid Aunt Agatha. In many of the "Jeeves and Wooster" stories, Bertie finds himself engaged to the wrong girl; some are sickeningly sentimental ninnies, others snare him in wild schemes. Jeeves, of course, always saves Bertie from the clutches of the wrong girl.

Role Reversal

An important and amusing theme running through all of the "Jeeves and Wooster" stories is the reversal of roles in the master/servant relationship between Bertie and his butler. Although Jeeves is the quintessential gentleman's gentleman, ready to serve Bertie at a moment's notice, Bertie is just bright enough to realize that his butler possesses a superior intellect. "Jeeves Takes Charge" establishes a formula that is familiar throughout the "Jeeves and Wooster" stories. When Bertie hires Jeeves, the butler wastes no time in showing subtle disapproval for Bertie's choice in women and suits. Bertie is initially defiant, but in the end, after Jeeves has extricated him from his predicament, the young fop gives in to the butler's quiet demands when he tells Jeeves to get rid of the distasteful suit. Jeeves has of course already disposed of the suit by giving it to the under-gardener. Later stories find Bertie changing his behavior or appearance (even once shaving off a mustache) in order to gratify Jeeves in the same manner. Thus, Jeeves actually has the upper hand in their relationship despite his lower social status as Bertie's servant.

Social Class and Wealth

Bertie Wooster is a young man who has never worked a day in his life. In "Jeeves Takes Charge" and other stories in the series, it is revealed that Bertie lives on allowances and inheritances from his rich aunts and uncles. This type of lifestyle, while it may seem unusual now, was common for young men in the upper class in England during the Edwardian era. Bertie is 24 years old, yet he has his own valet to serve him. Because of his class, he is able to live frivolously on the wealth of others. He spends much of his time drinking with his friends; in the opening of this story, as in many others, he is recovering from a hangover. His life is a pursuit of pleasure. This is one reason why Bertie is threatened by Florence's scheme to steal his uncle's manuscript: if he is caught, Sir Willoughby would probably disinherit him. This would definitely disrupt an ideal situation for Bertie.

Style

Satire

P. G. Wodehouse is recognized as one of England's great light satirists of the twentieth century. The "Jeeves and Wooster" stories delicately tweaked the wealthy lords and ladies of Great Britain and their society. The plot of "Jeeves Takes Charge" revolves around the memoirs of Sir Willoughby, Bertie Wooster's rich uncle. The various vignettes in the manuscript ("Recollections of a Long Life") detail embarrassing moments in the youths of several prominent Englishmen. Here, although it is obvious in most of his fiction that he looks favorably upon the wealthy, Wodehouse gently mocks the idea that the upper class is without flaw. One does not have to actually read Sir Willoughby's autobiography to realize this; the events and characters in "Jeeves Takes Charge" are evidence enough. For example, Lord Worplesdon (although he never physically appears) is an eccentric blowhard. His daughter, Florence Craye, is a pushy, conceited snob. Edwin Craye, supposedly a model young boy, is a sneaky and mischievous troublemaker. Meadowes, Bertie's original butler, is a kleptomaniac. However, it is the relationship between Bertie and Jeeves that serves as Wodehouse's main ironic punch. Bertie, in a position of power because he is rich (although it is through no effort of his own), is forced to recognize that Jeeves, his butler and therefore of a lower class, possesses a superior intellect.

Narration

Bertie Wooster is the narrator of "Jeeves Takes Charge." Although Bertie often seems clueless, much of the flavor of this story, as in all the "Jeeves and Wooster" stories, is derived from his narration. Wodehouse uses a variety of devices to make Bertie an amusing narrator: slang, exaggeration and understatement, mixed metaphor, and literary refererence. Bertie is a fool, but through his narration Wodehouse demonstrates that he is an endearing and likable fool because of his innate modesty and eagerness to please.

Plot

Wodehouse is famous for the complex plotting of his stories. In Jeeves Takes Charge, the action revolves around Sir Willoughby's memoirs. Each of the characters are struggling for control of the manuscript and their efforts result in pandemonium. Florence wants it destroyed because she is embarrassed by it. Bertie is bullied into stealing it so Florence won't break their engagement. Edwin wants Sir Willoughby to find it so that Bertie will be branded as a kleptomaniac. Poor Sir Willoughby simply wants it published. Finally, it is the clever Jeeves who finally wins possession of the book, thereby saving Bertie from both disinheritance and a disastrous marriage.

Setting

The story is set in England sometime soon after the Edwardian period. The action takes place at Easeby, the estate of Sir Willoughby. Many of Wodehouse's stories and novels take place at large estates or in castles. These settings lend themselves to the type of farce that he writes. Many rooms exist where characters can hide, and many windows where characters can spy or eavesdrop on each other. For example, while standing outside the library window, Bertie overhears Edwin tell Sir Willoughby about the stolen manuscript. One of the reasons Wodehouse's stories are so popular is that he so brilliantly describes the lavish settings where the stories of his privileged fools take place.

Historical Context

Edwardian England

In his essay "P. G. Wodehouse: The Lesson of the Young Master," published in the 1958 annual edition of New World Writing, John Aldridge notes that Wodehouse "belongs exclusively to Edwardian times. . . ." Aldridge is referring to the era of England's King Edward VII, who reigned from 1901, until his death in 1910. This decade marked a remarkably quiet transition from the Nineteenth to the Twentieth Century. At the time, England was one of the most powerful, advanced countries on earth. England was an industrial giant, and the British Empire stretched into Africa and Asia. Certainly, England had problems, including terrible poverty in the wretched slums of the larger cities. But the first decade of the Twentieth Century in England was an idyllic time, especially for the rich, in comparison to the tumult of the following decades. Wodehouse idealized the period; his characters spent evenings at "the club" and weekends at sprawling country estates. Although his later stories sometimes made references to contemporary culture, his fiction always remained firmly rooted in the values of Edwardian England.

Women in Early 20th Century England

Wodehouse, consciously or not, may have recognized the changing role of women in British society when he created the assertive (though unlikable) Florence Craye. Throughout the Nineteenth Century, women in England had been fighting for political power and social reform. The Kensington Society, eleven women who were seeking careers in medicine or education, brought a petition asking for women's suffrage to Members of Parliament John Stuart Mill and Henry Fawcett in 1865. John Stuart Mill favored universal suffrage and added an amendment that would grant women the right to vote to the Reform Act that was before Paliament. It was soundly defeated. The women went on to form the London Society for Women's Suffrage. In the 1890s, over a dozen suffrage societies from across England consolidated as the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) to bring pressure on Parliament to grant women the vote. A radical spin-off of the NUWSS, the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), formed in 1903. The battle for suffrage intensified over the next decade; many women were imprisoned, and hunger strikes were common. By the time Wodehouse was writing his first Jeeves and Wooster stories, Parliament was under an enormous amount of pressure to enact reform. In June, 1917, the House of Commons voted 385-55 to grant women over the age of 30 the right to vote. The archaic nineteenth-century notion of a "women's sphere" was beginning to crumble.

World War I

Wodehouse began writing the "Jeeves and Wooster" stories during World War I. The lack of any reference to the war is almost astonishing; again, his characters are forever part of Edwardian England. However, Wodehouse wisely knew that his strength was in writing light comedy. Many people were no doubt thankful for the slight relief that Wodehouse's absurd little stories gave them during one of the most horrible conflicts in mankind's history. "The Great War" began when Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary was assassinated by Serbian nationalist Gavrilo Princip on June 28, 1914. Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia and a chain of alliances were activated. Germany and Turkey joined Austria-Hungary to become the Central Powers. France and Russia began to build up their armies, and Germany declared war on both countries. Great Britain joined France and Russia against the Central Powers on August 4, 1914, when Germany invaded Belgium. Later in the war, Italy, the United States, and Japan would join the Allies against the Central Powers. World War I marked the first time many modern weapons were used and the results were devastating. Germany, France, Russia, and Great Britain lost almost an entire generation; 8.5 million were killed during the war. The entry of the U.S. into the war (April 4, 1917) served as a turning point. Ultimately, the Central Powers were overwhelmed and they were forced to sign the Armistice on November 11, 1918.

Critical Overview

By the time *Carry On, Jeeves*, the collection of stories containing "Jeeves Takes Charge," was published in 1925, Wodehouse had already firmly established himself as one of England's leading humorists. His books were usually well-received, and *Carry On, Jeeves* was no exception. An unidentified reviewer in the December 3, 1927 edition of the Saturday Review of Literature wrote:

We frankly admit our fondness for all the Wodehouse comics, and our especial delight in Bertie and the peerless Jeeves. The broad, rich, hilarious humor of the book places it, in our opinion, among the author's best.

Most reviews of the book were similar. However, the *New York Times* was somewhat more reserved in its praise:

Mr. Wodehouse's humor, diverting though it is at first, seems to be drawn too much to formula after one has read beyond a certain point. Many of the stories taken singly are nothing short of delightful. But one cannot avoid the feeling that an entire book of Wodehouse stories is an overabundance.

This was a fault that several critics found in Wodehouse's fiction. No doubt a recognizable and somewhat repetitious formula earmarks the Jeeves and Wooster stories. For example, in "Jeeves Takes Charge," Jeeves disapproves of a particular suit Bertie favors. Bertie is initially hesitant to part with the suit, but eventually he gives in to Jeeves. This situation is repeated, with slight variances, in almost all the Jeeves and Wooster stories. Another frequent plot device is the presence of pesky aunts and uncles. Thus, some critics found his writing tedious. Familiarity did not, however, breed contempt with the general public. Wodehouse's books enjoyed tremendous popular success.

Early in his career, Wodehouse was not granted the same sort of critical attention reserved for more serious writers of fiction. In the 1958 edition of *New World Writing*, John W. Aldridge writes that he knows of "no critical discussion of [Wodehouse's] work which attempts at all seriously to investigate the peculiar quality of his comic gifts or to account for the phenomenally high favor in which they have been held for all these years by the reading public." Aldridge argues that Wodehouse is one of the finest comic writers of the twentieth century. Since Aldridge's essay was published, there have been many scholarly articles and books written on Wodehouse's work. An essay published in the autumn 1959 *Arizona Quarterly* by Lionel Stevenson traces Wodehouse's antecedents in English literature from Ben Jonson to Oscar Wilde. In an introductory essay written for *P. G. Wodehouse: A Comprehensive Bibliography and Checklist* (1990), Anthony Quinton continues in the same vein. Quinton compares to relationship between Bertie and Jeeves to several other master/servant relationships in literature, such as Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, Mr. Pickwick and Sam Weller, and Phineas Fogg and Passepartout. Several biographies of Wodehouse have been published in the last three decades as well. Although Wodehouse wrote light comedy, a great deal of respect is held for his brilliant use of language and his well-crafted stories.

Criticism

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Critical Essay #1

Akers is a free-lance writer whose work has appeared in college journals and educational publications. In the following essay, Akers discusses the influence of P. G. Wodehouse's "Jeeves and Wooster" stories on the film and television of the late twentieth century.

In 1917, P. G. Wodehouse first introduced the characters of Bertie Wooster, the young, rich, and endearing English nitwit, and Jeeves, his cool and ingenious butler. More than 70 years later, the critical and popular success of the early 1990s British television series, *Jeeves and Wooster*, clearly demonstrates the enduring influence of Wodehouse's fiction on popular culture. Wodehouse's "Jeeves and Wooster" stories have been adapted many times for the stage and screen through the years, perhaps most regrettably for a pair of "Jeeves" movies starring Arthur Treacher in the 1930s. (These films had no trace of Wodehouse's actual stories; Jeeves is portrayed as an idiot and, unbelievably, there is no Bertie Wooster character!) However, the 1990s *Jeeves and Wooster* television series benefited from faithfulness to the original stories, sharp writing, and brilliant characterizations by Stephen Fry (Jeeves) and Hugh Laurie (Wooster). A frequent criticism of Wodehouse is that his fiction has always been oblivious to contemporary culture; although he wrote "Jeeves and Wooster" stories for over 50 years, the characters seem to be in a time-warp, circa Edwardian England. In another wise favorable essay published in the 1958 annual edition of *New World Writing*, John Aldridge writes:

One does have to suspend one's sense of the contemporary world, either through physical isolation or an act of the imagination, while reading Wodehouse, for he belongs exclusively to Edwardian times and has apparently chosen to remain unaware of just about every important development which has occurred in the world since those times. All efforts, including his own, to up-date his work must end in failure: his characters, even when they strike out with brave allusions to Clark Gable and Gatsby, betray in their every gesture, action, and assumption their helpless allegiance to the past.

Grumpier critics, such as the solemn Edmund Morris, found this type of fiction superficial and tedious. But as Aldridge explains in his essay, Wodehouse was simply a product of his era. Wodehouse's fiction was no doubt formulaic; but what an ingenious and effective formula! The familiarity of the characters and settings somehow facilitates a variety of situations in Wodehouse's stories. Thus, the *Jeeves and Wooster* television series is an almost perfect *situation* comedy. Here it is seen just how much Wodehouse's admittedly light, yet influential, fiction has permeated even today's culture. Perhaps the person who coined the television word "sit-com" never read Wodehouse's stories, but there is a Wodehousian element to the term nonetheless.

Wodehouse had great early success writing lyrics for the musical theater. His collaborations with Jerome Kern and Guy Bolton revolutionized American musical comedy. Today, the plots of these plays resemble those of television situation comedy. He later commented that his fiction was musical comedy without the music. He created two vibrant characters in Jeeves and Wooster and placed them in absurd situations in dozens of stories and novels. The writers of television's comedy series do the same thing every week (and Wodehouse was almost as prolific). The 1990s television adaptation of his stories, Jeeves and Wooster, is only the most obvious evidence of the influence of his fiction on the popular media of the late twentieth century. There are several other examples.

One example of Wodehouse's influence, as suggested above, is the very form of the television situation comedy series, which has existed since the 1950s. The ten stories in the 1957 Penguin edition of *Carry On, Jeeves* average 21.3 pages. Even the slowest of readers should be able to finish one of these stories within 30 minutes (including a break for the privy, of course). Perhaps Wodehouse was unable to leave the comfort of Edwardian England himself, but his formula was perfect for the halfhour television comedies of the last half-century. Television's most successful comedy series, regardless of their relative quality (compare *Three's Company to Taxi*), derive their success from placing characters familiar to the audience in absurd situations that are quickly resolved, either accidentally or through a particular character's cleverness. (The characters themselves, of course, may be as absurd as the situations.) The "Jeeves and Wooster" stories operate in the same manner. One can watch an episode of almost any contemporary situation comedy on television and find a "Jeeves and Wooster" plot to match it. Mistaken or deliberately falsified identities, mis-placed or stolen objects, practical jokes gone awry, abject and utter humiliation; all of these are prime plot ingredients for both Wodehouse and the writers of today's television situation comedies. This is not to say that these plot elements originated with Wodehouse; he claimed to read the entire works of Shakespeare every year, and Dickens was a great influence on him. It was his style that was original and, despite the anachronisms in some of his work, somewhat ahead of its time.

The 1981 film *Arthur*, written and directed by Steve Gordon, featured Dudley Moore as the title character, a ridiculously rich, drunken playboy. Moore was nominated for an Oscar for best actor in 1982. Although the perfectly cast Moore was hilarious in the role, John Gielgud, who played Arthur's butler Hobson, steals many scenes. In fact, Gielgud won the Academy Award that year for best supporting actor in the film. The story itself is a throwback to the screwball comedies of the 1930s. The plot concerns Arthur's decision to marry a lower-class woman against his mother's wishes, but audiences warmed to the close relationship Arthur has with Hobson. This writer doesn't know if Gordon actually read Wodehouse (Gordon died tragically just one year after the film); however, any reader of Wodehouse can see the similarities between the characters of Jeeves and Hobson. Both butlers serve their "masters" diligently; however, they are quick to show their disapproval through sarcasm. For example, in "Jeeves Takes Charge," Bertie persists in wearing a suit that Jeeves finds distasteful. At the end of the story, Bertie is reluctant to give up the suit, even though he knows he must because Jeeves has saved him from disaster. This leads to the following exchange:

[Wooster] Oh, Jeeves, 'I said; about that check suit.'[Jeeves] 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.'

In *Arthur,* Hobson is equally sarcastic when speaking to his "master":

[Arthur] "Do you know what I'm going to do? I'm going to take a bath."[Hobson] "I'll alert the media, sir."

Jeeves and Hobson may cut their respective employers to the bone with wit, but they are protective. They often show disgust with their employers, but still they act as caring, parental figures. Jeeves fixes Bertie a special drink for his hangover; Hobson bathes Arthur. Hobson would probably not exist without Jeeves.

Neither would the character of Benson. Robert Guillame won a supporting actor Emmy playing the role of the caustic butler on the situation comedy series, *Soap*. (He later won a best actor playing the same role in the spin-off series, *Benson*.) Soap premiered on ABC in 1977. It was a controversial (at the time) satire of soap operas. The program, in the early years, had excellent satirical writing, and some of the best performers, on television. Several performers on the show, including Guillame and Billy Crystal, went on to even greater success. Guillame's Benson shares several traits with Jeeves. Benson, like Jeeves, is sarcastic; however, he is not quite as subtle. Benson's classic line: the doorbell rings, everybody looks at him . . . pause . . . "You want me to get that?" The role-reversal in the "Jeeves and Wooster" stories and *Soap* takes on even more importance in the case of Benson in obvious ways (considering our country's history) because he is an African American. Benson, despite his acid tongue, is extremely protective of several (almost) innocent characters on the show, much in the same way that Jeeves is protective of Bertie. Both butlers are supposedly members of the "lower-class" because they are servants, but both men are more intelligent than their employers. Yet they still do everything in their power to protect them. Critics have complained that Wodehouse's fiction reeks of antiquity. There is some truth to this; however, it is ironic that his fiction has had such an impact on contemporary culture as demonstrated by Wosehouse's influence on on the characters and form of television and film comedy of the last 50 years. Regardless of the era, Wodehouse was a master of the English language, and his sparkling wit has aged well.

Critical Essay #2

In this essay Love compares the similarities of the characters of P. G. Wodehouse, Dorothy L. Sayers, and Ian Fleming, and argues that there exists literary continuity from Wodehouse to Sayers to Fleming.

In writing this essay (which started out to be a study of Lord Peter Wimsey), I was struck by the parallels between the novels of Dorothy L. Sayers and those of two other□hugely popular□British writers: P. G. Wodehouse and Ian Fleming. The more deeply I looked into it, the more interested I became. As a result, I will try to show that Sayers is a centerpiece joining the other two.

Wodehouse, Sayers, and Fleming were three of the more popular novelists to come out of Britain in the twentieth century. Wodehouse (pronounced "Woodhouse") had an almost unbelievable longevity as a published author. His first novel, *The Pot Hunters,* was published in 1902; his last (and ninety- sixth), *Aunts Aren't Gentlemen* (U.S. title: *The Cat-Nappers*), in 1974. Dorothy L. Sayers's Lord Peter Wimsey mysteries covered the 1920s and 1930s. And Ian Fleming's James Bond series ranged from 1953 to 1964, ultimately topping the bestseller charts. All three continue to be read widely throughout the English-speaking world. In addition, the BBC productions of the Lord Peter stories have been seen by millions; and every year or so Hollywood brings out another James Bond movie. I believe these writers have more in common than simply their popularity and nationality. I think literary dependency can be traced: from Wodehouse to Sayers; and from Sayers to Fleming. Jeeves to Wimsey to Bond, if you will.

First, Jeeves to Lord Peter. It's a simple matter to prove that Sayers read Wodehouse. No less a Sayers authority than James Sandoe takes it for granted. But we needn't rely on Sandoe: in the early pages of *Murder Must Advertise* Sayers mentions Wodehouse twice.

First, Pym's Publicity's new copy-boy (Lord Peter Wimsey) is compared to Bertie Wooster, one of Wodehouse's major characters: "I think I've seen him," says Miss Meteyard. "Tow-coloured, supercilious-looking blighter. . . . Cross between Ralph Lynn and Bertie Wooster." (A good indication of Wodehouse's popularity this: Sayers felt no need to explain to her readers who Bertie Wooster was.) A page later we read about "a bulky, dark youth in spectacles, immersed in a novel by P. G. Wodehouse and filching biscuits from a large tin." Obviously, Sayers was conversant with Wodehouse.

But Wodehouse achieved more than mere mention. He clearly left his mark on Sayers. (I suspect he leaves his mark on everyone who reads him. In researching this essay I discovered, to my surprise, clear evidence of dependency on Wodehouse in my own books□despite a thirty-year gap between the last time I read him and the beginning of my writing career.)

As evidence of Wodehouse's influence on Sayers, consider Wimsey's self-description in *The Nine Tailors:* "I'm a nice wealthy bachelor. Fairly nice, anyway. And it's fun to be rich. I find it so." Such a self-description would be just as appropriate on the lips of Bertie Wooster.

Or take the way Wimsey occasionally strikes others: "I met [Lord Peter] once at a dog show. He was giving a perfect imitation of the silly-ass-abouttown." Later in the same book, another character says, "If anyone asked, 'What is . . . the Oxford manner?' we used to show 'em Wimsey of Balliol. . . . One never failed to find Wimsey of Balliol planted in the centre of the quad and laying down the law with exquisite insolence to somebody. . . . After wards, the Americans mostly said, 'My, but isn't he just the perfect English aristocrat?'" Each of these descriptions would fit Bertie Wooster at least as accurately as it fits Wimsey.

Wooster and Wimsey are both bachelors. (Lord Peter's life on the printed page would end shortly after his marriage to Harriet Vane.) Both are harddrinking, fast-talking party animals with a penchant for finding and losing pretty women. Both have faithful, ingenious butlers. Both, finally, are upperclass, with an unquestioned, albeit unspoken, loyalty to the class system.

But Wimsey moves far beyond Wooster, as the leading character in a series of crime novels should, as opposed to the centerpiece in a set of humorous entertainments. Lord Peter is venturesome, daring, and self-reliant: qualities totally alien to Bertie. But if Bertie knows nothing of these qualities, that doesn't mean they are absent from Wodehouse's stories. This brings us to the character who is more truly Wimsey's—and therefore Bond's—literary antecedent than Wooster: Wodehouse's supreme creation, Jeeves. Bertie's butler may not be venturesome or daring, but he is supremely self-reliant.

"Jeeves!""Sir?""I'm sitting on the roof.""Very good, sir.""Don't say 'Very good.' It's nothing of the kind. The place is alive with swans.""I will attend to the matter immediately, sir.""All is well," I said. "Jeeves is coming.""What can he do?"I frowned a trifle. The man's tone had been peevish and I didn't like it. "That," I replied with a touch of stiffness, "we cannot say until we see him in action. He may pursue one course, or he may pursue another. But on one thing you can rely with the utmost confi- dence—Jeeves will find a way . . ."

Jeeves is an expert on fashion, on cuisine, on horse racing, on literature, on politics, and, of course, on *le grand jeu:* he knows precisely the way to a woman's heart.

There are, of course, striking differences as well. Jeeves is primarily concerned with saving his master's onions; Lord Peter is concerned with solving murders. Lord Peter is a master (of Bunter, his butler) and Jeeves a servant. Nonetheless, I maintain, the difference between the characters is far less than the difference between the genres of their stories. Wodehouse's stories rely on an inverted master- slave relationship as old as Plautus: the servant, for all his social inferiority, is the brains of the pair. Sayers's stories, though they contain an element of irony and self-deprecation (the Egotists' Club, for instance) depend finally on the cleverness of Lord Peter, who, after all, has Jeeves's trick of showing up at exactly the right time and place. (Though Bunter is a faithful servant and a delightful companion, his contributions to Wimsey's crime-fighting tend to be minimal.) Like Jeeves, Lord Peter is omniscient, omnipotent, and always right.

Now to the second point: if Jeeves, the superior servant, is literary antecedent to Lord Peter, the wealthy aristocrat, Lord Peter, with even more justice, can be said to have been the same for Ian Fleming's James Bond.

Not that Bond is either aristocratic or rich. He, first of all, is far from rich—*Moonraker* lists his salary as 1,500 pounds a year taxable, plus 1,000 pounds a year in tax-free income. But (like Jeeves) Bond enjoys elaborate perks, including travel to exotic locales and stopovers at luxury hotels. Furthermore, he never seems to lack for money with which to gamble, occasionally at very high stakes.

As to Bond's place within the British hierarchy of class, he is definitely a commoner. Or is he? Observe him on an outing at M.'s prestigious club, the Blades. We find another inverted master-servant relationship in the two men's dining habits: M., the aristocrat, dines on such items as deviled kidney, bacon, peas, and new potatoes□decidedly proletarian fare□while Bond orders smoked salmon, lamb cutlets, asparagus with Hollandaise. Bond, the commoner, has the upper-class tastes his boss lacks. And though he technically takes his orders from M., he is also shown to be the brains as well as the class of the partnership.

Is some of Lord Wimsey in James Bond? I think so, despite the complete lack of reference to Sayers in any of Fleming's biographies. First of all, take the following description of Wimsey in *Gaudy Night:* "height of the skull; glitter of close-cropped hair . . . minute sickleshaped scar on the left temple. . . . Faint laughterlines at the corner of the eye and droop of lid at its outer end. . . . Gleam of gold down on the cheekbone. Wide spring of the nostril . . . an oddly amusing set of features." Compare this passage, in its wealth of minute detail, to the way Ian Fleming frequently describes James Bond. Ironically, the best of these descriptions is in *The Man with the Golden Gun,* in a passage that describes not Bond but the assassin Scaramanga□who looks enough like Bond to be able to impersonate him successfully:

Age about 35. Height 6 ft. 3 in. Slim and fit. Eyes, light brown. Hair reddish in a crew cut. Long sideburns. Gaunt, sombre face with thick pencil moustache, brownish. Ears very flat to the head. Ambidextrous. Hands very large and powerful and immaculately manicured.

(Note both writers' use of elaborate detail. Wodehouse, by contrast, is extremely sparing in his descriptions. Virtually all we are ever really told of Jeeves's appearance is that he is a "darkish, respectful sort of Johnny.")

Another connection between Lord Peter and James Bond may be seen in the two men's use of cardsharping to foil villains. Lord Peter's behavior in Sayera's short story "The Unprincipled Affair of the Practical Joker" provides a basis for considering similar activities of James Bond.

In the Sayers story, a parasite named Paul Melville has stolen a diamond necklace from Mrs. Ruyslaender. She is unable to bring charges because along with the diamonds he also stole a small portrait with a highly compromising inscription.

Melville likes to play poker. Lord Peter, knowing of Mrs. Ruyslaender's predicament and wishing to help her, engages the thief in a game. During Melville's deal Lord Peter catches him by the arm, and a card falls from Melville's sleeve. Melville protests his innocence—correctly if vainly—because by adroit sleight of hand Lord Peter had planted the incriminating card on him. Having forced the thief into a corner, Wimsey offers him a way out: if he will return the necklace to its rightful owner he will be allowed to slink away.

This idea of cheating a cheater was used by Ian Fleming more than once, first in *Moonraker.* The initial premise of this book (published in 1955) is that a guided missile capable of reaching any capital in Europe has been developed. The missile is being financed privately by the fabulously wealthy Sir Hugo Drax. The British government is worried that Sir Hugo's propensity to cheat at cards might constitute a risk to national security. For his own good as well as for the defense of the realm, Sir Hugo must be stopped. James Bond, of course, is just the man to catch Sir Hugo out.

Bond is a trained cardsharp: he has learned to handle such tricks as how to drop cards from his sleeve—shades of Lord Peter! M., Bond's superior, invites Bond to the Blades Club, where he engages Sir Hugo in a bridge game and relieves him of fifteen thousand pounds.

But this was not Bond's last dustup with a cardsharp. In *Goldfinger,* the book that constitutes the strongest proof for my contention that Ian Fleming drew inspiration from the works of Dorothy L. Sayers, Bond encounters Auric Goldfinger, money launderer for the evil SMERSH organization. At their first meeting, Goldfinger is cheating at a canasta game at a Caribbean resort: he has positioned a woman in a hotel room behind his opponent to observe his hand through binoculars. She then transmits her findings through a radio disguised as Goldfinger's hearing aid. Bond funds the woman, calls Goldfinger's bluff through the radio, and forces him to make restitution to his victim.

But this byplay between Bond and Goldfinger— so reminiscent of that between Wimsey and Melville— is only the beginning. As the book proceeds, Fleming borrows a murder device employed by Sayers in her short story "The Abominable History of the Man with Copper Fingers."

The narrator of that story, Varden, relates an incident that occurred in the home of the fabulously rich sculptor Eric P. Loder, who lived there with his favorite model, Maria Morano. Loder's specialty as a sculptor was silver castings and "chryselephantine" (gold-and-ivory) overlays. Following a period during which Loder and his model were secluded (ostensibly for artistic work), Loder showed Varden a cast-silver Roman couch in the shape of a nude woman.

Shortly thereafter, while Loder was away, Lord Peter came on the scene and pointed out to Varden that the nude was the silvered body of the model. Loder had silver-plated her as punishment for an affair he imagined her to have carried on with Varden, for whom Loder had planned a similar fate. Thanks to Wimsey's intervention, Varden escaped, and Loder tumbled into a vat of his own cyanide solution.

Goldfinger imitates Loder. Goldfinger has a kinky taste for making love to women coated in gold paint. He leaves unpainted only a strip along their spines, to allow their skins to breathe. When Jill Masterson, Goldfinger's partner with the binoculars, betrays him with Bond, Goldfinger has her painted—entirely—so that Jill dies coated in gold, just as Maria Morales died coated in silver.

Conclusion: Wodehouse influenced Sayers; Sayers influenced Fleming. Jeeves to Wimsey to Bond.

What drove these three popular authors to write? Similarities can be found. According to Paul Gallico, Ian Fleming originally wrote *Casino Royale* as an escape from the "terrifying" prospect of matrimony. As to Wodehouse, reading between the lines of his biographies, we see the lonely child, Plum, passed from boarding school to distant relative, happy only in an imaginary world of comfort and security. These two authors created their own worlds: Wodehouse, a world of comfort and security; Fleming, one of danger and intrigue.

When we ponder Dorothy L. Sayers's career as a scholar and her less than ideal marriage, we may see a certain similarity to Fleming's escape into a world of danger and excitement. Her project, indeed, seems to be encoded in the very name of her hero. Lord Peter is, indeed, an expression of Sayers's *whimsy.*

We are fortunate to have Sayers's own words to guide us, for the following quotation has the ring of a deeply personal sentiment, for all the irony in the second sentence: "Mysteries . . . comfort [a person] by subtly persuading that life is a mystery which death will solve, and whose horrors will pass away as a tale that is told. Or is it pure perversity?" This snippet suggests that Sayers found life a horror; a horror her mystery writing may have mitigated.

A number of critics believe that Sayers, whether knowingly or not, created Lord Peter Wimsey as her beau ideal: the ideal man she could never find in real life. In this connection a line in *Have His Carcase* is revealing: Harriet [Vane] felt she had never fully appreciated the superb nonchalance of her literary offspring." For "Harriet" might we not read "Dorothy"?

Finally, how does Sayers rank as a writer against these other two giants of English literature? I concede she cannot be put in their class when it comes to name recognition of their major characters. "Jeeves" and "James Bond" have become synonymous, among English-speaking people everywhere, for "the proper English butler" and "the quintessential British spy." "Lord Peter Wimsey," resonate though it will for mystery-lovers, is not as recognizable to the public at large.

But popularity is not synonymous with quality; and it is with the quality of the writing I am here concerned. Comparing Sayers with Wodehouse is extremely difficult, since their genres are so different. Wodehouse, it must be said, was a master stylist. Making allowance for the firm and constant placement of his tongue within his cheek, his dialogue and descriptive passages rank high among the masters of the language. If readers are unfamiliar with him, I respectfully suggest they reread the brief passage of dialogue quoted earlier in this paper. The reader whose funny bone is not tickled by that passage is not the Wodehouse type.

In my opinion, Sayers is the finer writer of the two, but I can respect those of the opposite persuasion. What I will not countenance is the opinion that Fleming was Sayers's equal as a writer.

In his preface to the anthology *Gilt-Edged Bonds,* writer Paul Gallico expressed the view that Fleming was a "master of detail." Gallico could not have been more wrong. Fleming's genius lay in expressing certain broad tendencies in the politics and public rhetoric of his day, not in careful craftsmanship. He was a boxer, not a chess player. He didn't write "so that he who reads might run"; rather, he wrote while he ran! Evidence of Fleming's haste can be found throughout his books in numerous errors and inconsistencies.

First, compare James Bond's pharmacology (an important area of his expertise) to Sayers's careful research. His is frequently faulty. In *Moonraker,* in which Bond stirs a dose of Benzedrine into his champagne: "'It doesn't taste,' said Bond, 'and the champagne is excellent.'" "In fact, Benzedrine has an appalling taste, rather like quinine mixed with insecticide. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* calls it "very bitter and numbing." But Bond doesn't find it so. Nor does the Benzedrine set him off the dinner he is in the process of eating— lamb cutlets with all the trimmings—despite the fact that one of Benzedrine's principal uses is as an appetite *suppressant.*

Bond's understanding of marijuana is even weaker. Later in the same book, he learns of a new Japanese narcotic, addiction to which, "as in the case of marijuana . . . begins with one 'shot.'" [!] And as *Goldfinger* opens, Bond reminisces about a Mexican assassin with pupils tightly *constricted* from the deadly marijuana. [!!] Unfortunately for Fleming, he was writing just prior to a veritable explosion of marijuana information. Had his career been delayed a few years he might have been spared howlers like these.

Bond's French (unlike Sayers's) is little better than his pharmacology: "It was eight o'clock. The Enzian, firewater distilled from gentian that is responsible for Switzerland's chronic alcoholism, was beginning to warm Bond's stomach and melt his tensions. He ordered another double and with it a choucroute and a carafe of Fondant." Leaving aside the imputation that the Swiss are a nation of chronic alcoholics (I more often hear them referred to as workaholics!), Bond has made a rather odd selection from the menu: a *choucroute* is an order of sauerkraut. I presume Bond meant to order a *cassecroute,* or snack (usually some variation on a grilled ham-and-cheese sandwich).

Arithmetic is another chink in the Fleming armor. Consider the incident wherein Leiter complains of receiving short measure from a bartender in his martini. He complains of the large olive, the false bottom in the glass, then notes, "'One bottle of Gordon's gin contains sixteen true measures—double measures, that is, the only ones I drink. Cut the gin with three ounces of water and that makes it up to twenty-two. . . .'"

Three ounces equal six double measures? Mr. Leiter had shorted himself long before any bartenders had the opportunity to do so.

Not that Ian Fleming can't write. Passages like "a bustle of waiters round their table" or "leashed in by the velvet claw of the front disks, the engine muttered its protest with a mild back-popple from the twin exhausts" show an expertise in the use of vivid metaphors.

I believe Fleming's weakness (and his popularity?) stems from that fact that he eschewed detail work in favor of painting in broad strokes, mythologizing the 1950s and early 1960s, when the headlines were filled with stories of international intrigue.

Double agents Fuchs, Burgess, Philby, Blunt, and Maclean had compromised MI5 (Military Intelligence 5) and even the palace (Anthony Blunt was art historian to the queen). Worse yet, George Blake, imprisoned for fingering forty-two British agents assassinated by the KGB, managed a daring escape from Wormwood Scrubs and was in Moscow almost before his guards knew he was gone. Then in 1963 the John Profumo/Christine Keeler scandal brought down the government.

The British public, frustrated and angered by such blunders and incompetence, needed a distraction. Enter the superhero: ever-competent, neverblundering James Bond.

The Christine Keeler affair is a case in point. It had all the elements of a James Bond story— beautiful women, fantastic wealth, global power, international intrigue: all that's missing is James Bond himself. But compare the Christine Keeler story to a James Bond novel and one begins to see most clearly Ian Fleming's process of mythologization. His purpose was not to analyze or criticize events but to make them larger than life.

Keeler, only nineteen at the time of the Profumo affair, went to prison for two years on rather dubious charges, and lives today in public housing. For James Bond also, beautiful women are expendable, but their ruin is accomplished spectacularly: they are gilded, zapped, shot, stabbed, or exploded; not railroaded—and always in the vital interests of the realm, never for such tawdry, real-life motives as selling newspapers or winning an election.

Fleming's lack of irony is, in fact, characteristic of all his writing. SMERSH, "Smiert Spionam" (= "death to spies"), is described as "the Soviet organization of vengeance and death." Bond himself has a "license to kill." M. (and Bond) react with an outrage completely out of proportion (compared to the matter at hand—the construction of the Moonraker rocket) when they learn of Drax's ungentlemanly cardsharping. And although Bond himself doesn't indulge in racial stereotyping, he accepts such stereotyping without question, as when he is told that Koreans "are the cruellest, most ruthless people in the world," or that Jamaican "Chigroes" (of mixed African and Chinese ancestry) "have inherited some of the Chinese intelligence and most of the Negroes' vices." Fleming's lack of irony, like his carelessness with details, is characteristic of his emphasis on myth.

Sayers's books are much more interesting. Her background is realistic, her characters are threedimensional, her sense of evil realistic and true to life, her research far more exhaustive than Fleming's.

No better example could be given than the extensive and careful study that went into the descriptions of the ancient art of change ringing in *The Nine Tailors.* This novel has received much praise some of it from experts in the fieldfor the accuracy and thoroughness of those descriptions.

Next, I would also call attention to the meticulously plotted and, within the context of the plot, important time sequences in *The Five Red Herrings.* One cannot read that book without being struck by the care with which Ms. Sayers handles those sequences.

As to her overall abilities as a prose stylist, we should start with a concession. She was capable of self-indulgence. Witness the extreme length of *Have His Carcase,* which Sayers can fairly be accused of padding. I personally find none of the Wimsey books tedious, but *Have His Carcase* is not the first, or even the second, book I'd recommend to a budding Sayers enthusiast.

Nonetheless, if Sayers wasn't perfect, she was still a very fine writer, and capable of some bravura turns. The following monologue (from *The Nine Tailors*) is evidence of an ear finely attuned to the nuances of local dialect. The speaker is the gravedigger Harry Gotobed telling how he and his son came upon a corpse in a grave where it had no business being.

"Dick drives his spade down a good spit, and he says to me, 'Dad,' he says, 'there's something in here.' And I says to him, 'What's that?' I says, 'what do you mean? Something in here?' and then I strikes my spade hard down and I feels something sort of between hard and soft, like, and I says, 'Dick,' I says, 'that's a funny thing, there is something here.' So I says, 'Go careful, my boy,' I says, 'because it feels funny-like to me,' I says, 'that's a boot, that is.' . . . So we clears away very careful, and at last we sees him plain. And I says, 'Dick, I don't know who he is nor yet how he got here, but he didn't ought to be here.'"

Another delightful passage, of a totally different type, is the description of Wimsey's heroics in the cricket match in *Murder Must Advertise.*

Mr. Simmonds' third delivery rose wickedly from a patch of bare earth and smote [Wimsey] violently upon the elbow.

Nothing makes a man see red like a sharp rap over the funny bone, and it was at this moment that [Wimsey] suddenly and regrettably forgot himself. . . . The next ball was another of Simmonds' murderous shortpitched bumpers, and Lord Peter Wimsey, opening up wrathful shoulders, strode out of his crease like the spirit of vengeance and whacked it to the wide. . . . Mr. Simmonds . . . was replaced by a gentleman who was known as "Spinner." Wimsey received him with enthusiasm . . . till Brotherhood's captain moved up his fieldsmen and concentrated them about the offside of the wicket. Wimsey looked at this grouping with an indulgent smile, and placed the next six balls consistently and successfully to leg. When, in despair, they drew a close net of fielders all round him, he drove everything that was drivable straight down the pitch.

If Sayers was the better writer, how then account for Fleming's greater popularity? The sensationalism of his stories could be part of the reason, as well as the public's known proclivity for softcore porn. But I think the primary reason is the power of myth and Fleming's ability to tap into it. Sayers's type of book is aimed at a smaller, more select audience. Jeeves, Lord Peter, James Bond: no one would ever confuse them, but I hope I've shown that they (and their authors) have more in common than meets the eye.

Source: William F. Love, "Butler, Dabbler, Spy: Jeeves to Wimsey to Bond" in *Dorothy L. Sayers: The Centenary Celebration*, edited by Alzina Stone Dale, Walker, 1993, pp. 31-43.

Critical Essay #3

Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of the superman— a self-created hero and a natural leader— influenced a number of British writers during the early twentieth century, most notably D. H. Lawrence and George Bernard Shaw. In the following essay, Spath argues that Jeeves represents one of the best examples of the superman in popular literature.

There can hardly be any doubt that the most intriguing character created by P. G. Wodehouse is that of butler Jeeves, even though, as the clever servant who, episode after episode, proves superior to his master, he is anything but original. From the viewpoint of literary history he is indeed of as ancient a family as that hopelessly inefficient rich young man whom he serves. The extraordinary fascination Jeeves has held for a vast number of readers invites some investigation of how his author made use of one of the stock figures of comedy.

But, as we hope to demonstrate, Jeeves is not only the traditional sly servant; he is also one of the supermen of popular literature, who may be considered in relation to, for instance, the hero of the detective novel□ a genre which gained the peak of its popularity at about the same time as Wodehouse. Furthermore, there is the well-known fact that in the early twentieth century interest in the superman was expressed by several English writers of recognized literary importance, notably by Shaw and Lawrence. The corresponding developments of political history hardly need mentioning here. It seems worthwhile then to analyse the function of Jeeves in this context.

George Orwell, always a sensitive critic of popular writers, noted in 1936:

> [. . .] it was a great day for Mr. Wodehouse when he created Jeeves, and thus escaped from the realm of comedy, which in England always stinks of virtue, into the realm of pure farce. The great charm of Jeeves is that (although he did pronounce Nietzsche to be 'fundamentally unsound') he is beyond good and evil.

At first this may seem a little surprising since, superficially, Jeeves appears to be as genuinely Victorian as any average middle-class reader might have wished, especially when we compare him to the traditional servant of comedy whose morals are notoriously low. Jeeves knows neither financial greed nor sexual desires; it is, in fact, impossible to think of him as having erotic inclinations. He does like to collect any pecuniary rewards that may come his way, but what he enjoys in such cases is the success of his stratagems rather than the material gains. He would never do anything improper; his language is as immaculate as his manners or his appearance.

What strikes us about Jeeves is that he is not essentially interested in either doing good or doing well. The only guideline for his actions is contained in the phrase he frequently uses: "I endeavour to give satisfaction, Sir." It might be said that as a moral being Jeeves will be nothing but a butler. However, this sole ethical rule of loyalty to his master is interpreted by him as he thinks fit, not as the latter might wish. Jeeves's methods include a little blackmail now and again, or the occasional use of knock-out drops, but never anything as undignified as actual violence. The point about him is that he does not need it. He does not labour for success; it comes to him as the result of artistic endeavour.

Characteristically, he is a virtual dictator in questions of taste, whereas his ethics do not permit him to criticize morally any of Bertram's enterprises. However obstinately the young gentleman may behave at first, Jeeves inevitably gets his way when there are dissenting opinions about ties and suits. From time to time Bertram feels he ought to express an employer's righteous indignation about this, but his mood softens quickly, when he recalls some of his man's superhuman feats:

More than once, as I have shown, it has been my painful task to squelch in him a tendency to get uppish and treat the young master as a serf or peon. These are grave defects. But one thing I have never failed to hand the man. He is magnetic. There is about him something that seems to soothe and hypnotize. To the best of my knowledge, he has never encountered a charging rhinoceros, but should this contingency occur, I have no doubt that the animal, meeting his eye, would check itself in mid-stride, roll over and lie purring with its legs in the air.At any rate he calmed down Aunt Dahlia [. . .]

In most cases there is a perfectly rational explanation for Jeeves's charismatic powers: he has wide experience, common sense, and psychological insight. But some of his achievements are so impressive that not only the feeble-minded Bertram is inclined to credit him with superhuman abilities. Jeeves, for instance, is able to mix a "magic" drink which instantly cures his master's hangovers. He moves noiselessly, and Bertram even believes that he can walk through walls. Often Jeeves is referred to as "the higher powers," and on several occasions his actions are described in the words of Cowper's hymn: "[he] moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform."

It appears to be appropriate, then, to call him a superman, and also a true genius, who, as genius ought to be, is bounded only by his own laws: the laws of butlering. This means that he uses his giant brain to no other effect than to steer a not too bright young man gently past the pitfalls, which threaten a life devoted to innocent pleasure. It also explains that he has high standards of taste, which he autocratically imposes on his employer.

Turning our attention to Bertram Wooster we recognize some features of the dandy in him, but they are less prominent than he himself would have liked. The general impression is one of an overgrown schoolboy with plenty of pocket money. He likes drinking in his club, where he and his pals have a great time throwing bread at each other. He is very happy playing with a toy duck in his bath. Unfortunately, he is repeatedly torn from such joys and called upon to undergo testing adventures. One of his friends observes aptly:

We are as little children, frightened of the dark, and Jeeves is the wise nurse who takes us by the hand.

Happily, Jeeves is not only a wise nurse, but a male one, or else his protegés would be very unwilling to put so much trust in him. Women often strike fear in the hearts of Wooster and his friends:

I've said it before, and I'll say it again□girls are rummy. Old Pop Kipling never said a truer word than when he made that crack about the f. of the s. being more d. than the m.

Bertram is particularly terrified of aunts, as he sees in them a highly repressive type of authority. Wodehouse who, by the way, was brought up mostly in boarding schools and by relatives, very rarely shows us parent-child relationships, and if he does, they are of a rather detached nature. The role of mothers in his books is an especially small one, while aunts are in abundance, and where there are aunts, there is trouble. Invariably they tyrannize their nephews, husbands or brothers. They begrudge them their favourite pleasures and seek to diminish their liberty; they want them to put on proper clothes and to be a social success; they make it their constant concern to prevent unsuitable matches and to bring about desirable ones; they are snobbish and parsimonious. Aunts have morals, of course, but these are such as to suit entirely their own inclinations while interfering grossly with the wishes of others. There is very little a Wooster-aunt would not do in pursuit of what she considers her right or duty. The title of a late Wodehouse novel, *Aunts Aren't Gentlemen* (1974) sums up Bertram's lifelong experience with that kind of relative. The fact that Dahlia, to whom this verdict refers, is the aunt he dislikes least, fits in with her being rather masculine in appearance and habits: she hunts, swears, gambles, and spends more money than is good for her husband's digestion.

Young women make no less trouble for Bertram than aunts. According to the different dangers they represent, they can be divided into two types, both of which we find in *The Code of the Woosters.* There is Madeline, a dreamy, sentimental girl, who reveals to Bertram on more than one occasion that he is in love with her and that she will accept him. This poses a paralyzing problem for the young hero, as his code of honour forbids him to tell a lady that he would do anything rather than marry her. On the other hand, there is Stiffy Byng, who capriciously exploits the cavalier code by demanding of her lover, a young curate, that he steal the local policeman's helmet. One is reminded of *Salomé,* when, later on, the helmet is brought in by a butler "on a silver salver."

There are male persons, too, of whom Wooster is afraid, older men of high professional or official authority, like the psychiatrist Sir Roderick Glossop, and Sir Watkyn Bassett, a judge, who fined him once and would love the opportunity of sending him to prison. In the absurd Wodehouse world it is not at all surprising that both gentlemen are also potential fathers-in-law for Bertram, since their daughters are determined to marry him. In the presence of persons like Sir Watkyn he is reminded of childhood fears, such as he experienced before punishment by his headmaster:

I was feeling more as I had felt in the old days of school when going to keep a tryst with the headmaster in his study. You will recall my telling you of the time I sneaked down by night to the Rev. Aubrey Upjohn's lair in quest of biscuits and found myself unexpectedly cheek by jowl with the old bird, I in striped nonshrinkable pyjamas, he in tweeds and a dirty look. On that occasion, before parting, we had made a date for half-past four next day at the same spot.

The aged judge, though not exactly a *senex amorosus,* and possibly for some quite practical purpose, wishes to marry into the family of Roderick Spode, founder and leader of a fascist organization, called "Saviours of Britain" or "Black Short." Roderick is the other type of man of whom Bertram is terrified, the male bully. He is of giant size, wears an impressive moustache, and, for the sake of his mission, which requires him to remain single, refrains from marrying the judge's daughter.

We are now able to take stock of the problems, fears and enemies besetting our young gentleman. At one level he is the child afraid of grown-ups, of their power and authority; he is the weak boy afraid of those who are stronger. At a second level he is an adolescent male afraid of the other sex. Girls frighten him because they do not behave according to the rules that he himself accepts; so they appear to be unpredictable, unscrupulous, and dangerous:

I stared at the young pill, appalled at her moral code, if you could call it that. You know, the more I see of women, the more I think there ought to be a law. Something has got to be done about this sex, or the whole fabric of Society will collapse, and then what silly asses we shall all look.

Furthermore, Bertram has learnt that girls imply the threat of married life. Presumably he was once told that women wait for men to ask the relevant question, but he has found that ladies who decide to make him their husband take immediate steps to that effect, caring little whether and how he has made up his mind. And worse, the girls who go for him, are intelligent, strong-willed persons; they want to "mould" him according to their wishes. The culmination of all threats is an aunt, since she combines semi-parental authority with female unscrupulousness.

All in all, the enemy side stands—capricious girls excepted—for an orderly middle-class way of life which includes marriage, money, and a career. Judged by this standard, Bertram is bound to receive a very poor rating, as he does, for instance, from Aunt Agatha:

It is young men like you, Bertie, who make the person with the future of the race at heart despair. Cursed with too much money, you fritter away in idle selfishness a life which might have been made useful, helpful and profitable. You do nothing but waste your time on frivolous pleasures. You are simply an antisocial animal, a drone. Bertie, it is imperative that you marry.

Marriage, it appears, is the first social obligation of man, and the sole road to a tolerably virtuous life. In the eyes of his aunt, Bertram's neglect of this duty is not only morally reprehensible and even sinful, but downright unpatriotic. The naughty nephew, on the other hand, tenaciously clings to his freedom to live a playful life of leisure. This liberty is vaguely associated with the upper classes, to which he belongs in some unspecified way. He does feel responsible for his pals, who seem to have an unlimited claim to his assistance, and for any lady who can make a credible pretence of being in distress.

Bertram might be called a strictly innocent playboy. Life, for him, is a game, interspersed with occasional test matches, which, with his blend of boy-scout and knight-errant mentality he would not have the slightest chance of winning—were it not for Jeeves.

In *The Code of the Woosters* the invincible butler is involved in a fight against Roderick Spode, who as a pseudo-superman, could be regarded as his direct antitype. Even Bertram recognizes the dictator in him at first sight:

I don't know if you have ever seen these pictures in the papers of Dictators with tilted chins and blazing eyes, inflaming the populace with fiery words on the occasion of the opening of a new skittle alley, but that was what he reminded me of.

It is remarkable that a judge, Sir Watkyn, is Roderick's friend and ally. In combination, the fascist's physical strength and the force of the law are hard to beat. In order to help Wooster, Jeeves makes use of information received through the intelligence network of his butlers' club. There, in the headquarters of the good spirits, Spode's dark secret is known: he earns his living as a designer of ladies underwear—an occupation clearly unfavourable to the ambitions of an aspiring dictator. Jeeves tells the name of Spode's business to Bertram, who is to mention it in times of danger. The latter, equipped with what to him is a completely mysterious weapon, confidently confronts the enemy, only to find that he has forgotten the magic word. However, just in time he remembers, and the bully is reduced to a cringing coward, while Bertram is able to cast himself in the role of a stern teacher:

'I have not been at all satisfied with your behaviour since I came to this house. The way you were looking at me at dinner. You may think people don't notice these things, but they do.''Of course, of course.''And calling me a miserable worm.''I'm sorry I called you a miserable worm, Wooster. I spoke without thinking.''Always think, Spode. Well, that is all. You may withdraw.'

Since *The Code of the Woosters* was published in 1939, the political allusion implied by the character of Spode is obvious enough. It would be wrong, however, to emphasize the importance of such direct references to contemporary political affairs in the novels of P. G. Wodehouse. Basically Spode is just one type of evil person in Wooster-land. By making him a potential dictator Wodehouse adds topicality to an essentially timeless character, and thus connects his fairytale-world with the reader's experience. Fiction and reality, despite their apparent disparity, are shown to be related to each other, as indeed they always are, even though in popular literature such relatedness is normally of a less obvious kind. The character of Spode, when contrasted to Jeeves, points to the fact that the latter may be seen in connection with the question of leadership, which at that time was widely discussed in politics and literature.

Collaboration between Wooster and his butler began in 1917, from which time until 1941, the year of his ill-advised Berlin broadcast, the popularity of Wodehouse grew continuously. There is no need to decribe at any length the social and political problems that marked Britain in those decades. Certainly the threat of another war, the struggles for power, and the hunt for jobs and money led to an acute consciousness of change□of change for the worse. In David Thomson's *England in the Twentieth Century* the chapter on the years after the First World War is given the heading "Into the Waste Land". Thomson writes:

It seems likely that public life at all levels suffered a deterioration of standards, and a decline of taste. [. . .] and there was a propensity [. . .] to see pre-war conditions in a rosier hue than they had ever merited.

In this context the author also describes the changing role of women in society:

The emancipation of women took a multitude of forms: from lighter clothing and shorter hair and skirts to more open indulgence in drink, tobacco, and cosmetics, from insistence on smaller families to easier facilities for divorce.

If we set against this the essentially Victorian views on women of Bertram Wooster, we can perhaps understand that he was frightened, that he feared the collapse of society and called for antifeminine legislation, whereas, in real life, women were about to be granted equal suffrage.

In the United States depression and unemployment signalled the end of the American Dream. There, at least, the usefulness of the inherited constitution was never seriously questioned, while in Europe, not excluding Britain, the capacity of democracy for dealing with the problems that had arisen was doubted by a considerable number of people, some of whom expressed the wish for a kind of political superman.

D. H. Lawrence, for instance, believed that since hereditary aristocracy had spent its strength, and since democracy was based on a false assumption of equality, people would eventually seek their "natural" leaders:

At last the masses will come to such men and say: "You are greater than we. Be our lords. Take our life and our death in your hands, and dispose of us according to your will. Because we see a light in your face, and burning on your mouth."

Earlier, in 1903, a writer whom Lawrence disliked, George Bernhard Shaw, had argued similarly that the "overthrow of the aristocrat has created the necessity for the Superman." He expected nothing but the worst from what he called "Proletarian Democracy," as such a government would inevitably share the low mental and moral standards of its voters: "You cannot make a silk purse out of a sow's ear," is Shaw's caustic verdict. Therefore progress must remain an illusion, until it is given a biological basis:

The only fundamental and possible Socialism is the socialization of the selective breeding of Man: in other terms, of human evolution. We must eliminate the Yahoo, or his vote will wreck the commonwealth.

Man, according to Shaw, must consciously develop himself into superman. The ultimate purpose of this process is not a new type of individual leader, but the breeding of nations of supermen, of "King Demos."

The Irish dramatist nearly always gave the public a chance not to take his provocative ideas seriously, and usually they were not taken seriously. Lawrence, on the other hand, left no such loop-hole to his readers, and, consequently, was received with considerable hostility. And if we look for a superman in what was popular fiction at the time, in the detective novel for instance, we do not find heroes whom we might give such a title without unduly stretching the meaning of the word. The fictional detectives are gentlemen rather than supermen; they certainly cannot be said to be "beyond good and evil."

Bertram Wooster, too, adheres strictly, if somewhat naively, to a gentleman's code, but it is this attitude that often brings him close to disaster. In both the works by Shaw and Lawrence from which the above quotations were taken there is also a typical gentleman who fails to achieve his main object, because he is a gentleman. Octavius, in *Man and Superman,* is a sincere, chivalrous and kind man, deeply in love with Ann, who drops him for the radical revolutionist Tanner. In "The Ladybird," Basil, a good-looking, courageous officer, adores his wife Daphne, but she is drawn irresistibly to the "natural aristocrat," the Bohemian count Psanek.

Shaw and Lawrence, though for different reasons, attack both the ideal of a gentleman and the Victorian idea of a lady. Ann is described as a person, who will "commit every crime a respectable woman can"—an attitude that with equal justice might be attributed to the typical aunt in a Wodehouse novel. And like some of the young women there, Ann is, where men are concerned, the hunter, not the prey.

So, while there is in early twentieth-century English literature a tendency to be critical of traditional standards of behaviour as regards the two sexes, as well as of the liberal belief in progress and democracy, the detective novel, on the other hand, affirms the validity of pre-War concepts of social order, justice, morals, and manners; it presents as hero a perfect gentleman in a milieu essentially unaffected by historical change.

At a superficial glance, the fictional world of P. G. Wodehouse, who was said by Orwell to have remained "mentally in the Edwardian age," seems to belong to the past in a similar way. However, strange as it may seem, his novels, quite unlike other popular fiction of the period between the Wars, reflect current issues in a remarkable degree. In this, and also in the psychology on which their characterization is based, they are closer to what is generally regarded as the mainstream of English fiction of that time. There, for instance, the influence of childhood traumata on later life is frequently pointed out and analysed. Bertram Wooster, too, is shown to suffer from the imprint left on him by adult authority when he was a boy:

To people who don't know my Aunt Agatha I find it extraordinarily difficult to explain why it is that she has always put the wind up me to such a frightful extent. I mean, I'm not dependent on her financially or anything like that. [. . .] You see, all through my childhood and when I was a kid at school she was always able to turn me inside out with a single glance and I haven't come out from under the influence yet.

Such inhibitions are closely connected with his imagining women to be both mentally and physically stronger than he is. So he suspects that Honoria Glossop, while she was educated at Girton, was a selection for the college boxing team. One of his verdicts on modern women in general is that they are "thugs, all lipstick and cool, hard, sardonic eyes."

An error often to be found in critical opinion on Wodehouse is that he ignores the economic and social troubles of his age. In fact, the quest for money and the anguish caused by the lack of it, are recurrent motifs in his works. Wooster, it is true, lives on a secure financial basis, but several of his friends are hampered by an acute shortage of cash needed either to open a small business and get married, or, just as likely, for some utterly absurd project. Even members of wealthy aristocratic families, like the relatives of the Earl of Emsworth are sometimes forced to resort to the meanest schemes to balance their budgets.

These problems, admittedly, always affect individuals, not society as a whole. However, the stately homes of these novels seem to be pervaded by a veiled threat of change, and, at times, people have to be reminded not to forget their station, be they footmen, or secretaries, or upstart millionaires. One of the earlier Wodehouse heroes, the impecunious R. P. Smith, goes as far as to join the Socialists, but apart from his calling everyone "comrade," he does not exhibit any sign of left-wing inclinations. When Bertram's pal Bingo Little joins the Communists, he does so from purely personal motives, as the object of his devotions at the time happens to be a member of that party. The one extremist politician of any importance in a Wodehouse novel is the Fascist Spode, who, much like his counterparts of the opposite persuasion, is a violent and basically insincere person, without either taste or manners. It is because of their crudeness, mainly, that these enemies of democracy are felt to be even more disagreeable than the bourgeois aunts.

Obviously, some of the topics which aroused general interest between the Wars found their way into this fictional world, which otherwise reminds us so much of Edwardian England. Bertram's life seems to consist of repeated efforts to reconcile the troubled present with that mythical past, when gentlemen were still free and unencumbered, bound only by their honour, and when ladies still were ladies. Left to himself, he would be doomed to fail, not only through lack of strength and intelligence, but because, in order to succeed, he would have to be untrue to his code. Clearly, he needs someone able to combine in an aesthetically satisfactory way the demands of modern life with the ideals of the past. What is needed, this appears to be the message of P. G. Wodehouse, is a butler, not a Hitler.

Butlers seem to have been a specifically English upper class institution, highly esteemed as distinguished members of the household staff. They were assigned to the master of the house rather than to the lady and were, for instance, in charge of the wine cellar and responsible for the plate. They would be able to advise their masters on questions of etiquette or clothes, but would never attempt to be on familiar or intimate terms with them. They would have to be tactful, discreet, and, above all, loyal. A butler, therefore, was a person of considerable authority, and Wodehouse tells us that, as a youth, he used to be in awe of these "supermen," who "passed away with Edward the Seventh." In a country in which language and manners are regarded as distinctive of class their being able to speak like gentlemen would put them in a unique position between the separate worlds of upstairs and downstairs. This, at a time when Europe was seething with social turmoil, must have made the butler a figure of some literary potential. Was not there a type of character whom one could well imagine turning into a working class hero and strip the idle rich of their wealth and power?

Indeed, if we watch Jeeves continually solving Bertram's problems—outwitting bullies, extracting money for his friends from their tight-fisted relatives, saving him from conjugal slavery—we may wonder how the relationship between master and butler is to remain stable. Is it credible that this superman should not attempt to become ruler of him who has enlisted his help, since it is in the nature of a superman to dictate? Is it not inevitable that he should dictate in order to help? In 1902 a stage butler, created by James Matthew Barrie, actually deposed his aristocratic employers. In *The Admirable Crichton,* the hero turns out to be a "natural aristocrat," who, as the only capable person, assumes the role of leader when their ship is wrecked on a desert island. After their return to civilization the previous hierarchy is restored. Thus, this Shavian comedy of ideas demonstrates that artificial traditions are of greater weight than natural abilities in determining a person's place in English society.

Bertram, as we have seen in an earlier quotation, does feel that he has to assert himself against Jeeves and he cannot help asking himself occasionally,

> [. . .] why a man with his genius is satisfied to hang around pressing my clothes and what not. If I had half Jeeves's brain I should have a stab at being Prime Minister or something.

Thus, in an unobtrusive way, the question of the potential political ambition of a superman is raised. However, Jeeves is too complete a butler to wish to be anything else. Loyalty is essential to his character, rebellion outside the scope of his existence. Furthermore, his mental superiority makes it unnecessary for him to seek a position of dominance. His ultimate perfection consists in the fact that he does not have to become a dictator.

The relationship between Jeeves and Bertram, therefore, is beautifully balanced, neither of them wishing to alter it. One might even consider it to be an exemplary case of co-operation for their mutual benefit between capital and brains, rendering super- fluous every social dispute. The butler leads without dominating, while the master is led and, yet, retains his status. The reader can safely turn his mind to Bertram's agonies and rejoice with him over his victories, knowing that he has put his trust in a reliable, unambitious superman.

So, when the novels of P. G. Wodehouse mix with the timeless material of comedy some current problems, the solution offered is of current interest too; it is also absurd and specifically English: Wodehouse advances the paradoxical idea of a 'constitutional superman,' i.e. a superman who by virtue of his inherent constitution will be ever loyal and benevolent. Psychologically, this was probably a more satisfactory way of dealing with this question in literature than the provocative attempts of Shaw and Lawrence or the conservative approach of the detective novel. Jeeves, indeed, gave satisfaction! It seems appropriate that, when in 1939 Oxford conferred upon him the honorary degree of D. Litt., Wodehouse was hailed in *The Times* as "Ruler unquestioned of the Land of Laughter."

Source: Eberhard Spath, "P. G. Wodehouse's Jeeves: The Butler as Superman" in *Functions in Literature: Essays Presented to Erwin Wolff on His Sixtieth Birthday*, edited by Ulrich Broich, Theo Stemmler, and Gerd Stratmann, Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1984, pp. 269-281.

Critical Essay #4

In the following essay, Voorhees recounts the long and successful career of Wodehouse and his most popular creations, the characters of Jeeves and Bertie.

The cynical and witty W. Somerset Maugham once remarked that to be a grand old man of letters it was necessary to do two things: write a great many books and live a very long life. By Maugham's law, P. G. Wodehouse (1881-1975) was a grand old man of English letters, for he published about a hundred books and lived to be nearly ninety-four. The fact is that Wodehouse was obviously one of the masters of English comedy when he was still in his thirties.

Beside Wodehouse, many British and American comic writers who flourished between World War I and World War II now look like figures in a museum or an old scrap book. The "brittle" sophistication of Noel Coward has cracks through which sentimentality is embarrassingly visible, and some charter members of the Algonquin Round Table look less like great wits than high-school wiseacres. They did what Oscar Wilde only *said* he did: they put their talents into their writing and their genius, such as it was, into their lives. Coward did most of his acting on the stage, but they did most of theirs off it. Wodehouse was not an unclubbable man, but his idea of a writer was a man who sat at his desk and wrote. Of all the Algonquins, Robert Benchley holds up best, in part perhaps because his comedy, like Wodehouse's, is without malice and without posturing.

Wodehouse did not begin as a comic novelist. He wrote boys' books with a public-school background, he wrote light romantic novels, he wrote (when he was still a struggling young author) anythings that he thought popular magazines would publish. All of the earlier work, however, was in one way or another a preparation for the pure comedy which is his contribution to English literature. This includes not only the great Blandings Castle and the Bertie and Jeeves cycles but also several other series and cycles. One features Pongo Twistleton's aged but unsinkable uncle, another the raffish Ukridge, another the innumerable nephews of Mr. Mulliner, still another a cast of mad golfers. (By the chart bound into his book *The Comic Style of P. G. Wodehouse,* Robert A. Hall, Jr. demonstrates the full extent and complexity of Wodehouse's creation.) It is remarkable that Wodehouse, having reached a rare height of comedy so soon, kept the height for such a long while. *Something Fresh* (American title, *Something New*), his first comic country-house novel, was published in 1915. *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit* (American title, *Bertie Wooster Sees It Through*) appeared in 1954, and Wodehouse professed to write its dedication from Colney Hatch (he was always willing to make jokes about himself), but it is one of his very best books. *Aunts Aren't Gentlemen* came as late as 1974, and it can hardly be regarded as a great falling off.

Wodehouse created a fictional world as authentic in its way as that of Trollope or Balzac or Faulkner. To read his novels and short stories is to encounter again and again old acquaintances and familiar places: Bingo Little and the Drones Club, Aunt Dahlia and Market Snodsbury, Lord Emsworth and Blandings Castle, Bertie Wooster and Berkeley

Mansions. Unlike the worlds of the other three writers, however, Wodehouse's is perfectly innocent; there is not a Slope in it or a Rastignac or a single Snopes. Life is pastoral even in the centre of London: there are no whores in Piccadilly Circus, no rakes in the clubs of the West End, no adulterers in Mayfair. The great English country house is a haven for the naive: the storm of life blows through it in the shape of whirlwind farce, and beyond its grounds there lie those involvements which are hazardous only by the conventions of Wodehouse's comedy: school prize-givings, village concerts, and bonny baby contests. Even the tough old explorer Plank steers clear of the last of these, knowing that mothers the world over become thirsty for judges' blood when their infants do not win.

Wodehouse makes little attempt to keep up with the world. On the contrary, one of his distinctions is to have made anachronism a fine art. He was born early enough to have spent his first twenty years in the Victorian Age, and he had published a dozen books before the death of Edward VII. Not only the prevailing atmosphere but also various details of all the novels and short stories that followed are those of Victorian and Edwardian times. The books also abound in anachronisms from less remote periods. In a novel published in the fifties, a nightclub entertainer sings through a megaphone, like the young Rudy Valee, and in one published in the sixties, a girl drives a "roadster." The anachronism of the novels is part of the charm and part of the comedy. (A great joke, not in the novels but begotten by them, is that in World War II the Germans, taking Wodehouse literally, parachuted into the Fen Country an agent who was instantly apprehended because he was wearing spats.)

For Wodehouse's characters, time has been arrested. They are placed once and for all at some point of youth or age, like figures in a comic strip (or gods on Olympus), and forever tied to special pursuits. Bertie Wooster toddles off to the Drones Club or tools down to the country to be caught up in some comic imbroglio. The impossible Ukridge incessantly contrives schemes for getting rich quickly, every one of which falls flat. Golfers go round and round golf courses without end.

Of all the works of Wodehouse, those about Bertie and his extraordinary valet Jeeves are the best. To begin with, they have the best characters. Bertie and Jeeves were as happy an invention for Wodehouse as Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson were for Arthur Conan Doyle, and Wodehouse did what Doyle could not or did not trouble to do: he surrounded his main characters with platoons of well developed subordinate ones. The young men constitute a marvelous muster roll of eccentrics and nitwits. Bingo Little, after a fatheaded bachelorhood, marries the sentimental novelist Rosie M. Banks. Gussie Fink-Nottle retires to the country and devotes himself to raising newts, though he visits other country houses occasionally and once, in pirate's costume, goes to a fancy-dress ball in London. ("There is enough sadness in the world," Bertie says, "without fellows like Gussie going about in sea boots.")

Tuppy Glossop loses Bertie's friendship for a time by betting Bertie that he cannot swing across the Drones Club swimming pool by the rings and then looping back the last ring, so that Bertie is immersed in full evening dress. Roderick Spode is no friend of Bertie's but an evil genius resembling "those pictures . . . of dictators with tilted chins and blazing eyes, inflaming the populace with fiery words on the occasion of the opening of a new skittle alley." All the girls whom Bertie knows are beautiful, like those in a musical comedy, but dangerous. Roberta Wickham is discontented if she is not forcing Bertie into some lunatic enterprise. Florence Craye is determined to make him stop smoking and drinking and start reading serious books. Madeline Bassett believes that the morning mists on the meadows are the bridal veils of the elves. Worse, she believes that Bertie loves her. One of his recurrent fears is that, labouring under this delusion, she will insist on marrying him.

Most older characters are figures of authority, and aunts (as they are in Wodehouse's other books) are of special significance. Aunt Agatha, the one who, Bertie says, eats broken glass and turns into a werewolf at the full moon, is an older Florence Craye. Aunt Dahlia is his "good and deserving aunt," yet she blackmails him into dreadful adventures, not, as Roberta often does, just for the hell of it, but for ends to which she is quite willing to sacrifice him. Madeline's father, a magistrate in whose court Bertie has been fined, is authority in the legal sense. Sir Roderick Glossop, a "nerve specialist" convinced through most of the cycle that Bertie is certifiably insane, is authority in the medical sense.

The world of Bertie and Jeeves is also populated by a number of characters who would be, without Wodehouse's variety and vivacity, mere stereotypes. One is Wodehouse's variation on the American woman grown rich by a succession of marriages. Mrs. Spottsworth says to Captain Biggar, who offers to look for her lost necklace: "I wish you would. It's not valuable□I don't suppose it cost more than ten thousand dollars□but it has a sentimental interest. One of my husbands gave it to me, I never can remember which." Captain Biggar is a variation on the virile outdoor man, a good-natured joke on Kipling, Haggard, and their imitators. He is a great white hunter who lives by a strict code, loves the Empire, fears nothing, masters numerous African dialects. (Having become engaged to Mrs. Spottsworth, he hums a Swahili wedding march.) The explorer Plank is a variation on the same type, not a modest fellow like Biggar, but a blusterer.

Wodehouse can be as frugal as he is prodigal, and a few characters are so many interchangeable parts. Madeline Bassett appears in *The Mating Season* (1949) and Phyllis Mills in *Jeeves in the Offing* (1960), but it would scarcely matter if they changed places. Stephanie Byng is not much more than an alias for Roberta Wickham, and Harold Pinker is Reginald Herring again with one difference: on the football field, Pinker is a marvel of dexterity, but he cannot cross a room without overturning furniture. D'Arcy Cheesewright and Orlo Porter are clones of Roderick Spode.

There is nobody like Bertie. At the start of the cycle he is, as Wodehouse himself remarked, a fairly standard model of the "knut," the dandy and silly ass of the Victorian and Edwardian music hall. Wodehouse developed him in some of the early stories and then deliberately fixed his character when he discovered that he was on to a good thing. Though fixed, Bertie has contradictions that make him more than a "humour" character and a decency and sweetness that make him always likeable. The narrator of all but one of his adventures, he quotes right and left from the great literature of the Western World, but he frequently remarks that he "was made to read" at school a writer whom he quotes. He now concentrates on thrillers, racing papers, and detective stories, on which he considers himself an expert. He dislikes people who write serious books. Lady Melvern is "a pal of my Aunt Agatha . . . . A very vicious speciment. She wrote a book on social conditions in India when she came back from the Durbar." (Wodehouse probably has in mind *Mother India,* the best seller by Katherine Mayo, which purports to be an exposé of the ignorance and squalor of India. Evelyn Waugh made jokes about it in two of his novels, and Norman Douglas wrote an indignant reply to it called *How About Europe?*)

Though he is the narrator of more volumes than there are in *The Music of Time,* Bertie is "a spent force" after writing a short article on the welldressed man for Aunt Dahlia's magazine. Indeed, he is, whenever he is allowed to be, as languid as any fop who ever wore a wig in a Restoration comedy. In *The Inimitable Jeeves* (1923) he sits "in the old flat one night trying to muster up enough energy to go to bed." His summum bonum is a quiet life with plenty of sleep and plenty of good food, drink, and tobacco. He suffers "agony" when, visiting Aunt Agatha, he must go without cocktails and lie on the floor in his bedroom to exhale cigarette smoke up the fireplace chimney. Without Jeeves, he could not get through the routine of an ordinary day, much less get out of the predicaments into which he is repeatedly thrust. Each time Jeeves extricates him, Bertie must pay, usually by surrendering a piece of wearing apparel of which Jeeves disapproves: an unorthodox dinner jacket, a cummerbund, a blue Alpine hat with a pink feather.

But Bertie's indolence, self-indulgence, and incompetence are allied with innocence, with vulnerability, with nostalgia for times more decorous than his own. In one of his favourite clichés, he calls women "the delicately nurtured," but he is more sensitive than most of the women he knows. The food crank Laura Pike shocks him by talking clinically about the organs of digestion, and he dislikes The Palace of Beauty at the British Empire Exposition at Wembley, where girls portray famous women through the ages. A beautiful woman "loses a lot of her charm if you have to stare at her in a tank. Moreover, it gave me a rum feeling of having wandered into the wrong bedroom of a country house."

Bertie has contradictory visions of himself. In one he is the total loss that Aunt Agatha thinks him, but in the other he is the hero of high adventure. He has the "keen intelligence" of a Sherlock Holmes, "broods" much, sometimes "tensely," and "muses," like Tennyson's Lancelot. There is something of Sabatini's Captain Blood in him: ". . . though my voice was suave, a close observer in a position to watch my eyes would have noticed a steely glint." Bertie is like a boy who knows pretty well what he is but likes to live a fantasy life derived from his reading. He cannot be blind to the disparity between his style and his matter: "Those who know Bertram Wooster best are aware that he is a man of sudden, strong enthusiasms and that, when in the grip of one of these, he becomes a remorseless machine□tense, absorbed, single-minded. It was so in the matter of this banjolele-playing of mine." Jeeves objects to the banjolele, and Bertie has to give it up.

The vast differences between Bertie and Jeeves do not include one of age. There is merely a vague impression to the contrary, fortified by a few book jackets. Some picture Jeeves as a haughty majordomo, others as a kindly elder statesman. On the jacket of *Jeeves and the Tie that Binds* (1971) Osbert Lancaster draws him florid, portly, virtually bald, which is to say that he draws him as Wodehouse's classic *butler.* Bertie says that Jeeves is tall and slender and dark, and there is no more reason for Jeeves to be much older than Bertie than for Crichton to be much older than Lord Loam. Still it is easy to understand why, for many readers, Jeeves should appear to be at least twice the age of Bertie. In the first place, he knows more and thinks better. Whereas Bertie is addicted to detective stories, Jeeves is devoted to Spinoza (somewhere Bertie says that Jeeves has probably got to the point in Spinoza where one discovers that the butler did it). He has a wide acquaintance with other philosophers and with literature and is equipped with a jeweller's knowledge of precious stones. He knows the technical term for the Roman gladiator who fought with net and trident (*retiarius*) and the exact distance between London and Harrogate (two hundred and six miles).

Jeeves' manner and speech are the reverse of Bertie's. Bertie says, "Right ho," and Jeeves says, "Very good, sir." Quoting Henley's "Invictus," Jeeves begs Bertie's pardon just before coming to the word "bloody." Yet Jeeves is not all propriety. He has a strong strain of the gamester in him and bets as readily on the sack race at a village sports as he does on the horses at Ascot or the roulette wheels at Monte Carlo. Furthermore, he is capable of great physical violence, at least twice knocking people out, once with a putter and once with a cosh. He recovers the confidential records of his club by slipping a Mickey Finn into the thief's drink and tells Bertie that he never travels without one or two.

The long association of Bertie and Jeeves is only half plausible, since Bertie needs Jeeves but Jeeves does not need Bertie. Why, then, does Jeeves not leave? Indeed, how does it happen in the first place that a superman like Jeeves (not Nietzsche's kind: Jeeves once tells Bertie that Nietzsche is "fundamentally unsound") is unengaged just when Bertie has been obliged to dismiss his valet? Such questions are hardly to the purpose, for the relation ship of Bertie and Jeeves depends not upon plausibility but on convention. Wodehouse's comedy descends from the "artificial comedy" of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century stage, and the figures of the clever servant and the stupid master descend from more distant sources in classical comedy. Wodehouse adapted them, but luckily he did more than that; he invented his own version of an archetype and created a new myth.

Some works of Wodehouse are an ingenious mixture of modes, but the Bertie and Jeeves books are pure comedy. Their plots are better than those of most of the other books, and Wodehouse was one of the great plot-makers of literature. He composed rapidly (Guy Bolton said that to save time Wodehouse fed a continuous roll of paper into his typewriter, later cutting it into eleven-inch pages), but he plotted slowly. (At a manuscript sale at Sotheby's, Richard Usborne saw seventy pages of pencilled notes for *Jeeves in the Offing.*) He once remarked that his brain almost "came unstuck" as he created complication upon complication.

Wodehouse finds plenty of scope for farce in a big house in Wimbledon, and he contrives excellent foolery in a small cottage with a potting shed, but he discovers the ideal theatre in the stately home of England. With its numerous rooms and extensive grounds, it becomes under his direction a labyrinth, an obstacle course, and a huge booby trap. With its large staff of servants and its many guests, it is also a great playhouse for the disguise, impersonation, and mistaken identity which are staples of farce. On Wodehouse's stage, beards and moustaches are properties as common as umbrellas and muffins. Sir Roderick Glossop (of all people) impersonates a butler, and Jeeves impersonates Inspector Witherspoon of Scotland Yard. In a single novel Bertie impersonates Gussie Fink-Nottle, and Gussie impersonates Bertie. In another novel Bertie thinks that Plank is an old labourer on his own estate, and Plank thinks that Bertie is, first, a reporter come to interview him about his Brazilian expedition and, second, a cook named Alpine Joe.

Into the fabric of farce Wodehouse weaves threads from types of literature vastly different from farce, conspicuously the sentimental fiction which he called "bilge." Madeline Bassett tells Bertie the plot of *Mervyn Keene, Clubman,* a novel by Rosie M. Banks, which sounds as if it were inspired by Ouida. Keene is a handsome officer in the Coldstream Guards. He loves the beautiful Cynthia Grey but cannot declare himself, since she is engaged to another. He takes the blame for a crime committed by her brother and, released from prison, becomes a beachcomber in the South Seas. He breaks into Government House to get a rose which Cynthia has worn in her hair, and she tells him that her brother made a deathbed confession. Her husband, thinking Keene a burglar, shoots him. When the Governor rushes in to ask whether anything is missing, "Only a rose," says Cynthia, in a nearly inaudible voice.

Wodehouse finds it profitable to be in debt to Rosie M. Banks. Before Bingo Little marries Rosie, he has, as it were, enacted a score of her novels in goofy versions of his own. Other Wodehouse clowns slog through bilge, and Catsmeat Potter-Pirbright, more cynic than clown, recommends the most abominable brand of it. He proposes to write letters to Madeline Bassett for Gussie Fink-Nottle and say that Gussie has dictated them because of a broken wrist: "He gave it a nasty wrench while stopping a runaway horse and . . . saving a little child from a hideous death. A golden-haired child if you will allow yourself to be guided by me, with blue eyes, pink cheeks, and a lisp."

For purposes of burlesque and parody, Wodehouse also borrows from crook stories and racetrack melodramas. Village sports include footraces for boys "whose voices have not broken before the second Sunday in Epiphany," girls entered in egg and spoon races are bribed and disquali- fied, mysterious voices are heard in the shrubberies, and there are fears that the favourite in one event will be drugged.

Such happenings as these, like all others in Wodehouse, are related in a prose that Hilaire Belloc called the best of his time. The basis of it is Wodehouse's public-school education at Dulwich, where the Bible, Shakespeare, and nineteenth-century writers were emphasized, together with the usual Latin and Greek. Belloc must have admired the grace and lucidity of it, and perhaps he admired the complexity that makes it inimitable. Wodehouse lays tribute upon great writers, but (just as he exploits clichés of character and plot from subliteratures) he also exploits vocabularies and idioms from a great range of written and spoken English: not only bilge and thrillers but also popular science, newspaper editorials, the argot of trades and professions, slang, sermons, the talk of schoolmasters and schoolboys. The style is not altogether unlike the talk of a bright schoolboy newly aware of language, fascinated by great poetry and archaic expressions and fascinated as well by slang and technical terms. But it is, of course, a Platonic form of that talk: sophisticated, widely informed, skillfully controlled in all its incongruities.

The style suits Wodehouse as narrator. Properly adapted, it suits most of his comic characters. And it suits Bertie best of all, for Bertie is a hero educated but not intellectual, of wide reading but erratic memory, enthusiastic but puerile. Bertie, however, has Wodehouse's excellent ear, and at his very vaguest his speech may have the rhythm of a good nursery rhyme or riddle. With misty recollections of Keats' "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer," he asks, "Jeeves, who was the fellow who looking at something felt like someone looking at something?" In grammar and diction he is a purist, though fallible, and argues points of usage with Aunt Dahlia even at farcical crises.

Bertie's style incorporates some devices of Restoration comedy and later forms of the comedy of manners. For example, with an adverbial construction like "quite an indecently large stock of money," he transforms an objective statement into a subjective one, adding an emotional dimension and a fop's flourish. One thing that he does not use is obscenity. As Orwell said, he is remarkable for the purity of his language, since a comic writer sacrifices a great source of comedy when he refrains from obscenity. In the later novels, however, there are occasional *hells and damns* and a rare *bastard or bitch.* Now and then Bertie gets halfway across the frontier of vulgarity: "I shouldn't be at all surprised if Jeeves' three aunts shut him up when he starts talking, remembering that at the age of six the child Jeeves didn't know the difference between the poet Burns [whom Jeeves has just quoted] and a hole in the ground."

Wodehouse's figures of speech are like those of no other writer in English. One character stands "scrutinizing a safe and heaving gently like a Welsh rarebit about to come to the height of its fever," and another looks like "a halibut which has just been asked by another halibut to lend it a quid until next Wednesday." Wodehouse is endlessly inventive, and for the speech of Bertie he invents a particularly exuberant and lunatic kind of poetry. Bertie's mind is less literal than metaphorical, but his metaphors are often marvelously mixed. The commotion that Roberta Wickham is always starting, he says, is very amusing to her but not to the unfortunate toads beneath the harrow whom she ruthlessly plunges into the soup.

Bertie employs such learned devices as the transferred epithet, repeatedly taking grave sips of coffee and smoking meditative cigarettes, and his hyperboles and understatements are probably the best in Wodehouse. Sometimes he appears to forget that there is a singular in English, and if two constables enter a room, he says that the place is filling up with rozzers. At the other extreme, drawing upon the Biblical knowledge for which he won a prize at school, he refers to "that time when there was all that unpleasantness with the cities of the plain" and speaks of the French Revolution as "the time when there was all that unpleasantness over in France."

In the Wodehouse novels there are more quotations and allusions than in those of Aldous Huxley and Anthony Powell combined. They may involve Sir Isaac Newton (Newton's sad words to his dog Diamond, who had eaten a manuscript), a movie actress, or an obscure fact (for example, that William Gladstone was a disciple of the quack Fletcher and chewed each mouthful of food thirty-two times). Bertie often relies on a basic stock which Wodehouse got at Dulwich. There is a good deal from the Bible and still more from Shakespeare. Bertie has met a schoolmistress named Miss Mapleton: "'Twas on a summer evening in my tent, the day I overcame the Nervii." He declares, like other characters in Wodehouse, that he will meet someone at Philippi. (Evelyn Waugh admired Wodehouse greatly. Is it a coincidence or a tribute and inside joke that in Men at Arms Guy Crouchback says to Frank De Souza, "Well, we shall meet again," and De Souza says, like the ghost of Caesar to Brutus, "At Philippi?") Bertie draws upon Tennyson and Browning but also on minor poets of the nineteenth century like Thomas Moore and even Felicia Hemans. He remembers the peri "who stood disconsolate at the gate of paradise" and notes that the laugh of Honoria Glossop sounds "like waves breaking on a stern and rock-bound coast." (He also says, in other places, that it sounds like a train going through a tunnel or a troop of cavalry crossing a tin bridge.)

The rightness of the formulas on which Wodehouse constructed the world of Bertie and Jeeves is proved by his comparative failures when he departs from the formulas. He makes Jeeves, not Bertie, the narrator of "Bertie Changes his Mind," and by doing so he changes the whole nature of the world. It is one thing for Bertie to tell how Jeeves extricated him from a scrape and another for Jeeves to tell how he deliberately got Bertie into a scrape. It is one thing for Bertie to admit cheerfully that he is a chump and another for Jeeves to confide cooly that Bertie has no intellect. To prevent Bertie from inviting his sister and her children to live with him, Jeeves traps him into making a speech at a girls' school. The speech is a disaster, and Bertie drops the notion of an enlarged household. Jeeves rescues Bertie from the school but takes some pleasure from Bertie's distress. The story is, in effect, advice to beginning valets about keeping the upper hand, and it introduces into the stories what Bertie never introduces, the practical politics and cruelty of the real world. Moreover, the speech of Jeeves, amusing when contrasted with Bertie's, is not so amusing in itself. One may call it *Times* Augustan, as Richard Usborne does, or bogus Augustan, as Evelyn Waugh called the prose of Winston Churchill. Instead of the Wooster music, the wild Wooster poetry, it has order, dignity, irony; instead of amiability, it has a somewhat stuffy reserve.

In *Ring for Jeeves* (1953) the departures and failures are greater; the hard facts of social change have invaded Wodehouse's idyllic country-house world. Though he is Chief Constable of the county, Colonel Wyvern cannot get the kind of servants who once graced the stately homes of England. His butler is not well-stricken in years, corpulent, and nicely soaked in port from the pantry but a whippersnapper of sixteen, and his cook is an impudent fifteen. The ninth earl of Rowcester, the hero of the novel, is obliged to sell Rowcester Abbey because he cannot pay the taxes on it. To Captain

Biggar, long out of the mother country, Jeeves explains: "Socialistic legislation has sadly depleted the resources of England's hereditary artistocracy. We are living now in what is known as the Welfare State, which means □ broadly □ that everybody is completely destitute." Wodehouse loved the England of his earlier years and, though he did not live in England after 1940, he evidently could not in his later years refrain from a kind of commentary which he had never made before.

Worse for *Ring for Jeeves,* Bertie is absent from the novel. Jeeves has not left him but serves Bill Rowcester as butler, not valet, while Bertie attends a school designed to teach the aristocracy to fend for itself, m'lord. Mr. Wooster, though his finances are still quite sound, feels that it is prudent to build for the future, in case the social revolution should set in with even greater severity." The absence of Bertie leaves a vacuum which cannot be filled, since his character, style, and point of view are vital to the Bertie and Jeeves books. Wodehouse relates Ring for *Jeeves* in the style of his other comic novels, and that style is one of his great accomplishments, but the style of Bertie is a greater one. Without Bertie, Jeeves is diminished, for his character needs the dialogue between him and Bertie more than Bertie's does and, having no one to trade quotations with, he quotes too much.

With the loss of Bertie goes the loss of other important characters in the cycle like Bertie's aunts, Sir Roderick Glossop, Gussie Fink-Nottel, etc., and Wodehouse replaces them with characters modeled on those of his earlier comic romances. Jill (a favourite name in the earlier books) Wyvern moves "with a springy step" and once was "a flashy outside right in the hockey field," but she is inclined to great good news with squeals of delight. Wodehouse brings her up to date by making her a licensed veterinarian, the first professional woman in the novels. The impoverished Bill (another favourite name) Rowcester becomes a bookie with insufficient capital and a disguise of eye patch, false moustache, and loud checked coat. Bill's brotherin- law, an aristocrat compelled to go to work at a big London department store, talks of the place as if it were a military organization and is intended as a comic character, but he is only a mischievous fool. Mrs. Spottsworth and Captain Biggar save the novel, but it barely survives a major calamity. Jeeves becomes assistant to Bill on the racecourse and wears a dreadful checked suit and false moustache. The authentic Jeeves might have wished these on Bertie, but he would never have worn them for Bertie, much less for Bill Rowcester.

In virtually all the other Bertie and Jeeves novels, Wodehouse obeys the bylaws that he enacted for his world, with happy results for the commonwealth of literature. Given the word *valet* in an association test, thousands of readers would think of Jeeves. (Given the word *butler,* they would be less likely to think of James Barrie's Crichton than to think of Beach or another of Wodehouse's butlers.) Bertie is a character of almost Dickensian vividness and a narrator whose voice is unmistakable.

Wodehouse's farce has the ingenuity and speed of Feydeau's, but none of the sex. Visiting country houses, Bertie goes into a girl's bedroom only by accident, and bedroom farce is a business of practical jokes, of puncturing hotwater bottles and making apple-pie beds. Like the Sherlock Holmes stories, the Bertie and Jeeves books evoke a nostalgia for the Victorian-Edwardian world. But the Holmes stories are, after all, crime stories and, as Gavin Lambert has shown, there is a sense of evil in them that grows greater as Doyle grows older. In the entire world of Bertie and Jeeves, however, Holmes himself could not discover the slightest trace of wickedness. Anyone who dismisses that world as a bauble because it is buoyant makes a great eror. For it is in fact the creation of an artist whose adroitness is one of the distinctions of English comedy.

Source: Richard J. Voorhees, "Wodehouse at the Top of His Form" in *The University of Windsor Review*, Vol. XVI, No. 1, Fall-Winter 1981, pp. 13-25.

Adaptations

Stephen Fry and Hugh Laurie played *Jeeves and Wooster* in Granada's production of several Wodehouse stories on British television from 1990 to 1993. Many episodes were broadcast in the United States on PBS as part of the *Mobil Masterpiece Theatre* series. All of the episodes are available on videotape.

There have been more than 50 audio-tape versions of P. G. Wodehouse's stories recorded, including a tape featuring eight stories from Carry On, Jeeves read by Martin Jarvis.

Topics for Further Study

Study and discuss the titles and rankings of English nobility. By what process does one become a "Sir" or "Lord?"

Compare other well-known satirical writers, such as Mark Twain or Kurt Vonegut, to P. G. Wodehouse. Discuss the similarities and differences in their styles and subjects.

Research the history of England during the early 1900s. Discuss the economy and society of the period. Describe the fads and fashions of Edwardian England.

Study the role of the butler or valet in the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries and write an essay comparing the reality of the position with the way that it has been portrayed in popular media such as film and television.

Read several of the "Jeeves and Wooster" stories. Once you are familiar with the various characters and plots, attempt to write a scene (or story) of your own using the characters of Wodehouse. You could also attempt to create contemporary versions of the characters; use your imagination.

Compare and Contrast

1910: King Edward VII dies at Buckingham Palace on May 6 after a reign of nine years.

1999: Queen Elizabeth, crowned in 1952, is the monarch leading England into the 21st century. Her 51-year-old son, Prince Charles, is Heir apparent. Prince Charles has two sons, Prince William and Prince Henry, which virtually guarantees that the next person to take the throne will be the first male monarch in 50 years.

1917: The House of Commons grants suffrage to most women 30 years of age and older.

1990: After 11 successful years, Margaret Thatcher, the first female Prime Minister (PM) in English history, is succeeded by John Major. Thatcher, as well as being the first woman to become a PM, is also the first to win three consecutive general elections.

1914: World War I begins when a member of the Austrian royal family, Archduke Ferdinand, is assassinated by a Serbian nationalist in the Balkans.

1999: Civil strife in the Balkans threatens to engulf Europe in war. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) intervenes in a conflict between a sovereign nation (Yugoslavia) and its citizens for the first time since the treaty's inception. NATO's air-strikes, beginning March 24, lead to a tentative peace agreement between Serbs and ethnic Albanians on June 9.

What Do I Read Next?

Carry On Jeeves (1925) is the short collection of "Jeeves and Wooster" stories containing "Jeeves Takes Charge." It is a good introduction to the dozens of misadventures of the young dolt and his butler.

Wodehouse also wrote several novels about Jeeves and Wooster. One of the best is *Code of the Woosters*. Like "Jeeves Takes Charge," the characters all chase after a ridiculous object, in this case a cow creamer.

The works of the great British author Charles Dickens were a huge influence on Wodehouse. Dickens wrote several masterful novels concerning life in England during the 19th century. One of the best is Oliver Twist (first serialized 1837- 39). It is the story of an orphan taken in by a gang of pickpockets on the streets of London.

A completely different take on England's upper class can be found in Evelyn Waugh's classic novel of moral disillusionment, *Brideshead Revisited* (1945). The novel is the story of Charles Ryder, a middle-class man obsessed with a wealthy, dysfunctional family in the years leading to World War II.

A Butler's Life: Scenes From the Other Side of the Silver Salver (1996), written by Christopher Allen and Kimberly K. Allen, is based on Christopher Allen's expererience as a butler in Europe and the United States. The book is filled with anecdotes of a butler's life, as well as instructions for those who wish to become the perfect gentleman's gentleman.

Further Study

Hall, Robert A., *The Comic Style of P. G. Wodehouse*, Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1974.

A study of the comedic form, plots and characters in the fiction of Wodehouse.

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An ironic reading of politics in Wodehouse's "Jeeves and Wooster" stories.

Voorhees, Richard J., *P. G. Wodehouse*, New York: Twayne, 1966.

A literary biography by an eminent Wodehouse scholar.

—, "Wodehouse at the Top of His Form," in *University of Windsor Review*, Vol. 16, No. 1, 1981, pp. 13-25.

An analysis of Wodehouse's best writing.

Wodehouse, P. G., *America, I Like You*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1956.

Wodehouse's autobiographical account of his life in the United States.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Short Stories for Students (SSfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, SSfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of SSfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of SSfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in SSfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by SSfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

SSfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Short Stories for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Short Stories for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Short Stories for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from SSfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from SSfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

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Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Short Stories for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Short Stories for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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