

UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

"DON'T TELL ME YOU GOT INTO THE WRONG ROOM"-
Elements of Farce in P. G. Wodehouse's Jeeves & Wooster Novels

A Pro Gradu Thesis

by

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HUMANISTINEN TIEDEKUNTA
ENGLANNIN KIELEN LAITOS

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Tutkielman tarkoituksena on määrittää englantilaisen kirjailijan, P. G. Wodehousen kirjallinen tyylilaji eli genre. Tutkielmassa tarkastellaan farssin piirteitä kyseisen kirjailijan Jeeves & Wooster -romaaneissa sekä selvitetään myös löytyykö hänen tekstistään piirteitä, joita voidaan pitää tyypillisenä jollekin muulle komedian alalajille.

Johdannoksi esitellään kirjailija sekä hahmotellaan hänen luomaansa maailmaa. Genreanalyysissä lähdetään liikkeelle *genren*, *subgenren* ja *moden* määritelmistä, jossa lähtökohtana on käytetty Alastair Fowlerin ajatuksia. Komiikassa ylägenreksi erottuu komedia, ja sen alalajeiksi parodia, satiiri, ironia ja farssi, jotka esitellään pääpiirteissään.

Tutkielman materiaali koostuu viidestä P. G. Wodehousen Jeeves & Wooster -romaanista: *Thank You, Jeeves* (1934), *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit* (1954), *Jeeves in the Offing* (1960), *Much Obligated, Jeeves*, (1971) ja *Aunts Aren’t Gentlemen* (1974). Materiaalia lähestytään kolmelta eri suunnalta; erikseen tarkastellaan romaanien kuvaamaa maailmaa, juonia sekä henkilöahmoja, joista kaikista etsitään farssille tyypillisiä piirteitä. Samalla tarkastellaan myös löytyykö Wodehousen romaaneista parodisia, satiirisia tai ironisia piirteitä.

Rakenteeltaan Wodehousen romaanit ovat hyvin tyypillisiä farsseja. Niiden kuvaama maailma on epärealistinen, juoni monimutkainen ja useat henkilöahmot stereotyyppisiä. Kuitenkin etenkin henkilökuvauksessa Wodehouse on käyttänyt usein myös parodisia ja satiirisia tyylikeinoja, joten vaikka hänen romaanejaan voidaan pitää farsseina, täydellisen tyylipuhtaita farsseja ne eivät ole.

Asiasanat: P. G. Wodehouse. genre analysis. mode. subgenre. comedy. farce.

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1. INTRODUCTION

I became acquainted with the work of P. G. Wodehouse when seeing the British television series based on his stories about young Bertie Wooster and his manservant Jeeves. The series was very good, the actors fit perfectly to their parts, and the plot was packed with amusing action. It was only after I actually read Wodehouse's text, however, that I really became to admire his skills as a writer. The humour in the television series was mostly based on the farcical action in the stories, but in reading the novels, I was struck by Wodehouse's superb use of language. I have not found such brilliant fluency of comic writing anywhere but in his works, and I began to ponder on the question of what it actually is that makes his writing so much fun.

P. G. Wodehouse may have written about trivial things, but in my opinion he was no less an artist than James Joyce or William Faulkner. His mastery is only of a different kind. In many respects, Wodehouse can be seen as a highly creative writer of a discredited genre. Should he have chosen a more serious-minded field of literature, there might be lengthier mentions of him in literary histories. But Wodehouse wrote popular fiction. He has often been acclaimed as a comic genius, but he has never really gained the respect of the academic circles. Though immensely popular, comic writing has generally been regarded as an inferior form of literature. The attitude that what is amusing cannot be good is deep-rooted in our culture.

The basis for my Pro Gradu thesis is the question of literary genre, and P. G. Wodehouse's position in the genre of comedy. Most of the critics who have

written about Wodehouse and his work mention him as a master of farce, but since there is no exhaustive study as to why this definition has been made, I will make an attempt to map out the comic characteristics that he used in his fiction, and see if it indeed is well justified to say that Wodehouse wrote farce. I will start my work by introducing the writer and the world he created, and after that discuss the question of literary genre by introducing such concepts as comedy, parody, satire, irony, and farce. After this introductory part, I will then proceed to analyse Wodehouse's Jeeves & Wooster stories, and see what sorts of farcical elements can be found in his writing, and what kinds of other comic elements can be found in the novels. Based on these findings, I will then make an attempt to place Wodehouse in the field of comic literature.

2. THE WRITER AND THE WORLD HE CREATED

2.1. P. G. Wodehouse

The following brief introduction to the writer of Jeeves & Wooster novels is based on biographies by Connolly (1979), Jasen (1974), and Usborne (1961). Pelham Grenville Wodehouse was born in Guildford, Surrey in 1881. His father was working as a judge in Hong Kong at the time, but since the parents wanted their sons to have a private English education, young P. G. and his two brothers were left in England at a boarding-school. All the school holidays were spent with their numerous relatives; aunts in particular. P. G. never became really close to his parents, but his childhood seems nevertheless to have been a happy one. He was educated at Dulwich College, a middle-class public school in London where he studied on the Classical side. P. G. loved his school, and he was a member of the school's rugby and cricket teams as well as a writer for the school magazine. In his autobiographical book *Over Seventy* (1957: 474) he describes his childhood in a manner that reveals, not only his positive attitude towards life, but a sense of irony as well: "My father was as normal as rice pudding, my childhood went like a breeze from start to finish, with everybody I met understanding me perfectly, while as for my schooldays at Dulwich they were just six years of unbroken bliss." This was certainly not the suffering artist's childhood, but it provided a perfect background for the type of literature that would later become P. G.'s trademark.

After leaving school, Wodehouse worked as a bank clerk for two years, writing short stories for journals in his free time, until he resigned from the bank

and became a full-time writer. Wodehouse started his career by writing public-school stories and light romances for magazines, while also working as a columnist and a critic. He had always had a passion for America, and in the early 1900's he travelled there for the first time. Eventually Wodehouse became to live and work in America for long periods. He met his future wife in New York, and they married in 1914.

In 1940 Wodehouse was living in France when he was arrested by the Germans and sent to an internment camp. After making humorous radio broadcasts from Berlin he was considered a traitor by many people in Britain. After the war he settled in the United States and got American citizenship in 1955. In 1975 Wodehouse was knighted in Britain, and just a month and a half after that, he died at the age of 94.

P. G. Wodehouse was a highly prolific writer; he wrote over ninety books and twenty film scripts. He was also a part-author of over thirty plays and musical comedies. He excelled in vivid imagery and in slang, and his plots were crafted to perfection by endless rewriting and polishing. Although his writing was spread out over a period of over seventy years, the social atmosphere in his books remained the same throughout the years. "Wodehousian" is the often used term of the world which he created in his books. It is a world of idyllic landscapes, impressive manors, rustic cottages, green countryside, and a general atmosphere of peace and good will, all located in seemingly Edwardian or Georgian England where time has stopped.

In the following chapters I will introduce some aspects of Wodehouse's writing. I will give a brief introduction to the characters that appear in his Jeeves & Wooster novels, and say a few things about the style of his writing. In this

way I hope to make it easier to enter the “Wodehousian” world; to get an idea of what sorts of characters Wodehouse writes about, and what to expect from his texts.

2.2. Characters in Jeeves & Wooster Novels

The characters Bertie Wooster and his manservant Jeeves are the most famous of P. G. Wodehouse’s creations. The couple first appeared in a story called *The Man With Two Left Feet* in 1917, but they, as well as their world, were still unaltered in the novel *Aunts Aren’t Gentlemen*, which was published in 1974. In the period between, Bertie and Jeeves were the main characters in nine novels and numerous short stories.

The main character, and the narrator of the stories, is Bertie Wooster, who is a well-to-do bachelor, aged about twenty-five, but whose mental age is closer to fifteen. He has been to Eton and Oxford, and lives comfortably in a respected address in London, and is a “gentleman of leisure”, who, having no need to work, spends his time in social activities, and repeatedly gets himself into all kinds of difficult situations. The sole purpose of his life seems to be “to exist beautifully”, or in other words, to avoid matrimony and work.

It seems quite obvious that when creating the character of Bertie, Wodehouse used some of his own experiences as a source of material. In his book *Wodehouse at Work*, Richard Usborne (1961:183-88) notes that Wodehouse wrote about Bertie Wooster more than any other of his characters, and that in many respects Bertie is Wodehouse’s alter ego. The name Wooster is

significantly close to Wodehouse, and Bertie's childhood resembles the 1890's childhood of his creator. Robert A. Hall Jr. (1974: 109) notes that Bertie's likings are very similar to those of Wodehouse; they both like animals, golf, and swimming, and are familiar with the world of the musical theatre. Both Bertie and P. G. spent their entire youths in public-schools, although P. G.'s schools were not nearly as respected as Bertie's. Wodehouse always remembered his school years with affection, and he made Bertie and his pals the eternal public school boys. "Only Wodehouse pursued the odd idea of disguising his fifth-formers as responsible citizens and letting them loose among grown men and women." is how Benny Green (1981: 28) describes the Wodehousian world.

Wodehouse had a clear liking for servants. As a boy he used to spend time in the servants' hall whenever his family visited their friends' houses. He learnt to be in awe of butlers, as they were usually quite majestic characters. Bertie Wooster's man servant Jeeves is a butler whose mental capacities seem to have no limits whatsoever; he is like a walking dictionary, encyclopaedia and a Handbook of Etiquette all put together. In many respects Jeeves appears much more conservative and status conscious than his upper-class master. In these novels, Jeeves remains in the background in many ways; he is there when needed by his employer, but at the same time he is the master mind behind most of the action. Usborne (1961: 206) says that "Jeeves in most stories is the rim of the wheel and the hub, the plotter and the plot. Bertie sometimes insists on handling problems his own way. Jeeves, in his background planning, can not only allow for Bertie's mistakes; he can estimate their extent in advance and make them a positive part of the great web he is himself spinning."

Apart from Bertie and Jeeves, the obvious main characters, there are always several minor characters in the novels. Perhaps because of his background in the musical theatre, Wodehouse wrote novels as if he were writing a play for the theatre. In David Jansen's biography (1974: 166) Wodehouse is quoted as remarking: "In writing a novel, I always imagine I am writing for a cast of actors. Some actors are natural minor actors and some are natural major ones. It is a matter of personality. Same in a book." The plots in Jeeves & Wooster novels are typically very complicated and involve many characters, and the minor characters' function usually is to cause or complicate the action.

Since aunts were important figures in Wodehouse's own youth, they became important in his novels as well. Bertie has a whole stock of aunts, and at least one of them is always present in these stories, either in flesh or as a symbolic reminder of authority. Other kinds of aunts also appear in the stories; aunts of Bertie's friends or Jeeves's aunts. Richard Usborne (1961: 43) says that aunts represent authority and interference in the stories. He goes on to note that Wodehouse used aunts mainly for comic purposes; monstrous aunts are funny, whereas a monstrous mother would be tragic. Edwards (1977: 98) sees Arthur Conan Doyle's influence in the character of Bertie's terrifying Aunt Agatha: "Aunt Agatha is only perceived through the lens of Bertie's overwhelming fear of her, much as Moriarty can only be seen through Watson's perception of Holmes's chilling account." It is my impression, however, that these aunt figures are not just meant to be monstrous or terrifying, but they can also be seen as emancipated, active women. Usborne (1961: 44) states that Wodehouse rarely emphasizes the motherly qualities of his aunts; even though they may have children of their own, their main importance in the stories lies in the fact that

they are aunts. It therefore seems clear that aunthood in these stories seems to allow the women more flexibility than a traditional role of a woman in those days; aunts can be authoritative, or possess manly qualities, they are not merely seen as mothers and wives. Bertie has a respectful relationship with his aunts, but one of them, Dahlia, is Bertie's soul-mate and a dear friend, with whom he has a relationship in which feelings of love and rage fluctuate.

One of the central features of Bertie's life is his loyalty to his friends. They are mostly his old school chums from Eton and Oxford, but they have generally remained young at heart, like Bertie himself. These pals appear regularly at his door when they need his or his butler's help in their difficulties, which often involve young women. Bertie himself is far from being immune to Cupid's arrows; he has been engaged so many times that it is hard to keep account of all his engagements. Although most of these engagements have been sheer misunderstandings, or lapses that he has regretted afterwards, he has clearly felt strong romantic affection towards certain lively girls, like Bobbie Wickham and Pauline Stoker. These girls, just as the aunts, are also active and daring, and take the initiative whenever needed. Sexual ethics in Wodehouse's novels are strictly Victorian. The typically happy ending in these stories is the engagement of the young lovers, who are usually Bertie's friends, while Bertie himself is able to escape this "fate worse than death".

As well as benevolent characters, there appear also less amiable characters in Jeeves & Wooster novels. Bertie's aunt Agatha, Madeline Bassett or Roderick Spode can be counted as "nuisances" in these stories, since they all represent some sort of a threat to Bertie. Aunt Agatha threatens Bertie with her constant claims that Bertie should get a job and make something of himself, Madeline

Bassett, Honoria Glossop, and several other unpleasant young women threaten Bertie with the idea of marriage, and Spode is an authoritative figure, as well as a sheer physical threat.

2.3. The Style of Wodehouse's Writing

In order to get some sort of an understanding of the humour in Wodehouse's novels, it is essential to recognize that their main attraction is the language that is used in them. I will therefore briefly introduce some of the key elements that can be found in Wodehouse's style of writing, while bearing in mind the difficulty to analyse Wodehouse's language. According to Richard S. Carlson (1975: 83), "the reader who decides to analyze the language and literature of Wodehouse, for example, should expect to get caught up the silly and primrose path of Bertie Wooster's tongue, as the misspent knut speaks like a butterfly caught up in brandy."

An essential characteristic in Wodehouse's texts is the amount of dialogue in them. Robert A. Hall Jr. (1974:53-54) stresses in his analysis of Wodehouse's work that the amount of dialogue is distinctly higher than the narrative prose. Wodehouse uses longer narrative passages mainly to set the scene for conversation, and the shorter narrative passages usually describe actions that, if put on stage, would be visible to the audience. This sort of "semi-theatrical" style enabled Wodehouse to be more detailed and explicit, for example in his characterization, than would have been possible if he were writing directly for the theatre. Hall (1974: 55) further notes that most of Wodehouse's dialogue

could easily be transferred to the stage, and that this has in fact happened several times; for example Jeeves & Wooster stories have been turned into plays and films, with the BBC series starring Stephen Fry and Hugh Laurie as the latest addition. Therefore I find it justified to compare Wodehouse's fiction with playwriting rather than with actual prose. This fact is relevant when trying to trace elements of farce, which is obviously a form of drama, in Wodehouse's novels.

Turning now to take a closer look at Wodehouse's dialogue, the most striking thing in the Jeeves & Wooster novels is the incongruity between the language of the two main characters, Bertie Wooster and Jeeves. When matching these two extreme opposites, Wodehouse was able to create brilliant verbal comedy out of the differences between their speech styles, as is shown in the following extract from *Much Obliged, Jeeves* (1971: 5-6)

'You seem in good spirits, sir.'

'Yes Jeeves, I am happy today.'

'I am very glad to hear it, sir.'

'You might say I'm sitting on top of the world with a rainbow round my shoulder.'

'A most satisfactory state of affairs, sir.'

'What's the word I've heard you use from time to time-begins with eu?'

'Euphoria, sir?'

'That's the one. I've seldom had a sharper attack of euphoria. I feel full to the brim of Vitamin B. Mind you, I don't know how long it will last. Too often it is when one feels fizziest that the storm clouds begin doing their stuff.'

'Very true, sir. Full many a glorious morning have I seen flatter the mountain tops with sovereign eye, kissing with golden face the meadows green, gilding pale streams with heavenly alchemy, Anon permit the basest clouds to ride with ugly rack on his celestial face and from the forlorn world his visage hide, stealing unseen to west with this disgrace.'

'Exactly,' I said. I couldn't have put it better myself.

'One always has to budget for a change in the weather. Still, the thing to do is to keep on being happy while you can.'

'Precisely, sir. Carpe diem, the Roman poet Horace advised. The English poet Herrick expressed the same sentiment when he suggested that we should gather rosebuds while we may. Your elbow is in the butter, sir.'

'Oh, thank you, Jeeves.'

In the above passage the differences in the speech styles of the two characters are clearly visible. Bertie's language is a mixture of upper-class speech and slang, with numerous expressions from a public-school boy's register. Wodehouse wrote all the Jeeves & Wooster stories in America, and so there are also traces of American slang in Bertie's dialect. Bertie loves to quote famous poets and novelists, but usually gets them all wrong. Osborne (1961: 176) notes that Bertie has a "magpie vocabulary of synonyms and quotations" and that "By mixing his soiled metaphors and colliding his clichés, he fabricates a burbling language of evocative innocence" (1961: 177). Jeeves's language, on the other hand, is overly formal and literary in style. M. A. Sharwood Smith (1978: 214) states that Bertie's speech is often lower in style than Jeeves's, although Bertie is in fact the one belonging to the upper-class. Jeeves's language resembles the language of the bureaucracy. He is the one who recalls all the quotations correctly, and his role in the dialogue between himself and his master is to keep correcting and rephrasing everything that Bertie is saying; a fact that emphasizes his own mental capacities as opposed to his master's idiocy. In the above passage, for example, the constant rephrasing can be seen; Jeeves quotes three poets in order to put Bertie's babbly feelings to a more elegant form. Sharwood Smith (1978:211-214) also notes that Wodehouse frequently juxtaposes high and low style; he uses low language in high situations, but he also uses low language together with high language, which causes unexpected combinations. Wodehouse can also pair a highly literary form with a nonsensical meaning. "A style of comic expression depending for its effect on the contrast between the solemn correctitude of the form and the hysterical daftness of the content.", as Benny Green (1981: 26) describes it.

There are many theories that aim to explain what people find funny. One of these theories is the so-called incongruity theory, according to which comedy arises out of the conflict between two lines of logic. Robert A. Hall Jr. (1974: 80) seems to favour this line of thought, as he claims in his study on Wodehouse's work that humour has two essential ingredients: incongruity, and emotional neutrality. According to Hall, "the effect of incongruity is to lead the hearer or reader 'up the garden path', inducing him to expect one resolution, on the basis of what he has been told up to a certain point, and then to present him with a development quite different from what he has expected ..." Hall (1974: 80) proceeds to say that Wodehouse made use of almost any resource in the English language to obtain the effect of incongruity. One example could be his habit of using clichés or literary allusions in his texts. Richard Usborne (1961: 183) uses the following extract as an excellent example of "the Bertie Wooster burble" that Wodehouse put in the mouth of his main character:

It is pretty generally recognised in the circles in which he moves that Bertram Wooster is not a man who lightly throws in the towel and admits defeat. Beneath the thingummies of what-d'you-call-it his head, wind and weather permitting, is as a rule bloody but unbowed, and if the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune want to crush his proud spirit, they have to pull their socks up and make a special effort.

Usborne points out that in the above paragraph there are two quotations from earlier writers (the poet Henley and Shakespeare) that are altered for humorous effect. The above extract is also a good example of Bertie's habitual tendency to address himself pompously in the third person in situations when he feels that his masculine pride has been hurt. Richard S. Carlson (1975:56-62) classifies P. G. Wodehouse into the so-called benign humorists, along with such writers as A. A. Milne, Kenneth Grahame, and Beatrix Potter. He (1975: 56) claims that the Wooster & Jeeves stories are "an example of a 'children's literature'", since,

although they are not read by young children, the childish character of Bertie Wooster appeals to the inner adolescent of the reader.

In this section I have aimed to clarify the quality of Wodehouse's literary style. I believe that understanding how Wodehouse used language is important since the characters in his fiction are mainly constructed through the way that they speak. In the next chapter I will turn to the question of literary genre, and introduce the basic concepts of comedy.

3. THE QUESTION OF LITERARY GENRE

3.1. Definitions of Genre

The concept of literary genre is a complex question, since there are no set rules as to how, or even why genre should be defined. However, since the topic of the present thesis is to define a writer's position in the genre of comedy, it is crucial to establish some sorts of definitions within this particular genre. As a guideline for this thesis, I have used Alastair Fowler's ideas on generic classification. According to Fowler (1982: 40), "genres at all levels are positively resistant to definition." He (1982: 37) quotes the critic Kames, who says that "literary compositions run into each other, precisely like colours: in their strong tints they are easily distinguished; but are susceptible of so much variety, and take on so many different forms, that we never can say where one species ends and another begins." Fowler (1982:37-45) further notes that the main function of genres should not be to classify literature, but they should be seen more as types, or families rather than classes. Recognizing the type of literature is crucial in the interpretation of a text. The response to a novel depends on the knowledge of its genre, and therefore the reader needs to identify the type of the work in order to interpret its meaning. As was mentioned above, the boundaries of genres are never clear-cut, but change with time. It is common for genres to overlap; it is quite possible to find characteristics of several genres in one novel, and also to discover that opinions differ as to how novels should be classified.

Fowler (1982:56-74) distinguishes three main generic hierarchies: kind, mode, and subgenre. He uses the term 'kind' as equivalent to 'historical genre'.

Kinds can be defined as having certain features, such as size, representational aspect, or external form. Fowler (1982:106-118) proceeds to note that kinds are always termed in noun form, eg. 'novel', or 'epic', and they may be further divided into subgenres. The division usually depends on the subject matter or motifs of the work. Subgenres have all the same features as kinds, but they add some new feature, such as a new range of topics, to the genre. Fowler (1982: 122) notes that by using, for example, the setting as the decisive characteristic, a genre like the novel can be divided into such subgenres as the school novel, the factory novel, the city novel, or the university novel. Fowler (1982: 112) also observes that, depending on how far the generic division is carried out, there may even exist secondary or tertiary subgenres. Fowler (1982:106-107) states that genres can be further extended as modes, which are usually termed adjectivally, eg. 'comic', or 'satiric'. Modal terms do not give any information about the external form or size of the work. Thus, a 'comic novel', for example, refers to a combined genre, in which the external form is determined by the kind, 'novel', and it has nonstructural features that can be termed 'comic'. A kind can contain features that can be, for example, satiric or comic, but that does not necessarily make them satires or comedies.

Fowler (1982:128-129) also notes that *oeuvre*, the life's work of a writer, should be regarded as important when considering the meaning of a work. An *oeuvre* could almost be likened to subgenre, since it operates within the institutional genre and its rules supplement those of genre in assisting the reader to respond to the text. Fowler mentions the work of Dickens as an example of a characteristic personal repertoire, constituting of story types, characters, symbols, and imagery that "taken together can be thought of as Dickensian,

rather than characteristic of any one novel of Dickens” (Fowler 1982:129). Fowler’s discussion on the *oeuvre* of Dickens can well be applied to the work of Wodehouse, since I think that his work forms a highly distinct, and a highly uniform *oeuvre*.

Fowler’s definitions of genre, mode, and subgenre are used in the present thesis in distinguishing the genre of comedy from its different subgenres and modes. As a historic kind, comedy can be defined as being the main genre, and it can be further divided into such subgenres as farce, slapstick, satire, parody, burlesque, comedy of humours, comedy of manners, and the semi-tragic black comedy and tragi-comedy. For the purposes of the present thesis I will concentrate on defining the main features of comedy, and its four subgenres, satire, parody, irony, and farce, since I believe these to be essential when studying the range of comic devices that P. G. Wodehouse used in his work. In the following chapter the genre of comedy and its four subgenres are introduced, and after that an overview on farce is given as an introduction to the characteristics I will be looking for in my data.

3.2 Comedy

Probably the oldest and the most famous division of literary genres is the one provided by the greek philosopher Aristotle in his work *Poetics*. He divided drama into tragedy and comedy, of which tragedy was the more prestigious one, involving noble characters and happenings, whereas the characters of comedy were morally inferior. Comedy is therefore mainly a dramatic genre, and it has

traditionally had a less prestigious status than tragedy. There are various ways in which comedy can be defined and classified further. What is generally agreed upon, when defining comedy, is the fact that its main aim is to amuse the audience. The story is told in high spirits and non-elevated style. Comedy concerns ordinary, humble people, and its basic structural pattern moves from unhappiness to happiness. (Barnet, Berman, and Burto 1993:762-765, Frye 1957:163-86, Hodgson 1988:68-70) The hero removes the obstacles that the unjust society has erected in his path, and the story ends with a festive resolution, often a wedding. Comedy celebrates life and fecundity, and therefore matters related to sex are frequently displayed in comedies. Threats that appear in comedy are never taken seriously. The element of surprise is important in a comedy, since surprise evokes laughter. It is therefore likely that the improbable happens in a comedy. Improbability also brings out the absurdity of the characters' behaviour. The comic protagonist behaves according to his own absurd ideals, which makes him seem amusing.

Defining what is funny is perhaps an impossible task, since different people laugh at different things. Hodgson (1988:69-70) introduces three main theories that aim to explain what people find amusing. Hodgson says that Henri Bergson developed the so-called 'superiority theory', according to which comedy mocks fixed and obsessive behaviour, and characters who are possessed by vices. People laugh at the mechanical behaviour of people. The audience can feel superiority towards comic characters, because they see the absurdity of their behaviour, the habitual and repeated gesture and action that reduces them to stereotypes. Hodgson (1988: 69) proceeds to say that according to Freud and his 'relief-theory', comedy and joking issue from the unconscious mind. This

explains why there is so much sex, racism, and other taboo subjects in comedy. The 'incongruity theory', which has generally been associated with Immanuel Kant, claims that comedy arises when two lines of logic conflict with one another. According to the incongruity theory, laughter is 'an affect arising from the sudden coming to nothing of a strained expectation'. Hodgson (1988: 69) states that one or more of these theories always seems to apply to any form of comedy.

The classical comic protagonists are the *alazon*, the *eirone*, the buffoon, and the *agroikos*. The *alazon* is a cowardly imposter who tries to be more than he is, and ends up as the victim, while the *eirone* is the self-deprecator who is invulnerable to outside attack (Fletcher 1987:7-9, Frye 1957:39-40, Hodgson 1988: 14, 110-11). The buffoon's role in a comedy is not to contribute to the actual plot, but to increase the mood of festivity. The *agroikos* is typically the killjoy of the story. He is the straight and solemn character who refuses to take part in the festivities and tries to stop them (Frye 1957:175-176).

Since comedy is such a versatile form of literature, and open to different interpretations, there are bound to be as many ways to classify comedy as there are critics writing about the subject. Frye (1957: 177) notes that the boundaries of comedy are hazy; "comedy blends into irony and satire at one end and into romance at the other." Romantic comedy presents an ideal world in which lovers are the central figures, and other characters merely ridiculous (Barnet, Berman, and Burto 1993:762-765). The audience does not laugh at the characters, but with them. At the extreme end of romantic comedy is the sentimental comedy which exploits pathos and conscious moralizing (Hodgson 1988:345-346). The central character in this type of comedy goes through a moral reform. The style

can be traced in the novels of Dickens as well as in the contemporary soap operas. As for the other end of comedy that Frye mentions, in the next chapter I will proceed to introduce three such subgenres, or modes of comedy that are relevant also when discussing P. G. Wodehouse's writing: satire, parody, and irony.

3.3 Satire, Parody, Irony

Parody and satire can be seen as different modes of comedy ('parodic' or 'satiric' comedy), or as its independent subgenres ('parody', 'satire'). Irony, however, is a mode, or technique that is used within other genres. It is often rather difficult, if not altogether impossible, to make clear-cut definitions between these three modes. Parodist, satirist, and ironist all use each others' tools to achieve their goals, and it is not a simple task to ascertain whose toolbox has been tampered with in each particular case.

Margaret A. Rose (1993:52-56) defines parody as "the comic refunctioning of preformed linguistic or artistic material". In other words, parody imitates and comically contrasts a quoted text or work with a new context, aiming to create humour from the recognition of their incongruity. If parody imitates and exaggerates the weaknesses of the original in order to criticize, it has a satiric aim (Rose 1993:81-86, Pollard 1970: 28). Parody mocks artificial means of communication and the seriousness with which we take these means (Hodgson 1988:266-267). Its aim is to make writers revise their style, and the ways characters and situations are described. Hodgson (1988: 267) remarks that

according to the Russian formalists, parody is the tool in creating new genres; genres develop as successive parodies attack the earlier forms of expression.

Parody always makes the original material a constituent part of its own structure. Satire, however, is not as dependent on the preformed material as parody, but may make fun of it as external to itself. In fact, satire need not be at all restricted to imitation, distortion, or quotation of other material. Fowler (1982: 110) notes that satire uses other genres as its vehicles; it is able take almost any external form. When the audience laughs watching satiric comedy, or satire, it laughs at the absurdity of morally inferior people, such as the jealous spouse or the demanding parent (Barnet, Berman, and Burto 1993:762-765). These obstructionists are dismissed at the end of the play. Satire's aim is twofold; while generating laughter, it also generates disgust towards human weaknesses. The satirist tries to reform society by making the antisocial members of the audience see their errored ways and reform themselves. According to Pollard (1970: 74), satirist's aim is "to move his readers to criticize and condemn and he will seek to do so by moving them to various emotions ranging from laughter through ridicule, contempt and anger to hate". The tradition of satire is a long one descending from the old Greek satyr plays through Molière and Oscar Wilde to contemporary political satires.

As stated before, irony is often used by different sorts of writers; there are ironic comedies, tragedies, melodramas, and satires. Irony is defined by Rose (Rose 1993: 87-88) as a statement of an ambiguous character. Ironist offers the audience a single code, from which it should identify the 'apparent' message, and the 'real' message. In other words, ironist 'says what he does not mean' using distortion as his weapon. A well-known example of an ironic text is

Jonathan Swift's *A Modest Proposal* (Pollard 1970: 5, 67). In his novel Swift proposes that in order to cure Ireland of poverty and over-population, the Irish children should be reared as meat for the tables of the wealthy. This sort of gloomy irony requires a responsive audience to recognize its true meaning. Textual irony may be quite difficult to trace, but as Hodgson (1988: 185) notes, in dramatic comedy and farce the irony is often visual; the audience can watch two scenes at the same time while the characters of the play remain unaware of the activity in the other scene.

As farce is the subgenre with which P. G. Wodehouse has generally been connected, it deserves a more thorough introduction, which will be given in the next chapter.

3.4. Farce

Farce is a very old, and a very popular form of drama. It has generally been regarded as the lowest type of comedy, since its sole function has traditionally been to amuse people, not to invoke any deeper thoughts in them. Farce is a theatrical genre, deriving from the comic village performances of the Dorian Greece, and the Italian *commedia dell'arte* tradition. In *commedia dell'arte*, the plot and dialogue were mostly based on improvisation. The actor chose a certain character and developed it to suit his own personality. These characters were often archetypal creations, such as the impotent old fathers, the languishing wives, or the buxom servant girls. (Davis 1978:14-15, Hodgson 1988:72-73, 130)

The main elements in farce are exaggeration, improbability, violence and crude characterization. Albert Bermel (1982: 21) says that "farce deals with the unreal, with the worst one can dream or dread. Farce is cruel, often brutal, even murderous. Farce flouts the bounds of reason, good taste, fairness, and what we commonly think of as sanity". Davis (1978:23-27) also emphasizes the irrationality and anti-seriousness of farce, but at the same time stresses that in all its illogicality farce is extremely logical, since there is a carefully constructed structure beneath the irrational surface. Farce plots are often repetitive and mechanical, and the basic theme is the comic conflict between authority and rebellion. Davis (1978: 24) further notes that farce makes fun of authority figures in a manner that is aggressive, even violent, but the strictness of its rules prevents it from attacking social conventions too strongly. The element of unreason is important in farce. People whose humiliation would be an outrage to social conventions (often representatives of authority and propriety) play the role of 'kill-joys'. According to Davis (1978: 27), farce is often hostile, but all this hostility is balanced by a joyous festivity. The protagonists represent the good life, and the antagonists try to forbid it. It is quite obvious that the sympathies of the audience lie with the fun-loving protagonists. Bermel (1982: 46) states in his turn that the main purpose of farce is to satisfy our need for political and social leveling. We enjoy watching the servants outwit their masters, and laugh at politicians in distress. Davis (1978:85-86) distinguishes farce from satire by stating that farce aims to create laughter by breaking social taboos, but in doing this, it also avoids giving offence. While a satire ends with a dismissal of the characters and values that have been attacked, in farce they always gain their

conventional positions back at the end of the play. The jokes in a farce are not meant to be taken as satirical comments or social criticism.

The French philosopher Henri Bergson is a well-known theorist on comedy. In his classic essay *Le Rire* (1900. Finnish translation by Istonen and Pasanen 1994) Bergson (1994:23-28) defines comic type as a character who lacks flexibility, and who is therefore unable to adapt properly to changes in his circumstances. Bergson (1994: 50) emphasizes the humorous effect raised by mechanical behaviour; people laugh at a character whose behaviour resembles that of a machine. Type-characters are unaware of their limitations; they may congratulate themselves on their cleverness or good fortune, but they lack all self-consciousness. They are childishly innocent, have total lack of awareness of other people's concerns, and an obsession with their own. (Davis 1978:62-64, Hodgson 1988: 130) Davis (1978: 24) also notes that characters are depersonalized in a farce, and that they have to be "unconscious about the wrongs they inflict and suffer." Farce moves quickly, and the pace of farce prevents the characters from exploring their consciousness. According to Leo Hughes (1956:22-23), a chase is an ideal plot pattern in a farce, since it provides suspense and allows a fast pace, so that the audience is not allowed much time to examine the characters and actions too closely. Bermel (1982:22-25) states that characters, and the improbable situations that they are caught up in, are the two main ways in which humour in farces is created. Characters suffer different forms of indignity; they constantly find themselves in compromising situations, and may be subject to theft or physical attack. Characters are indestructable; they may get hit by a truck, or fall from a ladder, but they always come out of the ordeal intact. Often the writer of a farce robs the characters of some of their

senses and makes them victims; they may be stupefied by a hit in the head, drugged, blindfolded, or drunk. Another device is to put the character on unfamiliar ground, where he is different from everybody else and therefore a target for aggression or mishaps. Bermel also (1982:25-32) notes that objects and machines can have major roles in farces. These inanimate beings behave like characters, and usually they defy people in some way. There is, however, an important difference between objects or machines as characters, and human beings as characters; the former are destructible, the latter are not.

As was mentioned in the chapter dealing with genres, subgenres such as farce can be classified further according to their different topics. The main distinction between different types of farce is their handling of the plot. Davis (1978:65-71) defines 'talisman-farces' as a group of farces in which a physical object causes all the confusions in the story. It may be an elusive and desirable thing, or an object of embarrassment to the hero, in which case he tries to get rid of it at all costs. Davis (1978: 67) remarks that embarrassing talismans are usually sex-related objects; pornographic postcards, etc. According to Davis (1978: 71), the term 'snowball-farce' was developed by Henri Bergson ('une balle á la neige'). In a typical 'snowball-farce' the action starts from normal surroundings of respectability, from which it grows in size and speed, until finally it explodes and disintegrates. Henri Bergson (1994:66-68) further notes that this sort of snowball action is even funnier if the chain of events forms a circle, for example if an object that has caused all the complications returns in the end to its original position. The 'bedroom-farce' is a good example of a typical 'snowball-farce'.

As farce plots have been mentioned as being very technical in nature, there are bound to be some technical devices that are commonly used in all of them.

Hughes (1956:32-33) mentions repetition as one such device. The simplest way in which it can be exploited in theatrical farce is the repetition of a gesture, a movement, or a hilarious episode. The response of the audience grows with each successive repetition. It is also possible for characters to be multiplied. This can take place by using disguise or identical twins. One more type of repetition is to introduce a variant into the sequence of repetitions, such as in 'snowball-farces', in which there may appear a countless number of variations of the same theme. Hughes (1956:49-51) proceeds to say that places of concealment and disguises are essential elements in farces. The audience enjoys watching the protagonists in physical discomfort and embarrassment, safe in knowing that no one is really getting seriously injured. As in all comedy in general, also farce ends with a happy resolution. A feast at the end of the story is a typical comic resolution. According to Susan Purdie (1993:116-118), a feast is an ideal comic ending, since it offers all its participants an equal chance to be happy, and also gives the characters a legitimate reason for over-eating and -drinking that are normally considered to be socially non-acceptable. Hodgson (1988: 130) notes that farce cannot tolerate seriousness, but it can be found as a component in more serious plays, such as in political satires. However, the writers of farce do not normally venture outside their genre.

It has been pointed out above how difficult it is to categorize literature. While farce is a subcategory of comedy, they naturally share certain characteristics, but there must also be some things that set them apart. Albert Bermel (1982:53-56) tries to draw a line between farce and comedy by saying that comedy uses verbal wit as a tool, while humour which is physical and visual is the tool of farce. He (1982: 54) also states that lines in a comedy are "*intentionally* amusing. In farce

we laugh *at* the characters, not with them.” According to Bermel (1982: 55), the dramatic situations can also set farce apart from comedy. The abnormal world is the setting of farce, whereas the normal world is the setting for comedy. Bermel, however, admits that these ways to separate farce from comedy are not very reliable. He (1982:55-56) concludes that farce tries to make circumstances that are normal for some characters abnormal for others. In comedy the characters act in reality, trying to appear natural, but in farce the characters venture out of reality, and have no restraints in their actions. Leo Hughes (1956:18-21) differentiates farce from comedy by saying that farce’s sole purpose is to create laughter, whereas in comedy moral problems are dealt with. Davis (1978: 88; emphasis original) in her turn claims that “farce is comedy with *self-awareness* left out.” When the audience starts feeling empathy towards the characters, farce turns into comedy. As can be seen, the difference between comedy and farce is highly a matter of interpretation. In the present thesis Alastair Fowler’s definitions on genre and subgenre will be used, treating farce as a subgenre of comedy. According to Fowler’s (1982:106-118) definition, a subgenre has all the same features as genre, but differs from it in its topic matter. It is therefore impossible and irrelevant to try to draw a clear line between comedy and farce. They obviously share many characteristics, but also differ in some respects. One main difference is that comedy can have the aim of reforming society, but farce can never have such aims; its only purpose is to create laughter. Farce also exaggerates all its characteristics, whereas comedy can be more realistic in its setting and characterization. Furthermore, farce is more physical in nature than comedy, and it strongly emphasizes the mechanical and depersonalized elements in its characters.

The main elements of farce can be briefly summarized as follows: 1) The events take place in an unrealistic, exaggerated setting; a world upside-down. 2) The characters are simple stereotypes with no deeper qualities. Objects can have similar functions as the characters, and characters can behave like objects. 3) The plot is highly complicated, full of action, speed, and violence. 4) Authority figures are the target of ridicule, but at the end they are put back to their secure places. The world remains as it was, and happy ending for all parties concerned completes the story.

4. ANALYSIS OF THE ELEMENTS OF FARCE IN WODEHOUSE'S FICTION

4.1. Data and Method

The data for the present thesis consists of five novels by P. G. Wodehouse, all of which have Bertie Wooster and Jeeves as their main characters. The first Jeeves & Wooster novel, *Thank You, Jeeves* was written in 1934, and the last, *Aunts Aren't Gentlemen*, in 1974. Three novels are selected from the period between: *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit* from 1954, *Jeeves in the Offing* from 1960, and *Much Obligated, Jeeves* from 1971. These novels have been chosen because I think that they serve as good representatives of Wodehouse's work, and clearly illustrate the fact that the world and the characters in these novels did not undergo any change in a period of forty years. Furthermore, they provide sufficient data to show the basic comic elements that Wodehouse used in his writing.

The method that will be used to analyse the data is to view the novels and see what features in Wodehouse's writing could be considered as typical elements of farce. After studying the novels, I will present examples that can be considered farcical. I will also try to find out if Wodehouse used other modes, or techniques, such as parody or satire in his writing. Based on these findings, I will hopefully be able to define Wodehouse's position in the field of comic literature. Based on the description of the main characteristics of farce in the previous chapters, I have chosen to look more closely at three different aspects in these stories: their

setting, plots, and characters. In the following chapters I will attempt to find out if the abovementioned definitions of farce can be traced in Wodehouse's writing.

4.2. The Setting

The Wodehousian world is a world turned upside down, the population of which consists merely of rich and idle bachelors, peers, and aunts. The main characters in Wodehouse's stories almost always belong to the upper classes, and characters from the lower social classes are only occasionally introduced, and even then mainly for comic purposes. For example in *Thank You, Jeeves* (74-77), there are two policemen, who clearly belong to the lower class, since they use such a marked speech style: "you was" instead of "you were", and "the 'ouse" for "the house". The lower-class speech style is an obvious source of humour in the passage. This may sound as if Wodehouse made fun of the people from the lower classes, but in fact he often does just the opposite; the rich main characters are usually portrayed as behaving idiotically and irrationally, while the most intelligent character in Wodehouse's fiction is a servant. It would be jumping to conclusions, however, to say that Wodehouse cruelly mocks the upper class. Although he normally made fools of his rich characters, they are loveable fools with basically decent moral code.

Laura Mooneyham (1994:121-27) notes in her article on Wodehouse's work that, like Shakespeare before him, Wodehouse used the *topos* of the green world in his novels. The green, ideal world is always the idyllic British countryside, and more precisely, the country mansion, the weekend residence of the well-to-

do characters. There seems to be an eternal summer in the Wodehousian world, with the exception of occasional grey clouds in the sky that gather there when complications set in for the main characters. Mooneyham (1994:123-124) claims that Wodehouse created a world that is essentially realistic, since there is absolute narrative control in his fiction and no subjective experience. Human motivation is a very simple affair in such a static, narrator-controlled world, and therefore Wodehouse was able to make his characters act according to certain simplified patterns: if you kiss a girl, you have to marry her, if you infuriate your aunt, you have to emigrate to America.

The time in Wodehouse's novels seems to be the Edwardian England. Bertie Wooster drives a two-seater, and when taking a walk he takes with him a stick, a hat, and lemon-coloured gloves. Although the novels cover an era of forty years, the time remains the same in all Jeeves & Wooster novels, since Bertie himself does not age at all. Mooneyham (1994: 133) points out, however, that Wodehouse's "chronology was perpetually out of whack, as the plainly pre-1939 scene of Wodehouse's characters is commonly jarred by anachronistic reference to post-1945 culture,...". Therefore the time in Wodehouse's novels can be all times, and his stories offer the reader a leap out of history.

In the next two chapters I will take a look at the setting of Jeeves & Wooster novels, and see what sorts of elements in it are typical of farce. I have chosen to focus on feasting, or the 'high living', which I think forms the general setting in these novels, and three other aspects that are common to farce: sex, violence, and other physical action.

4.2.1. Feasting

Mooneyham (1994: 121) notes that an important comic convention used constantly by Wodehouse is feasting; "to the extent that many a plot revolves around determining who will be the employer of Anatole the master chef." Food, drink, and smoking are essential elements in the world of Wodehouse's fiction, and this emphasis on 'the better things in life' is very common to popular fiction in general. Carlson (1975:108-110) notes that the 'unreality' of the Wooster world is brought out by making Bertie Wooster such an exuberant character; "there is nothing incongruous about eggs, bacon, kippers, salmon, tomato juice, and champagne until Bertie indulges in them all at one breakfast sitting." J. A. Bull (1988:212-213) states that the readership of popular fiction is charmed by the atmosphere of high living in them. Using the class-based and masculine James Bond as his example, Bull claims that the protein-rich breakfast that is symbolically 'British', is essentially a manifestation of Bond's imperialist ideology. The English breakfast is a reoccurring element also in Jeeves & Wooster stories, but it is not used to bring out imperialist ideas. Instead its main function is to emphasize the essentially British quality of these stories, as in the following opening sentences of two Jeeves & Wooster novels, *Jeeves in the Offing*, and *Much Obligated, Jeeves*, in which the breakfast scenes act as immediate reminders of where the stories are set:

Jeeves placed the sizzling eggs and b. on the breakfast table, and Reginald ('Kipper') Herring and I, licking the lips, squared our elbows and got down to it. (*Jeeves in the Offing*, p. 1)

As I slid into my chair at the breakfast table and started to deal with the toothsome eggs and bacon which Jeeves had given of his plenty, I was conscious of a strange exhilaration, if I've got the word right. (*Much*

Obliged, Jeeves, p.1)

Usborne (1961: 175) parallels the breakfast scenes in Jeeves & Wooster novels to those in Arthur Conan Doyle's Holmes & Watson stories. In both of them the problems are taken up and discussed at the breakfast table in London, and from there the characters head to the countryside to tackle the problems. Mooneyham (1994: 122) notes that time is never disjointed in Wodehouse's fiction. Therefore a breakfast scene makes a very logical beginning to a novel.

Whereas the traditional English breakfast acts as a steady reminder of the hearty British atmosphere in these novels, the French cuisine that aunt Dahlia's chef Anatole prepares is a parodical comment on the snobbishness that is often connected with French gastronomy. Anatole is always mentioned as "God's gift to gastric juices", and all the characters praise his skills in a manner that is almost poetic. His menu is described in the following manner:

Le Caviar Frais
 Le Consommé aux Pommes d'Amour
 Les Sylphide á la creme d'Écrevisses
 Les Fried Smelts
 Le Bird of some kind with chipped potatoes
 Le Ice Cream

and, of course, les fruits and le café, but for all its effect on the Wooster soul it might have been corned beef hash.
(Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit, p. 90)

Clearly the French vocabulary is in contrast with the English here; the light and sophisticated French courses turn into heavier English dishes, with the comment on the tasteless British hash at the end. In this way Wodehouse parodies the common notion that British cuisine is so much lower compared with the French. Wodehouse's clear liking of the British delicacies, breakfast and high tea, for example, is evident in many instances, and so, through the character of Anatole, he is able to mock his countrymen for their unfounded attitude towards their own

culinary art. The passage also reflects the main character's not-too-good language skills. To Bertie, adding 'le' or 'les' to any food name makes it a sophisticated French food name.

Food can also serve as a reward in these stories, as in *Thank You, Jeeves*, where Bertie is treated with a magnificent breakfast after he has had to endure many ordeals during the story. Since Bertie's aim in life is to remain a bachelor, and he is therefore unable to 'get the girl', which is the typical happy end solution, his reward usually is in the form of food or drink. This is a typical feature of the juvenile literature of that time; for example the adventure stories by Enid Blyton are full of descriptions of food and eating, and it has been claimed that food acts as a surrogate for sex in juvenile literature (cf. Barker 1982). This claim could be quite valid also when considering the role of food and eating in Wodehouse's stories. It seems that sex in his fiction is replaced by other functions that give physical pleasure, such as eating, drinking, or smoking.

Since Bertie Wooster is an extremely rich, and an extremely vain young man about town, the stories are filled with items that are connected with high living; extravagant clothing, fine cars, pieces of jewellery, etc. The starting point in many novels is the fact that Jeeves disapproves of some new thing that his master has taken a fancy to, ie. a moustache, in *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit*, or a banjolele, in *Thank You, Jeeves*. There follows 'a clash of wills', as Bertie stubbornly sticks to his follies, but at the end of the story he gives in to Jeeves's sound opinion, and gets rid of the articles in question. Balance is restored, as Jeeves gets his reward; the shreds of dignity of his master are maintained. As Owen Dudley Edwards (1977: 91) states, Jeeves is in many instances much more

class-conscious than his upper-class master, and his foremost aim in life is to guard Bertie so that he would not dishonour his class.

Cigarettes and alcohol are also consumed in large quantities in these novels. The very reason that Bertie hired Jeeves in the first Jeeves & Wooster story, was that Jeeves could mix a remarkable drink to cure Bertie's hangover. Bertie gets physical and mental strength and relaxation from drinking and smoking. Occasionally it may even seem that he is addicted to these vices. The attitudes towards alcohol and smoking changed during the period from the 1930's to 1970's. Whereas cocktails and after-dinner cigars were refreshments in the 1930's, they were not regarded similarly in the 1970's. Wodehouse's characters, however, never altered their likings. The following two extracts in which Bertie's drinking and smoking habits are portrayed are from *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit*:

When Jeeves came in with the shaker, I dived at it like a seal going after a slice of fish and drained a quick one, scarcely pausing to say 'Skin off your nose'.

The effect was magical. That apprehensive feeling left me, to be succeeded by a quiet sense of power. I cannot put it better than by saying that, as the fire coursed through my veins, Wooster the timid fawn became in a flash Wooster the man of iron will, ready for anything. What Jeeves inserts in these specials of his I have never ascertained, but their morale-building force is extraordinary. (p. 7)

... five minutes later, a cigarette between my lips and a brimming flagon at my side, I was enveloped in a deep peace. The strained nerves had relaxed. The snootered soul was at rest. (p. 24)

In a typical farce, the central character represents the good life, and the 'kill-joys' of the story try to forbid it. This farcical element is clear in Wodehouse's novels: in two of the novels analysed, *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit* and *Aunts Aren't Gentlemen*, the theme of reformation is brought up as another character is trying to make Bertie quit his smoking and drinking:

'Cocktails, for instance, will be barred. She says they are bad for the

liver. Have you noticed, by the way, how frightfully lax everything's getting now? In Queen Victoria's day a girl would never have dreamed of mentioning livers in mixed company.'

'Very true, sir. *Tempora mutantur, nos et mutamur in illis.*'

'That, however, is not the worst.'

'You horrify me, sir.'

'At a pinch I could do without cocktails. It would be agony, but we Woosters can rough it. But she says I must give up smoking.'

'This was indeed the most unkindest cut of all, sir.'

'Give up smoking, Jeeves!'

'Yes, sir. You will notice that I am shuddering.'

(*Aunts Aren't Gentlemen*, pp. 102-103)

As can be seen in the above examples, Wodehouse portrays a life-style that is unattainable to most of his readers. Carlson (1975:93-96) argues that the type of literature that P. G. Wodehouse writes, offers the reader an escape from the modern world. He (Carlson 1975:100-102) places the Jeeves & Wooster stories into a type of escape literature in which the escape is towards a certain life-style. Bertie Wooster represents a hedonistic life-style that the audience loves, although it knows that, according to the morals of the twentieth century, it is the wrong way to live. It is perhaps the very 'wrongness' of Bertie's life-style that appeals to the public. He carries on the kind of exuberant life-style that the inner adolescent in all of us would like to lead. Although now Bertie Wooster seems to be as innocent as Cinderella, it has to be remembered that the novels about him were written between the 1930's and the 1970's. During the period in which these novels were written the world changed radically; there was World War II, followed by the cold war with its juxtaposition of the communist and the capitalist regimes. Women's role in society also changed radically, and the 1960's brought with it the sexual revolution, as well as many other new ideologies. Although Bertie Wooster may have started out as a character based loosely on reality, by the time the last Jeeves & Wooster novel was published in 1974, the sexually chaste main character with his man servant seemed hopelessly

archaic. Writing about an idle member of the *élite* with no intention of satirizing or parodying this world was quite probably regarded anachronous by the socially aware citizens of the 1960's and 1970's, and Bertie Wooster was a good example of a corrupted exploiter of the lower classes. In the overly sexual 21st century it seems that it is only a question of time before someone brings out a study in which it is stated that the relationship between Bertie and Jeeves is in fact homosexual.

In this chapter I have tried to illustrate the festive quality of Jeeves & Wooster novels, an element that, though it can be found also in other types of literature, is distinctly farcical. In the next chapter, I will focus on the various physical characteristics that appear in farces, and try to trace them in Wodehouse's novels.

4.2.2. Sex , Violence, and Physical Action

The excerpt in the above chapter where Bertie mentions with disapproval that 'everything's getting frightfully lax these days' could well be Wodehouse's own comment. As Mooneyham (1993: 125) remarks, Wodehouse found the kind of explicit sexuality that was portrayed in modern fiction, embarrassing. Sex is never mentioned in his fiction. Although young love is usually the central theme in Jeeves & Wooster novels, the curtain closes well before the united lovers even get to kissing. This fact is quite curious, since sex is usually a common theme in comedies, and particularly in farces.

While Bertie Wooster is totally incapable of committing himself to a long-term relationship with a woman, he is in no way immune to feminine attractions. There are a number of attractive girls that have turned his head, as can be seen in the following examples from *Thank You, Jeeves*, and *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit*, in which Bertie describes two of his ex-fiancées:

...I made the acquaintance of Pauline Stoker.
She got right in amongst me. Her beauty maddened me like wine. (p. 3)

She is tall and willowy and handsome, with a terrific profile and luxuriant platinum-blond hair, and might, so far as looks are concerned, be the star unit of the harem of one of the better-class Sultans. (p. 19)

Bertie's moral code is so strict that these sorts of infatuations always lead into a quick proposal and an engagement, which is usually broken off just as quickly. Nothing physical ever happens even during the short engagement period. It is not surprising, however, that Bertie is so chaste in all his actions, since his behaviour is in perfect accordance with the type of character that he is. Based on Fletcher's (1987:9-11) discussion on the traditional comic protagonists, it can be said that Bertie Wooster would fit perfectly into the role of the clown, or Harlequin. One of the most essential characteristics of the clown figure is the absence of conventional relationships with the opposite sex, because the clown is too childlike to relate to women in the conventional way. Furthermore, the clown's physical appearance differs from the other comic protagonists, and this feature is reflected in Bertie Wooster's constant 'fancies'; he is very conscious of his outer appearance and loves wearing fashionable items of clothing, even if he appears ridiculous in them.

Mooneyham (1994:126-127) points out that violence is a reoccurring theme in Wodehouse's plots, as well as a dominant force in the figurative language. It is the sort of violence that is typical of farce. The world around the characters is

so innocent and controlled and lacking real risks that it enables the characters to use such murderous language. There are numerous examples of sadistic threats that the characters throw at each other, as in the following one from *Much Obliged, Jeeves*, where Spode, who is one of Bertie Wooster's most fierce adversaries, is talking to him:

'You probably think that being a guest in your aunt's house I would hesitate to butter you over the front lawn and dance on the fragments in hobnailed boots, but you are mistaken. It will be a genuine pleasure. By an odd coincidence I brought a pair of hobnailed boots with me!' (p. 70)

Hall (1974: 42) notes that the audience finds these kinds of passages humorous because of the sheer physical impossibility of the threats. The violence does not appear too threatening if it is put in such an absurd form.

As well as being verbally harassed by tyrannical men, Bertie also gets threats from women. In the analysed novels there are many instances when Bertie's favourite aunt, Dahlia, uses horribly violent language to threaten Bertie. In these situations he is about to interfere into one of Dahlia's schemes, and she is very upset by this:

'Bertie,' said the blood relation, now having taken aboard an adequate supply of air, 'I am hampered by being at the other end of the telephone, but were I within reach of you I would give you one on the side of the head which you wouldn't forget in a hurry. ...' (*Aunts Aren't Gentlemen* p. 96)

'You'll do nothing of the sort, unless you want to have an aunt's curse delivered on your doorstep by special meessenger. Don't you dare to start mixing it with that man, or I'll tattoo my initials on you chest with a meat axe. ...' (*Jeeves in the Offing*, p. 52)

The humour in this sort of language acts on two levels; there is the element of surprise, since the threats come from the mouth of a beloved aunt, and the surprise is connected with the impossibility of taking the threats literally.

Bertie is constantly threatened by acts of violence, and once in a while he actually gets physically assaulted, but nothing grave happens on these occasions.

In *Thank You, Jeeves*, he has to escape his drunken butler who is chasing him with a carving knife, and in *Aunts Aren't Gentlemen*, he is gagged and tied to a sofa. These sorts of comical incidences are typically farcical, since violence in farce is not supposed to hurt anyone, but is made to appear funny. Although violence is common in these novels, the main character himself never acts violently. The closest Bertie gets to being aggressive is when he stands up to Stilton Cheesewright who has threatened to 'pull Bertie's head off at the roots and make him swallow it':

'Amazingly effective little contrivances, these,' I proceeded, rubbing it in. 'You read about them a good deal in mystery thrillers. Coshes they are called, though blackjack is, I believe, the American term.' (*Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit*, p. 155)

The humour that is aroused in farce is to a great extent based on physical action; tumbling characters, flying pies, and other moving objects are the basic material for all farces. Although these sorts of elements are more easily presented on stage than in literature, examples of physical tumbling can be found in *Jeeves & Wooster* novels as well. Bertie was nicknamed 'Bungler' in his younger years, and he has remained a somewhat non-balanced young man, as can be seen in these examples from *Jeeves in the Offing*, where Bertie tumbles into his old schoolmaster, and, later on, wets him with tea:

I came on him round a corner and rammed him squarely before I could put the brakes on. I clutched him round the neck and he clutched me about the middle, and for some moments we tottered to and fro, linked in a close embrace. Then, the mists clearing from my eyes, I saw who it was that I had been treading the measure with. (p. 30)

The effect the apparition had on me was to make me start violently, and we all know what happens when you start violently while holding a full cup of tea. The contents of mine flew through the air and came to rest on the trousers of Aubrey Upjohn, MA, moistening them to no little extent. (p. 33)

It is typically the main character in farce who is inclined to tumble into people and things. In these stories it is common that Bertie bumps into prestigious, tyrannical characters, who usually already have a negative attitude towards him. In this way, the status of these authority figures is dropped down, since even their higher learning or income cannot protect them from physical encounters with "the lower intellect" represented by Bertie. As Bergson (1994: 13) states, people tend to find humorous the kind of human action that is rigid and lacking flexibility. In Bertie Wooster we find a person who is at times in total lack of control as regards to his physical action. This, of course, parallels to the fact that he is also 'mentally negligible', as Jeeves puts it, for how can a man who is unable to control his own body be able to control his own thoughts?

As can be seen in these examples, Wodehouse created a setting that was not exactly a typically farcical world. Farce generally deals with ordinary, even a bit vulgar people in ordinary surroundings, whereas in Jeeves & Wooster stories rich characters act in a luxurious world. It is a setting that is more common to satire, but in satire the rich and idle characters would usually be mocked. In the world of satire, it is held self-evident that money corrupts, and therefore rich characters tend to have less amiable moral qualities. This is not the case in Wodehouse's novels, however. His rich main characters may be idiotic and self-centred, but they are always basically good-hearted and generous. The basic setting may not be typical for farce, but it is a farcical setting in many other ways. The protagonists in this world represent the good life, and they want to preserve their comfortable lifestyle, although they are constantly attacked by tyrannical characters who would want to reform them. There is a strong emphasis on physicality in Jeeves & Wooster novels. Tumbling and bungling are

obvious sources of humour, but they are also used to form a certain image of the characters, as well as to develop the plot. Physical and verbal violence is common in these novels, but nobody ever gets seriously injured in them. Emphasis on physical action is a very typical characteristic of farce, but the absence of sex that is evident in Jeeves & Wooster novels, is distinctly untypical. Sex has been an essential ingredient of farces from the days of *commedia dell'arte*, and therefore the lack of it seems curious in Wodehouse's otherwise very farcical novel settings. The explanation may be that Wodehouse started his writing career at a time that was still rather Victorian in its attitudes towards sexuality. Although Wodehouse deprived his characters of their sexuality, he offered them lots of other physical pleasures, food as the most important of them. As was said before, this feature brings his works closer to the juvenile literature of that time.

4.3. The Plots

The influence that the American musical stage had on Wodehouse's writing has been mentioned by several critics. Wodehouse's novels are in many ways constructed like plays. Edward L. Galligan (1985: 611) claims that Wodehouse's form is "the American musical comedy of the first quarter of this century adapted for fiction". The typical musical comedy is light, its characters are simple stereotypes, and it is heavily plotted along conventional lines that provide the audience with constant twists in the story. Robert A. Hall Jr. (1974: 21-23) states in his analysis on Wodehouse's comic style that Wodehouse's plots

underwent a change after he had written pieces for the musical stage. The romantic aspect in the plots became simplified and was taken more for granted, and the act of falling in or out of love became to happen abruptly. "The influence of musical comedy and its stylized plotting is evident, furthermore, in the crystallization of Wodehouse's characters into certain easily recognizable stock types, corresponding to those of the musical stage: juvenile leads, major comic characters, and bit-parts" says Hall (1974: 23). He continues that the main theme in the plots of Jeeves & Wooster novels is Bertie's effort to try to avoid matrimony. According to Hall (1974: 27-28), "the ordinary musical-comedy-hero - and, for that matter, the ordinary Englishman in general - regards marriage to the girl of his choice as his ultimate goal in romance, Bertie's efforts to avoid marriage at all costs make him, in the novels about him and Jeeves, into a comic anti-hero." Hall (1974: 47) also notes that Wodehouse's technique for constructing a plot resembles that of the *commedia dell'arte*; the audience knows exactly how the story is going to end, but the pleasure of following the story lies in finding out how the characters get mingled in the several twists in the plot, and in the case of Wodehouse, enjoying his use of language. Wodehouse never cared much about originality, and he could use the same kind of plot pattern in several of his stories, and occasionally even borrow from other authors.

4.3.1. Farcical Elements in the Plot Structures

I will now take a closer look at the plots in Jeeves & Wooster novels, and try to find out if there are such elements in the plots which could be termed as farcical. As the plots in all Wodehouse's novels are very complicated, summarizing the plots of all five novels would be too space-consuming a task to be done in the limits of this thesis. I will therefore focus on just two of the novels. These particular novels have been chosen because they represent two different eras. The time between the writing of these novels is almost forty years; *Thank You, Jeeves* was the first full-length Jeeves & Wooster novel, written in 1934, and *Much Obligated, Jeeves*, was written in 1971. By comparing the plots of these two novels, I will also hope to find out if there can be found any differences in their structure. As we know, the world changed radically from the period between the 1930's and 1970's, but did that have any effect on the Wodehousian world?

The basic plot that runs through *Thank You, Jeeves* is simple: Bertie's friend Chuffy has invited Bertie to stay at his estate which he is trying to sell to an American millionaire J. Washburn Stoker. Chuffy and Stoker's daughter, Pauline, fall in love, but there are several obstacles in the lovers' path before they can finally have each other. The basic idea behind the main plot may be simple, but all the side plots to the story make it quite complicated. There are twenty-two chapters in the novel, and all of the chapters contain at least two twists in the story, sometimes even as many as four or five. In order to give some idea on how Wodehouse constructed his plots, there is a summary of the first

eight chapters included in the appendix. These eight chapters form only about one third of the story, but it is easy to see the basic plot pattern here; one incident leads to another, causing the main character to be in a constant state of unbalance. The pace of the plot is fast; a character's situation may change within seconds, and then change again. Wodehouse typically ends his chapters by bringing in a new twist to the circumstances. Characters are always on the move; their comings and goings are reported in detail. This is a feature that is more common to plays than to novels; it seems that from time to time Wodehouse is writing stage directions for an audience so that it can see what is happening:

It couldn't have been very long after this when the front door was suddenly flung open. Somebody emerged. The door slammed. And then the emerger started to stump rapidly down the drive in the direction of the gates.

There had been just a moment when the light from the hall shone upon this bloke. It had been long enough for me to identify him.
(*Thank You, Jeeves*, p. 156)

According to Davis (1978:65-71), all the abovementioned characteristics, ie. quick pace, complicated plot, and constant twists, are typical of a 'snowball-farce', in which the action starts from normal surroundings, after which it grows in size and speed, until it finally disintegrates. Davis mentions the 'bedroom-farce' as a well-known example. In a bedroom-farce the protagonists are sexually frivolous, and there is a lot of cheating going on. Bedrooms play an important role in Wodehouse's novel plots too, but the action that goes on in them is always innocent. It can well be said that Wodehouse took the frame of the bedroom-farce, but removed all the actual sex from it, so that only a hint to sexuality remained. Bertie is absolutely shaken to see Pauline in his bed and in his pyjamas, and he cannot even consider the possibility to sleep under the same roof with her:

'...What I was saying was that a reputable bachelor like myself, who has

never had his licence so much as endorsed, can scarcely be blamed for looking askance at girls in heliotrope pyjamas in his bed...'
(*Thank You, Jeeves*, p. 69)

'What a lot of trouble I'm giving you, Bertie.'
'Oh, no. Only too pleased. Well, I suppose I might as well be pushing along.'
'Are you going?'
'In the circumstances,' I replied a little frigidly. 'I can hardly doss on the premises. I shall withdraw to the garage.'
(p. 77)

According to Leo Hughes (1956:49-51), disguises and places of concealment are the basic material for all farce plots. These sorts of features are easily found also in *Thank You, Jeeves*. As was mentioned before, the action in the Wodehousian bedroom is always innocent, but jealous ex-fiancés or raging fathers tend to misinterpret controversial situations, which makes hiding a necessity, as in the abovementioned bedroom scene, in which Pauline has escaped his bullying father to Bertie's, and there is a knock on the door:

'It's father!' Pauline gargled, and with a swift flip of her finger she doused the candle.
'What did you do that for?' I said, a good deal pipped. The sudden darkness seemed to make things worse.
'So that he shouldn't see a light in the window, of course. If he thinks you're asleep he may go away.'
'What a hope!' I retorted, as the knocking, which had eased off for a moment, started again with more follow-through than ever.
(*Thank You, Jeeves*, p. 72)

Disguises are used in the passage in which Bertie has to blacken his face and infiltrate 'a troupe of negroid entertainers' in order to escape from Stoker's yacht. The boot polish is also used by Glossop, as he is entertaining the son of the woman he loves. The end result is that Bertie and Glossop both have to skulk in the garden of Chuffnell Regis, because the boot polish does not come off.

The ending in *Thank You, Jeeves* is a happy one: thanks to the brilliant scheming of Jeeves, the two lovers get each other, and Bertie is once more released from the prospect of marriage. Bertie has been through many ordeals

during the story, and at the end of it, he is treated with a magnificent breakfast. Jeeves also gets his reward at the end, since at the end of the story Bertie sees the idiocy of his latest folly, the banjolele playing, and gives in to Jeeves's opinion that he is better off without it. The status quo is preserved as Bertie remains a bachelor with the content Jeeves by his side. The tyrannical figures in the story, Stoker and Glossop, are both humiliated during the story; Stoker is threatened with the idea that he may lose all his money, and Glossop has to hide in the garden at night with boot polish on his face, after which he is arrested by the police. But even these characters are liberated from their predicaments in the end, and Stoker's money, as well as Glossop's reputation, are both restored. The Wodehousian story does not end with a marriage that is probably the most common ending in all comedy, but an engagement of the main lovers. However, the almost ceremonial end scene in which Bertie is again able to relax and enjoy his peaceful breakfast, can perhaps be considered as a type of feasting scene:

The sunlight poured into the small morning-room of Chuffnell Hall. It played upon me, sitting at a convenient table; on Jeeves, hovering in the background; on the skeletons of four kippered herrings; on a coffee-pot; and on an empty toast-rack. I poured myself out the final drops of coffee and sipped thoughtfully.
(*Thank You, Jeeves*, p. 225)

Much Obligated, Jeeves was written in 1971, and the plot deals with matters related to politics. In all of his novels, Wodehouse tangles all the characters into a net of different interests, using two or three major plot lines running through the novel. This characteristic can be seen in the plot summary that is included in appendix 2. In *Much Obligated, Jeeves*, Bertie's friend Ginger Winship is running for the Conservative candidacy to please his fiancée Florence Craye. Bertie's ex-valet, who was called Brinkley in *Thank You, Jeeves*, but Bingley in this novel, returns to the scene, this time trying to make money out of the candidate's not-

so-spotless past that is recorded in a book that is kept at the butlers' club. The club book can be considered as a typical example of the 'talisman' that Davis describes (1978:67-71). It is in the interest of several people to get hold of the club book and use it for their own advantage. At the beginning of the novel Bertie asks Jeeves to destroy the pages about him in the book, but Jeeves refuses to do so. However, the end solution is that Jeeves does destroy the pages about his master; a rather different ending to the story, since it is usually Jeeves himself who gets his way at the end. The plot in *Much Obligated, Jeeves* resembles that of *Thank You, Jeeves* in many ways. The set of characters is distinctly similar; the affianced couple consists of a friend and an ex-fiancée of Bertie's, and there are again two tyrannical, 'killjoy' figures, Runkle and Spode. The end solution is again a happy one. Bertie escapes the threatening engagements, the killjoy figures both get humiliated, and Ginger escapes his tyrannical fiancée and switches his affections to his sympathetic secretary.

The driving forces behind the action in *Much Obligated, Jeeves* are greed and ambition, as is the case in almost all Jeeves & Wooster novels. The characters are after money or prestige, and only Bertie seems to be free from such aspirations. This element makes the plot in *Much Obligated, Jeeves* differ from that of *Thank You, Jeeves*. Whereas the latter novel is full of farcical action, the former relies more on its characterization. In *Much Obligated, Jeeves*, Wodehouse uses satirical devices quite often in his representation of characters. For example, the character L. P. Runkle seems to be created for thoroughly satirical purposes: Runkle is portrayed as a very unpleasant character, and his wealth also brings out the other characters' will to benefit from him, as can be seen in the following bit of dialogue between Bertie and his aunt Dahlia:

'That's L. P. Runkle, and I want you to exercise your charm on him, such as it is. He has to be conciliated and sucked up to.'

'Why, is he someone special?'

'You bet he's someone special. He's a big financier, Runkle's Enterprises. Loaded with money.'

It seemed to me that these words could have but one significance.

'You're hoping to touch him?' (p. 56)

Through Runkle's character Wodehouse is also able to point some criticism towards the British system of honorary titles:

'It confirms one's view that this Runkle is a stinker.'

'The stinker supreme. And he tells me he has been tipped off that he's going to get a knighthood in the New Year's Honours.'

'How can they knight a chap like that?'

'Just the sort of chap they do knight. Prominent business man. Big deals. Services to Britain's export trade.'

'But a stinker.'

'Unquestionably a stinker.' (p. 58)

It is quite clear that in developing the plots for his stories, Wodehouse made use of traditional farce plot structures. Davis (1978: 23) emphasizes the mechanical quality of farce plotting, and this element is evident in Wodehouse's texts. His novels are planned to perfection: there are no loose ends, but everything is tied into a neat package at the end. The action in the novels is clearly the sort of 'snowball-action' that both Bergson (1994:66-68) and Davis (1978: 71) describe. Hiding, chasing, sneaking into other people's rooms, or appearing in disguise are all devices that are very typical for farce plots. But there are also elements that are common in farces but do not appear in Wodehouse's writing. The most obvious example is the lack of sex in all of his novels, even in those that could otherwise be easily typed as being 'bedroom-farces'. There is also relatively little actual physical violence in his novels; the characters may use language that is terribly violent, but it is quite rare that these threats are actually put in practice. Wodehouse's novel plots cannot be clearly categorized into 'bedroom farces' or 'talisman farces', but he mixed elements of

both in all of his stories. There is not only one main plot running through the story, but several plots that intertwine. Furthermore, it seems that in his early Jeeves & Wooster novel, *Thank You, Jeeves*, Wodehouse used more traditionally farcical plot structures than in *Much Obligated, Jeeves*, in which he is more inclined to satirical characterization. Although there may seem to be a slight shift from a more farcical first Jeeves & Wooster novel to a more politically aware later novel, the basic laws that govern the action of the characters are exactly the same in 1971 as they were in 1934. Young men still take walks carrying Whangees and wearing Homburgs, and rescue damsels from distress.

As was mentioned above, farces are mechanical in nature, and there are several technical devices that are used within farce plots. One such device, which I believe to be highly relevant when analysing Wodehouse's fiction, is repetition. Together with variation, it will be discussed in the next chapter.

4.3.2. Repetition and Variation

It was stated above that repetition is commonly used in farce plots (Hughes 1956:32-33), and this device is used regularly also by Wodehouse in his Jeeves & Wooster novels. There are many different types of repetition in Wodehouse's stories, starting from the repetition of a part of speech to the repetition of plot structures. The incongruity between Bertie's speech and the speech of Jeeves is the key element in these novels, and the most common type of comic repetition is Jeeves's habitual, almost automatic response to his master's speech:

'I forgot to mention, sir, that Sir Roderick called to see you this morning.'

`What!'
 `Yes, sir.'
 `He called to see me?'
 `Yes, sir.'
 `After what has passed between us?'
 `Yes, sir.'
 `Well, I'm dashed!'
 `Yes, sir. I informed him that you had not yet risen, and he said that he
 would return later.'
 (*Thank You, Jeeves*, p. 2)

The butler jargon is crystallized in Jeeves's character, and he seems to master it to extremity. The density with which the word `sir' appears in his speech is overwhelming, and the mechanical nature of his responses is one of the reasons that makes his speech appear so comical.

There are also many examples of repeating funny episodes in the Jeeves & Wooster novels. For example in *Thank You, Jeeves*, Bertie's attempts to find a quiet place to sleep in are interrupted three times by the two policemen and once by Chuffy. When Bertie is driven to hide into the night with bootpolish on his face, he gives a fright first to Chuffy, then to the maid, and at last to Pauline by springing up quite suddenly, not remembering that his appearance seems rather odd. A comic variant to this sequence of repetitions is the scene in which Bertie appears to Jeeves:

`Oh, Jeeves,' I said, popping up like a jack-in-the-box.
 You can't rattle Jeeves. Where scullery maids had had hysterics and
 members of the Peerage had leaped and quivered, he simply regarded me
 with respectful serenity and, after a civil good morning, went on with the
 job in hand. He is a fellow who likes to do things in their proper order.
 (p. 178)

Wodehouse used to `recycle' his characters. This is of course obvious in the Jeeves & Wooster novels, because in these books the same characters are bound to appear repeatedly, since they are connected with the main characters. But Wodehouse also made his characters visit his other novels. Bertie and Jeeves, for example, both appear as characters in other books. Occasionally Wodehouse

changed the names of his minor characters; for example Bertie's ex-valet, who in *Thank You, Jeeves* is called Brinkley, returns to the stage in *Much Obligated, Jeeves*, as Bingley. Bertie's friends regularly switch their affections, as does Bertie himself, so that engagements between Bertie's mates and his ex-fiancées are common. One of the regular female characters in Jeeves & Wooster novels, Florence Craye, who is the stepdaughter of Bertie's hideous Aunt Agatha, and hence a stepcousin of Bertie's, is engaged to G. D'Arcy 'Stilton' Cheesewright, Bertie himself, and finally to Percy Gorrington in *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit*. In *Much Obligated, Jeeves* she has switched her affections to Ginger Wiship, but during the span of the novel gets once more engaged to Bertie. Wodehouse uses repetition also in describing the looks of Florence Craye, as the text is virtually the same in two novels, *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit* (see page 39), and *Much Obligated Jeeves*:

At the time when she was engaged to Stilton Cheesewright I remember recording in the archives that she was tall and willowy with a terrific profile and luxuriant platinum-blond hair; the sort of girl who might, as far as looks were concerned, have been the star unit of the harem of one of the better-class Sultans; and though I hadn't seen her for quite a while, I presumed that these conditions still prevailed. (pp. 29-30)

Wodehouse uses the repetition of characters so frequently in his novels that it almost seems as if he gained some sort of pleasure out of making the same characters appear time after time in different combinations. But as Galligan (1985:613-614) notes, Wodehouse demonstrates variation within the rigidly defined limits of farce. Wodehouse relies heavily on repetition, but he also adds a sufficient amount of variation to his novel plots, so that he does not merely plagiarize himself. This variation can be seen in the motivation that drives the characters to act. Although the characters always act consistently with their peculiar personalities, the motivation behind that action may vary. For example,

in *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit*, Florence breaks up her engagement to Stilton Cheesewright because of his jealousy, in *Much Obliged, Jeeves* Florence's engagement to Ginger Winship is broken because Ginger is not ambitious enough.

Wodehouse never aimed at originality in his writing. He copied his own plot structures in several novels, which is evident even when comparing just these two Jeeves & Wooster novels. It may seem that Wodehouse's style of writing is indeed very repetitive and even monotonous, since you cannot expect an element of real surprise in his novels. However, in the case of Wodehouse, an important feature is that he wants to please his audience. He rewards his faithful readership by letting them identify old characters, but he also keeps his audience alert by constantly inventing new characters, and linking them sometimes with the old ones. It is as if the Wodehousian characters were riding on a merry-go-round that occasionally stops for a while to take new passengers. These passengers will be the topic of the next chapter.

4.4. The Characters

The two main characters of Jeeves & Wooster novels are like day and night. Using unlike pairs is a common feature of farce. According to Davis (1978: 63) "the artificiality of the arrangement signals a distancing of the characters from the audience and the lessening of their humanity; they lack the flexibility of life". When creating the characters of Bertie Wooster and Jeeves, Wodehouse used an ancient comic pattern of the dumb master and his clever servant; the *alazon* and

the *eiron*. Jeeves is the *eiron*, who manipulates the events, and Bertie is the *alazon*, the victim (Mooneyham 1994: 124). Northrop Frye (1957: 173) notes that in Roman comedies there were tricky slaves, and that in Renaissance comedy these developed into scheming valets, and later on, in modern fiction, into amateur detectives. So historically, Jeeves and Wooster are but descendants of such forebears as Sancho Panza and Don Quixote, or Pickwick and Sam Weller. Frye (1957: 174) notes that often the tricky slave had his own freedom in mind as the reward for the services to his master. In this sense Jeeves does not resemble the classical servant character at all, since his sole purpose is just the opposite; he prevents all the possibilities of his master's matrimony in order to remain in his service at all costs.

In Jeeves & Wooster novels there are usually six to eight side characters along with the main pair. As the plots of these novels follow the same type of pattern, so the cast of characters is also similar in all the novels. In the analysed novels, there is always a couple in love. The female party has been engaged to Bertie, and the male one is either Bertie's close friend or a not-so-close acquaintance. There is also another type of couple in the story, namely two *agroikos*, or 'killjoy' figures. One can be, for instance, the tyrannical father of the bride-to-be, and the other is Bertie's old adversary. Bertie's aunt Dahlia is a regular visitor in the novels, she appears in four of the five novels that were analysed. Other side characters include menacing children, as Chuffy's cousin Seabury in *Thank You, Jeeves*, or figures from Bertie's past, like his (ex)-butler Brinkley. A distinctly Wodehousian feature is the fact that all his characters are linked to each other. This linking of characters makes it possible to create snowball-like action, since all the characters are co-dependent.

In the following chapters I will map out what sorts of characters can be found in Wodehouse's Jeeves & Wooster stories. For the purposes of this thesis, I have divided the characters into four categories: farcical, satirical, parodical, and ironical characters. It has to be remembered, however, that this kind of division is highly arbitrary, since in reality the characters are not obvious representatives of a certain class. A character can well be typed as possessing, for example, both farcical and parodical qualities. As in real life, the more is known about people, the more complex they become. Furthermore, it has to be noted that the following chapters not only deal with characters, but along with them, also other kinds of features that enter the abovementioned categories will be discussed. For example, Wodehouse's tendency to use quotes from previous writers in his dialogue and narration is a feature that is very difficult to discern from such elements as characterization.

4.4.1. Farcical Characters

Wodehouse wrote about characters that were often strongly stereotyped. In many ways Bertie Wooster is a typical main character of farce. He fits perfectly to the description of a type character that both Davis (1978:62-64) and Hodgson (1988: 130) give. Bertie Wooster is unaware of his limitations, childishly innocent, and has an obsession with his own concerns. According to Bermel (1982:22-25), the characters in farce suffer all forms of indignity. In Jeeves & Wooster novels, Bertie is usually the character who is ends up in situations that make him look ridiculous; he has to slip into other people's bedrooms in search for some object

that his aunt Dahlia is after, and he usually gets caught doing this or ends up in the wrong room. Bertie goes through many ordeals that are typically farcical; he is kidnapped and chased in *Thank You, Jeeves*, thrown to a lake in *Jeeves in the Offing*, and tied to a sofa in *Aunts Aren't Gentlemen*. Bertie never “learns his lesson” during a span of a novel but continues to make same sorts of mistakes time after time. Although he is the main character of ten novels and several short stories that cover an era from the 1910's to the 1970's, he never shows any signs of mental growth. He is an idiotic, bungling rich boy in 1917, and he remains that way till 1974. All these characteristics seem to make him quite a typical main character of farce.

However, in many ways Bertie is not just another stereotypical character. Usborne notes (1961: 188) that Bertie Wooster may have started out as a stereotype, but he was bound to become more three-dimensional, since Wodehouse wrote about Bertie far more than about any other of his characters, and did this in a period that was longer than fifty years. Bertie may be obsessed with his own concerns, but he is not indifferent to other people's worries. For example, he loves his aunt Dahlia and her husband dearly, and is always ready to sacrifice himself for their benefit. Bertie also shows remarkable altruism when it comes to his friends, and he is especially chivalrous towards his female friends. There are many instances in which Bertie, while certainly knowing that the end result is a catastrophe, still volunteers to help a female friend of his:

I quivered like a startled what-d'you-call-it. She had spoken with a cheery ring in her voice that told an experienced ear like mine that she was about to start something. In a matter of seconds by Shrewsbury clock, as Aunt Dahlia would have said, I could see that she was going to come out with one of those schemes or plans of hers that not only stagger humanity and turn the moon to blood but lead to some unfortunate male – who on the present occasion would, I strongly suspected, be me – getting immersed in what Shakespeare calls a sea of troubles, if it was Shakespeare. (*Jeeves in the Offing*, p. 62)

The audience of farce does not feel sympathy towards the characters, but this is not the case with Bertie Wooster. Partly because of Bertie's altruistic nature, the reading audience feels a distinct sympathy towards him. Another reason that makes the audience relate easily to Bertie is that he does not possess any unpleasant qualities. He only wants to exist peacefully in his comfortable lifestyle and not hurt anyone. What some people consider as vices, food, alcohol, smoking, laziness are vices that many people confess possessing, and that, again, brings him close to the reader.

Jeeves can also be seen as a stereotype of how the perfect "gentleman's personal gentleman" behaves. It is rather difficult to analyse Jeeves's character, since so little is known about him. Whereas Bertie spills out everything about him in his babbly speech, Jeeves does not give away anything. Jeeves never shows any emotions but does his duties mechanically. In this respect he is "a buttlng machine", and as Bergson (1994: 50) notes, a person whose behaviour resembles that of a machine appears amusing. In many instances Jeeves is portrayed as non-human, describing him through his bodily functions, as in the following excerpt from *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit* (p.2, emphasis added), in which Jeeves is entering the Wooster residence while Bertie is taking a bath:

...my reverie was interrupted by *the sound of a soft footstep* in the bedroom, and I sat up, alert and, as you might say, agog, the soap frozen in my grasp. If feet were stepping softly in my sleeping quarters, it could only mean, I felt, unless of course a burglar had happened to drop in, that the prop of the establishment had returned from his vacation, no doubt looking bronzed and fit.

A quiet cough told me that I had reasoned astutely, and I gave tongue.

As has been often acknowledged, defining what is funny is extremely difficult, but what makes Jeeves such a hilarious character in my opinion is the unpredictability of his highly predictable behaviour; the audience expects a certain reserve and distance from him, and yet his response can still be even

more neutral than is expected and his word choices even more apt. Jeeves's non-human, machinelike role enables him to be very frank in his opinions, as can be seen in the following passage from *Much Obligated, Jeeves* (p. 172), in which Jeeves reports the happenings of a political meeting to Bertie:

'The proceedings opened with a rendering of the national anthem by the boys and girls of Market Snodsbury elementary school.'
 'Pretty ghastly, I imagine?'
 'Somewhat revolting, sir.'

Jeeves does not let his personal feelings affect the machinelike way in which he handles matters regarding his master's outer appearance. He is always strikingly honest when it comes to opinions about Bertie's looks:

'The moustache. That is what you are alluding to, is it not? I grew it while you were away. Rather natty, don't you think?'
 'No, sir, I do not.'
 I moistened my lips with the special, still suave to the gills. I felt strong and masterful.
 'You dislike the little thing?'
 'Yes, sir.'
 (*Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit*, p. 8)

He spoke with quiet severity.
 'Your tie, sir. It will not, I fear, pass muster.'
 'Is this a time to talk of ties?'
 'Yes, sir. One aims at the perfect butterfly shape, and this you have not achieved. With your permission, I will adjust it.'
 (*Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit* p. 89)

This obsession of Jeeves's about the clothing etiquette may seem absurd, but as Edward L. Galligan (1985: 617) notes, it can also act as a healthy reminder of what really is important in life: "when we devote ourselves to apparently trivial things like trousers life can be gay, but when we take our troubles and our selves seriously it will certainly be dreary." Through Jeeves's character Wodehouse is also able to exploit one of the most essential ways of creating laughter: a device that is described by Henri Bergson (1994: 45) as a sudden movement of the attention from the mental to the physical, as in the following previously quoted excerpt from *Much Obligated, Jeeves* (pp. 5-6):

'One always has to budget for a change in the weather. Still, the thing to do is to keep on being happy while you can.'

'Precisely, sir. Carpe diem, the Roman poet Horace advised. The English poet Herrick expressed the same sentiment when he suggested that we should gather rosebuds while we may. Your elbow is in the butter, sir.'

'Oh, thank you, Jeeves.'

All the abovementioned facts about Jeeves's characters, the mechanical quality of his action, and his firmly defined butler role make him a farcical character. However, Jeeves's ironlike loyalty to his master and his circle of friends is a characteristic that is not typically farcical, since it does not ridicule him as a character, but on the contrary, makes him a highly sympathetic person.

Authority figures are perhaps the most typically farcical characters in Wodehouse's fiction. They are the only figures who are portrayed as thoroughly unpleasant, and can be considered as clear descendants of the tyrannical characters in *commedia dell'arte*. The most terrifying authority figure is Bertie's aunt Agatha, "the one who kills rats with her teeth and devours her young" (*Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit*, p. 1). Aunt Agatha does not appear in flesh in any of the analysed novels, but she appears in the horrifying imagery whenever something blood-stopping has to be described. Authority figures are usually portrayed emphasizing their titles or professions. Being an educated person is not a benefit in the Wodehousian world, but, on the contrary, it is almost a rule in Jeeves & Wooster novels that the more education you have, the more unpleasant you tend to be. Bertie's tyrannical former headmaster is always described using his title; in *Jeeves in the Offing* he is 'Aubrey Upjohn, MA', in *Much Obligated, Jeeves* he is 'Arnold Abney, M.A.' There are two authority figures who appear regularly in Jeeves & Wooster novels: Roderick Spode alias Lord Sidcup, the founder of a British fascist organisation, and the psychiatrist Sir Roderick

Glossop. Spode dresses his supporters in black shorts instead of shirts, and this feature brings out once more the importance of physical appearance and clothing in the novels. In the Wodehousian world, a person cannot be taken seriously if he does not dress appropriately. This emphasis on the appearance can be considered a farcical characteristic, since it is an essential part of the physicality that is such an important element in farce. Spode is the only tyrannical character who stays tyrannical till the end, he never shows any signs of becoming softer in his attitudes. The only way in which Bertie could gain any sort of authority over Spode was to remind him of the magic word 'Eulalie Sœurs':

...Spode, who was an amateur Dictator of sorts, who went about in black footer bags shouting 'Heil, Spode!', also secretly designed ladies' underclothing under the trade name of Eulalie Sœurs. Armed with this knowledge, I had had, of course, little difficulty in reducing him to the level of a third-class power. These Dictators don't want a thing like that to get spread about. (Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit, pp.31-32)

It is a typical feature of farce that the authority figure possesses a secret vice, such as cross-dressing or homosexual tendencies, the revealing of which would embarrass the character in the face of others. It was mentioned above that in a talisman farce, the embarrassing thing can be an object, such as pornographic postcards (Davis 1978: 67). Since Wodehouse's writing is extremely chaste, a mere hint to that direction is enough to ridicule the character. Another regular tyrannical character, Sir Roderick Glossop, appears in two of the analysed novels. He is introduced by Bertie in *Thank You, Jeeves* (p. 4) as follows: "A bald-domed, bushy-browed blighter, ostensibly a nerve specialist, but in reality, as everybody knows, nothing more nor less than a high-priced loony-doctor, he has been cropping up in my path for years, always with the most momentous results." In both of the analysed novels in which Glossop appears, he is wearing some sort of a disguise, which enables him to break away from his tyrannical

role. In *Thank You, Jeeves*, Glossop entertains the son of a woman he loves by dressing up as a negro minstrel, and ends up having to hide in the garden at night with boot polish on his face. Since Bertie is in the same situation, the predicament brings these two characters closer to each other. In *Jeeves in the Offing*, Glossop acts as Aunt Dahlia's butler in order to observe unnoticed the mental health of one of Dahlia's guests. Bertie is staying alone at Aunt Dahlia's, since Jeeves is taking his annual holiday, and Bertie and Glossop, who have previously detested each other, find a new sense of understanding:

'... In a curious way it restores my youth. It brings back to me my preparatory school days, when I would often steal down at night to the headmaster's study to eat his biscuits.'

I started. I looked at him with a kindling eye. Deep had called to deep, and the cockles of the heart were warmed.

'Biscuits?'

'He kept them in a tin on his desk.'

'You really used to do that at your prep school?'

'Many years ago.'

'So did I,' I said, coming within an ace of saying, 'My brother!' (p. 92)

Thus there happen two kinds of reversals of roles; Bertie and Glossop change from adversaries to friends, and Glossop's butler role begins to resemble that of Jeeves's, which can be seen from his Jeeves-type speech style and the activity with which he starts to take part in the ongoing scheming at Brinkley Court.

As was mentioned above, the protagonists in Jeeves & Wooster novels indulge simple pleasures; eating, drinking, smoking, and an occasional go at a crossword puzzle or a couple of pages of light literature. The antagonists try to bring about a change in this immobile world, but the attempt is strongly condemned, and doomed to fail according to the rules of farce. The antagonists not only try to interfere in physical pleasures, but in three of the analysed novels, there is also a character who is an intellectual 'killjoy', a character who forces his or her assumingly wide literary knowledge on others. The constancy with

which Wodehouse attacks these intellectuals is evident in all the analysed novels. Mooneyham (1994: 128) says that “Wodehouse perpetually wages a literary class war against the literati, the modernist elite.” She (1994:128-129) notes that in almost all of Wodehouse’s novels there is a member of high culture who is made ridiculous. In two of the analysed novels, *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit* and *Much Obligated, Jeeves*, this intellectual figure is Florence Craye, Bertie’s step-cousin and ex-fiancée, who appears to be in a mission to reform all her husband-candidates.

You know how it is with these earnest, brainy beazels of what is called strong character. They can’t let the male soul alone. They want to get behind it and start shoving. Scarcely have they shaken the rice from their hair in the car driving off for the honeymoon than they pull up their socks and begin moulding their partner of joys and sorrows, and if there’s one thing that gives me the pip, it is being moulded.
(*Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit*, p.23)

Later on in the same novel, Florence is about to reform Bertie, after they have gotten engaged once again:

‘I knew then that you were groping dimly for the light and trying to educate yourself by reading good literature, that there was something lying hidden deep down in you that only needed bringing out. It would be a fascinating task, I told myself, fostering the latent potentialities of your budding mind. Like watching over some timid, backward flower.’
I bridled pretty considerably. Timid, backward flower, my left eyeball, I was thinking. I was on the point of saying something stinging like ‘Oh, yes?’ when she proceeded. (p. 115)

Florence’s character is also ridiculed in *Much Obligated, Jeeves*, where her tendency to switch fiancés is mocked by Bertie and Aunt Dahlia:

‘...She can’t stand a loser.’
‘So he told me. Remember what happened to Percy Gorringer.’
‘And others. England is strewn with ex-fiancés whom she bounced because they didn’t come up to her specifications. Dozens of them. I believe they form clubs and societies.’
‘Perhaps calling themselves the Old Florentians.’
‘And having an annual dinner!’ (p. 92)

The above piece of dialogue reveals that Florence is not just a 'killjoy' figure in the stories, but also a *buffoon*, since her behaviour is so absurd that it amuses other characters. The constancy with which Wodehouse uses the reformation theme can be seen also in another female figure, Vanessa Cook in *Aunts Aren't Gentlemen*, who seems to be made exactly from the same wood as Florence. As soon as she gets engaged with Bertie, she starts to mould him:

Vanessa, meanwhile, had picked up my *By Order Of The Czar*, and I could see by the way she sniffed that she was about to become critical. There had always been a strong strain of book-reviewer blood in her. 'Trash', she said. 'It really is time you began reading something worth while. I don't expect you to start off with Turgenev and Dostoievski', she said, evidently alluding to a couple of Russian exiles she had met in London who did a bit of writing on the side, 'but there are plenty of good books which are easier and at the same time educational.' (p.112)

Another type of farcical female figure is Madeline Bassett, who is also a constant threat to Bertie's bachelor status. Madeline is a thoroughly ridiculous character who does not evoke any sympathies in the readership; and thus a good example of a farcical type character. In *Much Obligated, Jeeves*, (p.7) Bertie states that she is "as mushy a character as ever broke biscuit, convinced that stars are God's daisy chain and that every time a fairy blows its wee nose a baby is born." It could, of course even be argued that Wodehouse is at times chauvinist, since many a female character is either a tyrannical member of the intellectual élite like Florence Craye, an incorrigible troublemaker like Bobbie Wickham, or insufferably soppy like Madeline Bassett. But Wodehouse does not show any more mercy towards his male characters; you can seldom find men who are so much in the leash of women as men in Wodehouse's novels. As soon as a man gets engaged to a woman, the female party starts to run things, and the male party obeys. Men are either completely without a will of their own, or they suppress their own will totally. The more traditional masculine side is shown

only to other men; all the young men in love are extremely jealous and become very hostile at the slightest provocation. Bertie's pals are all pleasure-loving nitwits, who struggle against the attitudes of the 'kill-joys'; authority figures like tyrannical aunts, fathers, or industrial magnates. All these young men are alike, and they only seem to differ in their outer appearance.

Animals and objects also appear frequently as characters in Wodehouse's novels. Aunt Dahlia's cat Augustus appears in both *Much Obligated, Jeeves*, and *Jeeves in the Offing*, a small dachshund named Poppet visits the scene in *Jeeves in the Offing*, and in *Aunts Aren't Gentlemen*, a cat acts as an active talisman in the story. In my opinion, animals are essentially farcical since they usually create physical action to the plot. According to Bermel (1982:25-32), inanimate objects can also have similar functions as characters in farces. In Wodehouse's novels, however, people are often portrayed as if they were objects. Sharwood Smith (1978:208-209) states that characters are thus "devalued" by Wodehouse:

A substantial form appeared against the summer sky. It entered. It took a seat. And, having taken a seat, it hauled out a handkerchief and started to mop the brow.

(*Thank You, Jeeves*, p.198)

Sharwood Smith also discusses another similar technique in which Wodehouse reduced his characters to objects. One example of this can be seen in the above extract; "started to mop *the* brow", but there are numerous other instances in which this device is used: "As I sat in the bath-tub, soaping *a* meditative foot and singing,...", "I shook *the* coconut." (*Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit*, pp. 1, 131), "I hadn't been reading long when drowsiness stole over me, *the* tired eyelids closed,..." (*Jeeves in the Offing*, p. 79), "I sat up and eased *the* spine into the pillows." (*Much Obligated, Jeeves*, P.190) In this way Wodehouse created a strong contrast between the mental and the physical; a person handles his body as if it

were an object. I think that this device strongly adds to the element of physicality in the novels. As Bermel (1982:25-32) notes, objects can have similar roles as characters in farce, and this seems to apply to the Wodehousian characters the other way around; characters occasionally relate to their bodies as if they were objects, and thus behaved like objects. There are even instances in which human beings are being portrayed as if they were animals. Jeeves, for example, is often portrayed in this way, as in the following extract from *Much Obligated, Jeeves*, (p.116): “Opening the conversation with that gentle cough of his that sounds like a very old sheep clearing its throat on a misty mountain top,…”

4.4.2. Satirical Characters

The Wodehousian cast of characters offers delicious chances for a satirist. Although Wodehouse did not create his universe for this particular purpose, he does occasionally make use of satirical devices. Wodehouse mocks human weaknesses, such as hypocrisy or greed through some of his characters. Bertie’s idiotic friends are typically characters who are portrayed through a satirist’s viewpoint. Love, for example, is described in the traditionally romantic way in Wodehouse’s novels, but it is often revealed that the emotion is rather corrupted in the end, and only serving the selfish needs of the two lovers. The choice of partner is highly dependent on physical and economic factors, as is evident in the following extracts from *Much Obligated, Jeeves*:

‘...It’s the old business of what Jeeves calls the psychology of the individual. Very possibly the seeds of rebellion start to seethe within him when she speaks her mind, but he catches sight of her sideways or gets a glimpse of her hair, assuming for purposes of argument that she isn’t wearing a hat, or notices once again that she has as many curves as a

scenic railway, and he feels that it's worth putting up with a spot of mind-speaking in order to make her his own. His love, you see, is not wholly spiritual. There is a bit of the carnal mixed up in it.' (p. 128)

..., but there was something so reassuring in her being engaged to Spode. Because, whatever you might think of him, you couldn't get away from it that he was the seventh Earl of Sidcup, and no girl who has managed to hook a seventh Earl with a castle in Shropshire and an income of twenty thousand pounds per annum is lightly going to change her mind about him. (p. 63)

I think that the above extracts are satirical to the extent that they can easily be compared with similar kinds of passages from Jane Austen's writing. Austen describes a society in which women's asset in the matrimonial market was her looks and a man's his income, and the same kind of arrangement seems also to apply to the world in Wodehouse's novels.

Wodehouse cannot be considered in any way to be a political writer, but since he wrote at a time in which the world was clearly divided into the capitalist and the communist side, it is only natural that there are some remarks about the world situation in his books. In the same manner he dealt with the British class system; it is accepted as reality, and he never had any intention to criticize or undermine the system. Mooneyham (1994: 132) points out that Wodehouse only used class envy and class conflict for comic purposes. In the same way he accepted capitalism, using economic motives in his plots. Money is a common theme in Wodehouse's novels, and the characters talk very freely about it; Bertie, for example, describes himself casually as being "stagnant with the stuff" (*Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit*, p.6). The Wodehousian world is thoroughly capitalist, but there appear several characters with communist sympathies in his novels. One such character is Bertie's one-time butler, Brinkley, who in a later novel curiously changed his name to Bingley. These left-wing characters are always ridiculed; in the Wodehousian world of plenty, communists more than anyone want to get their hands on big property, regardless of their personal ideology.

Since the rich main characters take wealth for granted, it makes the people who strive to become rich seem vulgar. This slight contempt towards human greed is clear in the following passage from *Much Obligated, Jeeves* (p. 37), in which Jeeves and Bertie discuss the character of Bingley:

'I believe his political views were very far to the left at the time when he was in your employment. They changed when he became a man of property.'

'A man of property, is he?'

'An uncle of his in the grocery business died and left him a house and a comfortable sum of money.'

'I suppose it often happens that the views of fellows like Bingley change when they come into money.'

'Very frequently. They regard the coming revolution from a different standpoint.'

Bingley is portrayed in two novels as an extremely unpleasant and untrustworthy man, and he becomes even more unpleasant after he has become wealthy and lost all the shreds of his communist idealism. Also Bertie's old colleague from Oxford, Orlo Porter is a young and fierce revolutionist. It turns out, however, that Orlo would not personally object to owning luxurious things, as can be seen in the following dialogue with Bertie:

'...And I am a man who likes nice things. I want to branch out.'

'A Mayfair flat?'

'Yes.'

'Champagne with every meal?'

'Exactly.'

'Rolls-Royces?'

'Those, too.'

'Leaving something over, of course, to slip to the hard-up proletariat?'

'You'd like them to have what you don't need?'

'There won't be anything I don't need.'

It was a little difficult to know what to say. I had never talked things over with a Communist before, and it came as something of a shock to find that he wasn't so fond of the hard-up proletariat as I had supposed. I thought of advising him not to let the boys at the Kremlin hear him expressing such views, but decided that it was none of my business. I changed the subject.

(*Aunts Aren't Gentlemen*: 141-42)

In contrast to Bingley's cold greed, Orlo Porter, however, seems to become more human after having confessed that he is every bit as comfort-loving as the next guy. So it is in fact Bingley's unpleasant disposition, not his ideology, that defines him as a character. This is the case with Orlo Porter as well; since he is so endearingly honest when it comes to his own needs, he proves that he is not the fierce enemy of the élite he claims to be, but instead a member of it, and a very decent sort of chap at that. In the above extracts Wodehouse uses a device that is common in satire; in order to hide the fact that he is expressing his own satirical comments, the writer puts his ideas in the mouth of a fool, who in this case is Bertie Wooster. According to Leonard Feinberg (1967:48-49) "the fool intersperses unpopular and forbidden truths among genuinely foolish remarks. And like the child and clown, who presumably do not know any better, the fool is permitted to express ideas which would be dangerous or vulgar in the mouths of 'normal' adults." Examples in which satirical comments of their type are put in Bertie's mouth can be found in other novels as well.

4.4.3. Parodical Characters

The most obvious form of parody in Jeeves & Wooster novels which is acknowledged in several studies written about Wodehouse's work is the similarity between the characters of Bertie and Jeeves, and Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson. Owen Dudley Edwards (1977: 91) notes the resemblance, as he says the following about Jeeves:

His loyalty is his redeeming characteristic. It is in the first instance loyalty to Bertie as an institution; hence the permanent insistence that Bertie must not

betray the standards of that institution by eccentricity in dress or hirsute adornment. But it becomes a personal loyalty of the kind that is proof against almost any challenge. ...Jeeves, like his forebear Sherlock Holmes, retains independence alongside loyalty.

Conan Doyle's stories had been Wodehouse's favourite reading as a youngster, and so they were understandably a major influence on his own writing. Usborne (1961: 175) states that "I sense a distinct similarity, in patterns and rhythms, between the adventures of Jeeves as recorded by Bertie Wooster and the adventures of Sherlock Holmes as recorded by Dr Watson." He also claims that the high incidence of crime in Jeeves & Wooster stories may also be an echo of the Sherlock Holmes stories. Edwards (1977: 16) notes that detective fiction provided Wodehouse with knowledge about how to construct a novel: "Order, plot development, resolution of loose ends and judiciousness in the deployment of incident were lessons the detective story had to teach him" According to Edwards (1977:102-103), Doctor Watson is similar to Bertie in the sense that they were both characters who were created to provide the reading audience with a figure it was easy to identify with. They provide the access for the reader to enter the "master-mind's" world, but they themselves end up being the fools. M. A. Sharwood Smith (1978: 206) sees the Jeeves & Wooster novels as parodies of the standard detective story. Sharwood Smith remarks that indirect parody can be seen in the constant frequent use of the type of language that is used in these stories, such as in the following examples that he has taken from *Thank You, Jeeves*: "the man of chilled steel" (p. 202), "a soft smile playing over the finely chiselled face" (p. 126). Direct parody can be seen in Bertie's explicit reference: 'This, if I mistake not, Watson... is our client now' (p. 197).

Another example of this parody of detective stories, as well as their audience, is a scene in which a character turns out to be a writer of detective stories under a pseudonym of Rex West in *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit* (p. 208):

'Rex West? Lord-love-a-duck! Did you write *The Mystery of the Pink Crayfish*?' I gasped.

He bowed his head again.

'I did. And *Murder in Mauve*, *The Case of the Poisoned Doughnut* and *Inspector Biffen Views the Body*.'

I hadn't happened to get hold of those, but I assured him that I would lose no time in putting them on my library list, and went on to ask a question which had been occupying my mind for quite a while.

'Then who was it who bumped off Sir Eustace Willoughby Bart, with the blunt instrument?'

In a low, toneless voice he said:

'Burwash, the butler.'

I uttered a cry.

'As I suspected! As I suspected from the first!'

A distinct parodical attitude towards the detective story jargon is evident in the above extract. Bertie is a stereotypical crime story reader and he masters the terminology that is used in them. Mystery novels are about the only type of literature that he reads, and he is loyal to his favourite novelists, and enthusiastic about the outcome of the stories. There are constant references to writers of crime stories in Wodehouse's texts. Agatha Christie is mentioned by name in many novels, as well as Sherlock Holmes, and the abovementioned crime novelist Rex West is of course a reference to the crime story writer Rex Stout.

Another topic that is often parodied in Wodehouse's novels is politics. Wodehouse can in no way be considered a political writer, nor did he have high moral aims in his writing. "It was not that I had a particular message for humanity. I am still plugging away and not the ghost of one so far, so it begins to look as though, unless I suddenly hit mid-season form in my eighties, humanity will remain a message short", was how the writer himself put it (Wodehouse 1957: 486). It is true, however, that Wodehouse sometimes wrote about things

that annoyed him and that these things can be seen as political comments. For example, the creation of Roderick Spode and his "Black Shorts" was clearly an anti-fascist statement. According to Margaret A. Rose (1993: 93), Wodehouse was parodying the jargon of the British fascism through this particular character. What is more, Wodehouse created the character of Spode as remarkably early as in 1938; he made his first appearance in the novel *The Code of the Woosters*, in which he is introduced in the following manner:

'Roderick Spode is the founder and head of the Saviours of Britain, a fascist organisation better known as the Black Shorts...'
 'By the way, when you say "shorts", you mean "shirts", of course.'
 'No. By the time Spode formed his association, there were no shirts left. He and his adherents wear black shorts.'
 'Footer bags, you mean?'
 'Yes.'
 'How perfectly foul.' (pp.71-72)

Stephen Medcalf (1976: 203) states that this sort of reaction towards fascism was typical for the British people at that time. Wodehouse, as well as his countrymen did not know enough about fascism and nazism, and that enabled him to be so light about the subject.

The rhetorics of political speeches were another source of parody. In *Much Obligated, Jeeves*, Bertie is helping his friend Ginger to run for the Conservative candidacy, and Spode, the great orator, has also come to aid Ginger. Spode in his turn, also nurses hopes of a political career, but there is a practical hindrance in his path to the Parliament:

'...Spode is one of those silver-tongued orators you read about. Extraordinary gift of the gab he has. He could get into Parliament without straining a sinew.'
 I dare say she was right, but I resented any praise of Spode. I made clear my displeasure by responding curtly:
 'Then why doesn't he?'
 'He can't, you poor chump. He's a lord.'
 'Don't they allow lords in?'
 'No, they don't.'
 'I see,' I said, rather impressed by this proof that the House of Commons drew the line somewhere. (pp. 52-53)

The above comment of Bertie's can also be seen as a satirical comment of the author. Wodehouse makes numerous comments on the British political system in this particular novel. Through the character of Ginger, who is in no way interested in politics, but only wants to please his fiancée, Wodehouse is able to mock the emptiness of the political jargon. Ginger seems to have memorized some of the key lines in political rhetorics:

Over an afterdinner smoke on the previous night Ginger had filled me in on what his crowd proposed to do when they got down to it. They were going, he said, to cut taxes to the bone, straighten out our foreign policy, double our export trade, have two cars in the carage and two chickens in the pot for everyone and give the pound the shot in the arm it had been clamouring for for years. (p. 78)

According to Walter Nash (1985:100-101), passages in which the writer appears to imitate a rhetoric of a genre are called pseudoparodic. "Such pseudoparodic passages abound in comic writing; constantly, in reading comedy, we are aware of shifts in expression that mockingly shadow familiar features of style." This is also the type of parody that is most typical of Wodehouse. There are numerous examples of passages in which the style of writing vaguely resembles some other style or writer. For example, along with the satirical tone in which Wodehouse handled his intellectual characters, there appear also characteristics that are distinctly parodical, such as in a poem that Percy Gorrington has written about his rival Stilton Cheesewright in *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit*:

I stood with a man
 Watching the sun go down.
 The air was full of murmurous summer scents
 And a brave breeze sang like a bugle
 From a sky that smouldered in the west,
 A sky of crimson, amethyst and gold and sepia
 And blue as blue as were the eyes of Helen
 When she sat
 Gazing from some high tower in Ilium
 Upon the Grecian tents darkling below.
 And he,

This man who stood beside me,
 Gaped like some dull, half-witted animal
 And said,
 'I say,
 Doesn't that sunset remind you
 Of a slice
 Of underdone roast beef?' (p. 79)

The above poem is a good example of how Wodehouse used parodical devices; it starts with a beautiful description of nature that brings to mind the poetry of, for example Coleridge, but towards the end the personal feeling of the poet seems to get hold of him, and the poem ends with a vulgar, everyday sentence that completely ruins the poetic atmosphere, and makes it very comical. Along with the abovementioned pseudoparodic devices, Wodehouse also uses references to famous writers or poets. According to Sharwood Smith (1978: 214), in these passages Wodehouse does not parody the source itself, but "the stained-glass attitudes adopted towards them". As both Usborne (1961: 176) and Hall (1974:110-111) note, Bertie Wooster has a 'magpie' mind, in which quotations and clichés get tangled. Bertie often reaches for a quotation, but does not remember it correctly, and Jeeves has to rectify him. Later, Bertie may use the quotation in the correct form, but in a distorted context. The following passages in which Bertie strives for a quotation from Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, is from *Thank You, Jeeves*:

'... And what is worrying her is that he does not tell his love, but lets concealment like...like what, Jeeves?'
 'A worm i' the bud, sir.'
 'Feed on his something...'
 'Damask cheek, sir'
 'Damask? You're sure'
 'Quite sure, sir.'
 (p. 39)
 ...
 'But suppose the sale of the house does not go through?'
 'In that case, I fear, sir...'
 'The damask cheek will continue to do business at the old stand indefinitely?'
 'Exactly, sir.'

'You really are sure it is 'damask' ?'
 'Yes, sir.'
 'But it doesn't seem to mean anything.'
 'An archaic adjective, sir. I fancy it is intended to signify a healthy complexion.'
 (pp. 42-43)

Kaarina Meskanen (1996: 26) says in her Pro Gradu thesis that Wodehouse is a "comical writer with parodic tendencies". She (1996: 14) claims that Wodehouse parodied the British class-system through the characters of Bertie Wooster and Jeeves. I have not found this kind of parody in Wodehouse's novels, but quite on the contrary; often you sense a distinct sympathy for the impoverished and tax-ridden English aristocracy in Wodehouse's books. For example in *Thank You, Jeeves* (pp.11-12), Bertie's friend Chuffy is described in the following manner:

He's dashed hard up, poor bloke, like most fellows who own land, and only lives at Chuffnell Hall because he's stuck with it and can't afford to live anywhere else. If somebody came to him and offered to buy the place, he would kiss him on both cheeks. But who wants to buy a house that size in these times?

As can be seen, in Wodehouse's novels, property is not just about money, but it can also mean responsibility that can become almost a sacrifice. Of course, Wodehouse kept his sympathetic nature well in control. In the portrayal of Bertie's uncle Tom, a parodical attitude is present:

Uncle Tom, though abundantly provided with the chips, having been until his retirement one of those merchant princes who scoop it up in sackfuls out East, has a rooted objection to letting the hellhounds of the Inland Revenue dip in and get theirs. For weeks after they have separated him from his hard-earned he is inclined to go off into corners and sit with his head between his hands, muttering about ruin and the sinister trend of socialistic legislation and what is to become of us all if this continues. (*Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit*, pp. 72-73)

I think that Wodehouse's description of the rich upper class members is quite honest, he does not try to make them look better or worse than they are. All the characters have their virtues and their faults.

4.4.4. Ironic Characters

Wodehouse says things very directly, he does not have any hidden messages in his writing. Wodehouse's choice of the narrative point of view also rules out the possibility of the sort of visual irony that Hodgson (1988: 185) talks about, in which the audience can watch two scenes at the same time. Since the novels are told only from Bertie's point of view, the reading audience can only see things from his angle.

In Jeeves & Wooster novels there is only one character that can be considered as somewhat ironical: Jeeves. As Mooneyham notes (1994: 124), Jeeves's *ieron* role grants him an ironic perspective on events. This can be seen in Jeeves's detachment from the actual happenings in the stories. He only appears in the scene when his services are required, the rest of the time he is either reading Spinoza or doing domestic chores. However, he seems to be constantly aware of all the things that take place, and usually he is a bit more informed about matters than Bertie. A sense of subtle verbal irony can sometimes appear in Jeeves's beautifully-formed responses:

'...Can you bust a safe, Jeeves?'
 'No, madam.'
 'Don't say "No, madam" in that casual way. How do you know you can't?'
 'It requires a specialized education and upbringing, madam.'
 (Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit, p. 131)

Occasionally Jeeves even retorts to irony in his attitude towards his master, as in the following dialogue in which Pauline Stoker announces to Jeeves that she has decided to break off her engagement to Bertie:

'...I've changed my mind.'
 'I am glad to hear that, miss.'
 ...

'Glad, are you?'

'Yes, miss. I doubt whether the union would have been a successful one. Mr Wooster is an agreeable young gentleman, but I would describe him as essentially one of Nature's bachelors.'

'Besides being mentally negligible?'

'Mr Wooster is capable of acting very shrewdly on occasion, miss.'

(Thank You, Jeeves, pp. 188-189)

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION: WODEHOUSE AS A COMIC WRITER

"You could, of course, write a thesis about Wodehouse but the endeavour would be like trying to preserve thistledown between sheet glass. The prose soars up and away, to be enjoyed by the simplest souls." (McDonagh, Melanie *The Evening Standard*, 24 January 2000) In my effort to try and define Wodehouse's position in the field of comic literature, I have found the above statement to be painfully true. Wodehouse's fiction is at its best when enjoyed in a comfortable chair along with a cup of tea and biscuits, and not torn apart by a far-stretching analysis. However, the appreciation of good literature cannot be lessened by such analysis, quite the contrary. Wodehouse's novels are meant to be entertainment but an attentive reader can find the whole history of comic writing at work in these seemingly light novels. They reflect the ancient comedies in their basic structural pattern; a move from unhappiness to happiness after the hero has removed the obstacles from his path, followed by a festive resolution. Elements of *commedia dell'arte* are reflected in the Wodehousian characters. The classical comic protagonists, the *alazon*, the *eirone*, the buffoon, and the *agroikos* are all present in Wodehouse's novels. The main characters are descendants of such

comic pairs as Don Quixote and Sancho Panza. The plot structures follow the old patterns of 'snowball farce' and 'talisman farce'. Satirical and parodical characteristics also abound in Wodehouse's writing. What seems to be a piece of straightforward, simple comic writing is in fact the end product of a variety of literal influences.

The aim of the present thesis has been to define a writer's position within the genre of comedy. As has been noted, the field is a vast and varied one, having no clear boundaries. The different subgenres and modes of comedy are not by far categories that are clear and stable, but at times they can be just matters of interpretation. In order to give a clear and unified idea of what features can be found in Wodehouse's fiction, certain simplifications were of course necessary. For the purposes of this thesis it was essential to limit the number of subgenres of comedy to just four, when in fact comedy has countless different subgenres and modes. Also, choosing the aspects in Wodehouse's writing that would be analysed proved to be quite difficult, since in his fiction, as probably in all fiction in general, different elements cannot always be separated from each other, but they interact. For instance, Bertie Wooster's life-style is an essential part of both characterization and the general setting in the novels, but in this thesis the theme has only been discussed in the chapter dealing with the setting. However, all these difficulties have made the analysis of Wodehouse's fiction very challenging. Although many features in his writing fell quite easily under a certain category, there were also numerous instances in which the definition was not by far easy.

Wodehouse has been named "a master of farce" in several literary articles, but the farcical aspects in his writing have never really been systematically studied.

The main aim of this thesis has been to establish the farcical elements in Wodehouse's Jeeves & Wooster novels. I have found that many characteristics in Wodehouse's fiction are typically farcical. The setting in his novels is typical of farce because of its unreal and exaggerated nature. The Wodehousian world operates according to its own strict rules, and these rules would be downright impossible in the world in which we live in. The plots in Wodehouse's novels are highly typical of farce. It was quite common that Wodehouse wrote a hundred pages of notes for his novels, so that the action would be consistent and there would not be any loose ends. The plots in farce are mechanical like a clockwork; the timing has to be right so that the audience would laugh. In Jeeves & Wooster novels the plots have numerous twists that lead to more complicated action. Wodehouse uses the old patterns of 'snowball-farce' and 'talisman-farce', but he mixes these two so that elements of both can be found in his novels. All Jeeves & Wooster novels end happily, and all the characters gain their status quo back in the end.

The cast of characters in Wodehouse's novels is a varied one. There are certainly many stereotypical characters that are common in farce, but there are also more complex characters. The main couple, for instance, may seem like a typical unlike pair that is often used in farces. As has been seen, however, these two main characters cannot be so simply categorized. Bertie Wooster, the main character and the narrator of the novels, is not merely a stereotypical idiotic young-man-about-town, but a character who is able to sacrifice himself for the benefit of others, and to whom the reading audience identifies to. Jeeves defies the stereotypical servant role by possessing an extremely loyal attitude towards his master. Also the minor characters have diverse qualities. For instance, the

character of Sir Roderick Glossop, who started out as a purely farcical 'killjoy' figure, gained more personable qualities during the span of the novels. The characters were also the main outlet for satire, parody, and irony in Wodehouse's writing. Through such characters as Ginger Winship or Orlo Porter, Wodehouse was able to express his own satirical views on politics.

One of the most central definitions of farce is the fact that it has no real message, but its only purpose is to amuse its audience. This feature seems to fit in very well with Wodehouse's own view of his work, since he always claimed to have no particular message in his writing. However, once a novel is published, it becomes public property, and its creator can no longer be the highest authority over it. The reader is entitled to his or her own interpretation of the work, regardless of what the writer's own intentions have been. As time brings perspective to things, a 1970's reading of Wodehouse differs from that of the 1940's, and again in 2000, Wodehouse reads differently. The most constant feature in Wodehouse's writing is his tendency to mock the so-called intellectual élite, be them psychiatrists, poets, politicians, or school headmasters. Wodehouse always sides with the silly and the innocent. This the most important message that can be found in his literature, and it can be considered a message that is typically farcical.

To summarize, I would not say that Wodehouse's writing could be termed as pure farce, but then again, can any work of literature be a "pure" representative of its genre? I believe not. Wodehouse uses so many structures and devices that can be termed as farcical that I think it is quite justified to say that he wrote farce, only I would add that Wodehouse makes quite liberal use of almost any kind of comical style, be it comedy, parody, or satire. Farce provided Wodehouse

the basic structure for his novels. In his fiction, farce is the vehicle and language is the passenger within. The real importance, however, lies in the journey that is taken, in the interaction between the reader and the novel. In fact, interaction is closely connected with a theme that I think would be an interesting topic for future research, namely the theatrical aspect in Wodehouse's fiction. The fact that Wodehouse also wrote pieces for the stage must have had a significant influence on his novel writing. In this connection, it has to be remembered that farce is mainly a theatrical form of literature. It is therefore quite remarkable that Wodehouse was able to transform a form of art that relies so heavily on actors into a novel form. Another aspect that would be worth studying is the role of farce in the 21st century. As the importance of farce as a theatrical genre has probably diminished, it has spread into new areas. For instance, I see a strong influence of farce in some of the contemporary television sitcoms. Analysing the above questions exceeds the limits of the present thesis but they would provide interesting starting points for future research. There is still much to be found between the pip-pip and the tinkerty-tonk.

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APPENDIX 1

Summary of the plot in the first eight chapters of *Thank You, Jeeves*:

1. All the major characters are introduced in this chapter; Bertie bumps into his former fiancée, Pauline Stoker, Pauline's father, and Sir Roderick Glossop, who is an old adversary of Bertie's. Bertie has taken to banjolele playing, and receives complaints from annoyed neighbours. He decides to retire to the countryside to continue with his hobby. Jeeves resigns because he cannot stand the prospect of having to listen to Bertie's banjolele playing in a small cottage.
2. Bertie meets his old friend Chuffy, who invites him to stay at a cottage of his at Chuffnell Regis. When Chuffy finds out that Jeeves has given notice, he immediately hires him.
3. Bertie finds out about Chuffy's plan to sell his estate to Stoker. Stoker, Pauline, Glossop, and Pauline's little brother are all coming to Chuffnell Regis on a yacht.
4. Pauline announces to Bertie that she is in love with Chuffy and asks for Bertie's help in the matter.
5. Bertie makes a plan to bring the two lovers together: he is to kiss Pauline and make sure that Chuffy sees it and becomes jealous.
6. Bertie kisses Pauline, but they are seen by Pauline's father, not Chuffy. Stoker and Chuffy end up in a fight, after which the Stoker party reclines to the yacht. Chuffy finds out about Bertie's engagement to Pauline and their kiss. Bertie tells him that Pauline is in fact in love with Chuffy, and that his kiss to her was entirely brotherly. Chuffy vows to marry Pauline at all costs. Returning back to his cottage, Bertie finds Pauline in his bed wearing his pyjamas.
7. Pauline tells Bertie that she has swum from the yacht and sought shelter at Bertie's place, breaking the downstairs' window in order to get into the cottage. There is a knock at the door.
8. There are two policemen at Bertie's door. They have noticed that someone has broken Bertie's window, and come to see if everything is all right. Bertie tries to seek a place to sleep in, since he cannot sleep under the same roof with Pauline, but is constantly interrupted by the patrolling policemen.

APPENDIX 2

Summary of the plot in *Much Obligated, Jeeves*:

The main plot in the novel is the story about Ginger Winship's candidacy. In a side plot Spode, who backs up Ginger in the election, wants to run for Parliament himself. Another side plot is constructed through one of Aunt Dahlia's schemes. She wants her daughter Angela to get married to Tuppy Glossop, with whom she has been engaged for years. The couple cannot get married because Tuppy does not have enough money. Tuppy's late father has worked for Runkle Enterprises, and invented a medicine that made millions for the firm but nothing for him. Now the financier L. P. Runkle has come to Aunt Dahlia's to sell his husband Tom an old silver porringer. Tom has gone to France, but Aunt Dahlia tells Runkle that he will be back in a couple of days, in order to make Runkle stay, and serve him the chef Anatole's best cookings, so that he would get into mellowed mood and part with some money to Tuppy. As Runkle refuses to give any money to Tuppy, Aunt Dahlia pinches his silver porringer in order to blackmail some money from him. After having found out that the porringer is not that valuable, she makes Bertie return it. Bertie ends up as being the victim of all scheming. He is also the sufferer in the breakup of Ginger and Florence, as he once more has to get engaged to Florence. Spode's political career also puts Bertie into risk; Spode has to give up his peerage in order to get into the Parliament, and this does not fit in with his fiancée's plans. The fiancée in question is Madeline Basset, who has been engaged to Bertie several times. If the engagement between Spode and Madeline is broken off, Bertie is once more at risk to get betrothed to her.

Jeeves learns of Runkle's past prison sentence from the club book, and Runkle ends up having to depart with some of his money so that his secret is not revealed and his upcoming knighthood threatened. Spode's political career comes to an end as he gets hit in the eye by a potato at a political meeting.