Much Obliged, Wodehouse
A Study of Gender and Power in Three P.G. Wodehouse Novels

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Abstract

The novels written by P.G Wodehouse that feature the characters Jeeves and Wooster are lighthearted and comedic. They revolve around an upper class young man and his struggle to remain a bachelor. However, according to the literary theorist Fredric Jameson: even if texts do not aspire to promote ideologies they still do. It will be this essay's aim to see what kind of ideologies are promoted in three of P.G Wodehouse's novels. Of interest is also to explore how these ideologies blend and intermingle with each other and with the aspect of gender. The findings of this essay are that one cannot simply rely on just a social class aspect or a gender aspect in order to interpret the text and its ideological and political substance since social class, ideology, politics and gender are closely linked to each other.
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Introduction

P.G. Wodehouse's career as a writer spans from the early 1900s until his death in 1975. He wrote lighthearted humorous literature, set during the earlier parts of 1900s, that often revolved around a young unmarried man from the upper class and his struggle to either marry the woman he loves or avoid marriage at all costs. The latter is true of Bertram “Bertie” Wooster who is one half of the literary duo Jeeves and Wooster. Reginald Jeeves is Bertie's valet or as he likes to call himself “a gentleman's personal gentleman” (*Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit* 199). The stories about these two men usually consist of Bertie wanting to help a friend, getting into trouble himself and Jeeves sorting it all out in the end. They are fairly simple in form and the characters in these books are to the vast majority stock characters as is common practice in the comedy genre. A stock character is a literary term that describes and simplifies a person. These type of characters can be defined by one or very few traits. The Jeeves and Wooster series offer an array of stock characters: the clever butler, the dimwitted upperclass young man, the bossy aunt, the romantic girl with her head in the clouds and so on. Stock characters are used because they are easily identifiable and predictable for the sake of comedy. This may sound innocent enough but historically stock characters have been criticised for promoting negative stereotypes of different ethnicities. The point that is attempted to be made here is that just because something is comedy does not mean it is without ideology. The literary theorist Fredric Jameson claims that all texts are political and by following his lead we can assume that even though the Jeeves and Wooster series is not written to be taken seriously or say anything about society, critique or otherwise, it still inadvertently does.

Since the Jeeves and Wooster novels are not aimed at being taken seriously they, like many other comical texts are overlooked by serious literary criticism. Jameson's theory is that all literature is political regardless of form and that it always promotes a certain ideology or mode of production.

This essay aims to investigate what kind of political ideology is promoted in primarily three
of Wodehouse's novels: *Right Ho, Jeeves* (1934), *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit* (1955) and *Much Obliged, Jeeves* (1971). This essay will also explore how gender is presented, what function it has and how it is related to power and ideology in these novels.

**Theoretical Framework**

The analytical framework will be constructed from the following line of works: Fredric Jameson's work on political interpretation of texts will be used as it is presented in his study *The Political Unconscious – Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. To shed further light on the ideologies at play in these novels we shall examine theories concerning the position of power known as the gatekeeper, as it is understood by Rebecca C Harris, and the role of the unreliable narrator as described by Bruno Zerweck. The concept of Homosociality and gender will also be explored as it is introduced by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in her study *Between Men – English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. Also, gender will be analysed as it is demonstrated by Simone De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*.

The question of social class plays an integral part in Wodehouse's novels in that Wooster is an aristocrat and Jeeves is his manservant. Interestingly, the class dimension is both emphasised and played down, a fact that calls for the investigation of the political dimension of the texts. In his study, Fredric Jameson demonstrates that all literary texts are political. He takes his stance in Marxist literary theory in order to show how conflicting ideologies and philosophies intermingle and interrelate in different texts (3). According to Jameson, there are three different “semantic horizons”; the political, the social and the historical horizons, which may be seen as stages texts pass through (60-61). All literary texts go through these three stages but it is important to note that the different levels do not disappear when the text goes from one stage to another; they are still
there but they change in character depending on when and where the texts are interpreted (61). At
the political level “the 'text' or object of study will tend to coincide with the individual literary work
or cultural artifact” (62). This means that the text is simply assumed to exist on its own and not
linked to its historical or social context. If, at the political level the text strives to resolve an
ideological conflict or contradiction, this is done by what Jameson describes as a symbolic act. An
example of a symbolic act is wish-fulfilment or a happy end in a work of literature where it is
highly unlikely that the same contradiction would be happily resolved in reality. These symbolic
acts are not always performed at a conscious level. The symbolic acts serve to establish the
ideology that the text promotes even though it might not be aware of doing it.

The second horizon, the social, has “widened to include the social order” (61). Now the text
is no longer only confined to being viewed as an individual text. Here Jameson introduces his
theory of what he calls the ideologeme “that is, the smallest intelligible unit of the essentially
antagonistic collective discourses of social classes” (61). The subversive makes itself known in this
phase and the contradictions that can appear between social classes are never really completely
resolved. Instead the symbolic act makes sure that closure is found in the text but not by solving the
conflict in itself. An example of this type of symbolic act is having the lower classes say that they
are happy to work despite the circumstances.

The historical level is what Jameson refers to as “the ultimate horizon” (79). The reason for
this stage being called ultimate is because it is not possible to interpret a text without being
influenced by the historical time when the interpretation is made. Here, Jameson's thinking derives
from the Marxist theory of the mode of production. The mode of production is the way in which
people organised society around the distribution of resources in order to survive during a given
period in time. During the time of Feudalism land was the most important resource for survival
followed by Capitalism - the exchange of money for goods and for labour - during the industrial era.
The important thing to note here is that the mode of production holds power over what ideology it is
possible to embrace. Jameson explains it the following way:

These modes, or "stages" of human society, have traditionally included the following: primitive communism or tribal society (the horde), the *gens* or hierarchical kinship societies (neolithic society), the Asiatic mode of production (so-called Oriental despotism), the *polis* or an oligarchical slaveholding society (the ancient mode of production), feudalism, capitalism, and communism (with a good deal of debate as to whether the "transitional" stage between these last - sometimes called "socialism" - is a genuine mode of production in its own right or not). What is more significant in the present context is that even this schematic or mechanical conception of historical "stages" … includes the notion of a cultural dominant or form of ideological coding specific to each mode of production. (74-75)

There are two different modes of production that stand in an antagonistic relation to each other and are found in the Jeeves and Wooster novels. The first is Conservatism which is linked to the old code of conduct and chivalry associated with aristocratic Feudalism. The second is Capitalism that according to Jameson sprung out of the Enlightenment where the bourgeoisie wanted to gain access to power and consequently struggled against the idea that a person was born into the ruling classes (3). The conflict could in other words be called: old money and values versus new ones. The novels deal with these ideological problems in different ways which shall be looked further into in this study.

Gatekeeping, according to Rebecca C Harris' article with the same name, is a power position that exists between two different poles. The gatekeeper can decide what information can reach from one pole to another and in this sense control what information may go through to the other pole. In essence this kind of power allows for the gatekeeper to effectively manipulate both sides. In reality the gatekeeper's actual influence, Harris explains, is disputed but there are many examples in the
novel when the character, Jeeves, uses this position as a tool for manipulation and effectively overrides Wooster's authority. Studying the way Jeeves uses the power reveals some of the ideologies at play.

In the Wodehouse novels we have a first person narrator that also is the protagonist of the stories. Two defining characteristics lifted by Bruno Zerweck in his article “Historicizing Unreliable Narration: Unreliability and Cultural Discourse in Narrative Fiction” are commonly associated with unreliable narration and also apply in this study. Firstly it occurs “in personalized situations of narration” (Zerweck). This means that there can be either a first person narrator or that the narration is focalised from a personal point of view. Secondly the unreliable narrator seems to unintentionally incriminate himself. There are indicators in the text that show the reader that things might not be as the narrator suggests. Zerweck writes that this self-incrimination is something that happens in novels with unreliable narration and can be found through inconsistencies between how the narrator perceives an event in the novel and how the reader interprets the same event and this is also done for comic effect. But unreliable narration is not only used for the sake of comedy. It is also used in literature with a more serious tone. This type of narration can show two different ideologies at once - Wooster seeing things one way and the novel saying something else.

The novels are interspersed with issues of gender and power – both between the different sexes and within the same one. In *Between Men* Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick writes about how male homosocial desire is a driving force for character motivation in literature. According to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick male homosocial desire is a non-sexual desire toward other men. She argues that in a society where men have more power than women, there will be homosocial bonding between men. This means that men will promote the interests of other men because they identify with and encourage each other’s needs and ambitions (1-3). She chooses to call it homosocial desire because the word desire visualizes a structure whereas the word love just conveys an emotion. Homosociality does not refer to homosexuality. In fact homophobia is common in literature
featuring homosocial relationships (Sedgwick 20).

Interesting for this study is also how Sedgwick connects the gender system to the social class system:

[T]he emerging pattern of male friendship, mentorship, entitlement, rivalry, and hetero- and homosexuality was in an intimate and shifting relation to class; … no element of that pattern can be understood outside of its relation to women and the gender system as a whole. (1)

Social class cannot be divorced from the gender system as a whole and this has interesting implications in the novels for how women and men use class as a way to effectively hinder other groups to enter their realm and reinforce the world view that they represent. For instance, in the novels Wooster is a member of a gentleman's club called the Drones Club. The members of this club are all male and from the higher social stratum. This kind of establishment separates the different sexes and social classes from intermingling with this rich and highly influential clique of people.

Of interest is also how the mechanics of love triangles function and how they promote male bonding without threatening the heterosexual norm. Sedgwick argues that it is common in love triangles that the relationship between the two males is as strong or stronger than that of the female love interest (21). Men use women as objects to win acclaim and admiration from other men and in essence to get closer to other men without having their heterosexuality threatened. Sedgwick quotes the character Sparkish in the play The Country Wife when he says: “It may be I love to have rivals in a wife;' since 'loving alone is as dull as eating alone” (51).

In Simone De Beauvoir's study The Second Sex the role of the woman is described as limited and very much a false image or myth as she puts it. This theory is based on the understanding that men are seen as the norm and women are a simple aberration of the norm – an “other” (267). Being an other is not just connected to gender, according to Beauvoir, it also concerns black people and
other groups who are seen as subordinate by the dominating group. As long as there is a power hierarchy there is always going to be a division of people into different groups. The groups with less power are often connected with the concept of “mystery” (270). Beauvoir points out that mystery is used as an excuse for not putting oneself in the other's situation. The other is simply called mysterious and left at that. The consequences of not seeing a group of people as subjects in their own right and dismissing those people's behaviour as simply being mysterious is that it allows for mistreatment and ignorance of their human needs and wants. The mystery of femininity is according to Beauvoir one of the strongest myths and it forces women to act in a certain way to be viewed as feminine. “If the definition provided for this concept is contradicted by the behavior of flesh-and-blood women, it is the latter who are wrong: we are told not that Femininity is a false entity, but that the women concerned are not feminine” (267). Included in the myth of femininity is that a woman often is two-faced and manipulative – a bad woman. She can act as saint but also as demon (268).

**The Gatekeeper**

Jeeves is the one that always sorts out the conflicts in the end and this implies that Jeeves is the person who has the actual power in the novels despite the fact that he has a lower social standing in comparison to Wooster. However, Jeeves does not use his power to gain more benefits for himself. Instead he uses his skills to put things back the way they were before the different troubles arose. In a sense he is the conservative force working to preserve the current state of affairs. Because Jeeves does not wish to stir things up within the higher social stratum he is supporting the current social order. Jeeves functions as a gatekeeper in Wooster's life. He is, as Harris explains, in the key position in between two different poles and able to manipulate the information that goes from one
pole to another. In *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit* there is a scene where Wooster receives a letter asking him for a loan of a thousand pounds for a play. This letter is never read by Wooster himself. Instead Jeeves reads it:

>'The letter is of considerable length, sir. Perhaps if I were to give you its substance?'

>'Do so, Jeeves. All ready at this end.'

>'It is from a Mr Percy Gorringe, sir. Omitting extraneous matter and concentrating on essentials, Mr Gorringe wishes to borrow a thousand pounds from you.' (9-10)

After a further discussion on the matter where some details are explained the discussion is finally settled with the following dialogue:

>'Would you back a play, Jeeves?'

>'No, sir.'

>'Nor would I.' (12)

Later in the same novel Wooster walks in on Jeeves in the middle of a telephone call. Wooster assumes from the fact that “he had not chucked in a lot of ’Sirs’” (37) in the conversation that he was talking to “some pal of his” (37). This is not the case, instead Jeeves pretends to be Wooster while talking to Mr Gorringe about the loan. Jeeves justifies this by stating that he believed that it would spare Wooster some “discomfort and embarrassment” (37). The reader never finds out what was specifically said in the letter or the phone call but it can be assumed that it would not have been impossible to persuade Wooster to agree to the loan. Jeeves effectively uses his gatekeeper status to make sure that there will be no sponsoring of the play.

The two different scenes can be viewed as a way to establish Wooster's and Jeeves's relationship and gives some primary information about their characters. It also shows how power over decision-making works in their relationship. Jeeves takes control and Wooster is more than happy to give it to him. Wooster was delighted that Jeeves took care of the telephone call and even
believed it to be in line with the “feudal thing” (37). The feudal spirit is something that is often related to in the novels and its meaning to Wooster is never explicitly explained. Feudalism is a concept that describes the social, economic and political order that existed during the middle ages. The power belonged to local lords and was distributed down to others demanding homage and services in return. Wooster seems to expect something similar from Jeeves – he expects Jeeves to always have his best interests at heart. This shows Wooster's Conservative ideology and it also exhibits some of the antagonism that Jameson claims is inherent in texts. Wooster is Jeeves' employer and Wooster is paying for his services. These transactions are, then, linked to Capitalism and the bourgeois' ideology of liberalism. This implies that the private and the public spheres are held separate through the exchange of money. However, Wooster and Jeeves both seem to have values and expectations that belong to a Feudal/Conservative sphere. Thus, there is a clash between the different ideologies' attitudes toward what is viewed as private and what is seen as public. In Conservatism the private realm overlaps the public one. Wooster's high expectations of Jeeves to first and foremost protect him, and his absolute trust in Jeeves suggest a closer relationship than that of employer and employee. In other words, their relationship represents an asymmetrical coexistence between Feudal values and Capitalist practice.

But why does Jeeves not want to sponsor the play? The book, *Spindrift*, it is based on is a popular one that was “well received by the intelligentsia” (11) although it is not to Jeeves' taste. When Wooster asks him what he thought of the novel he replies: “[I]t seemed to me a somewhat immature production lacking in significant form. My personal tastes lie more in the direction of Dostoevsky and the great Russians” (11). Jeeves' motives are interesting on several levels: The first is that Mr Gorringe who is asking for the loan does not belong to a high social class. The second is that the fictional novel *Spindrift* is written by a woman. He also states that he prefers Dostoevsky and the Great Russians, who are all men. The third is that this woman happens to be Lady Florence Craye. Florence is a recurring character that Wooster at more than one occasion finds himself
engaged to against his own wishes. She is portrayed as bossy, critical and striving to change the men she comes in contact with.

The fact of the man, Mr Gorringe, asking for the money not being a part of the higher social stratum and that the play could be seen as venture capital puts the circumstances of the loan dangerously close to that of Capitalist practice. Since Wooster represents old money the implications of him helping out a play would make him openly promote Capitalist ideology. Regardless of how successful the play would be the ideological stance as Conservative is more important than the promise of financial success. The play is still financed in the end but not by Wooster or any other aristocrat. Instead it turns out that Mr Gorringe himself can pay for the production. It is revealed that he is a writer of what can only be assumed to be sensational mystery novels under the pseudonym of “Rex West” (39) of which Wooster is a great fan. This revelation can be seen as a symbolic act that keeps both ideologies separated but settles the initial conflict.

The fact that the writer of Spindrift is a woman and that this particular woman is Lady Florence Craye, the on and off fiancée of Wooster (and other men) is interesting when it comes to homosocial desire. She is a threat to the homosocial bond between Wooster and Jeeves and her tendency to be engaged to and then leaving and/or being left puts her close to the bad woman stereotype suggested by Beauvoir. The homosociality and feminist aspects will be studied in greater detail at a later point in this essay.

The power play between Jeeves and Wooster is in harmony in the novels when Jeeves effectively takes care of business and Wooster is willing to let him do it. When things are not in harmony it is often Wooster who tries to solve or do something on his own and fails miserably. When this story is repeated from novel to novel a pattern emerges that says something about the underlying ideology of it. Jameson speaks about how ideology is a prominent part in all text in his study - everything written has some kind of link to politics even if it claims to or not (4). He argues that it is always important to be aware of this political side of texts, regardless what the text might
be about. Failing to do this, according to Jameson, leads to "something worse than an error: namely, a symptom and a reinforcement of the reification and privatization of contemporary life" (4).

Furthermore, there should be no distinction between different types of texts:

Such a distinction reconfirms that structural, experiential, and conceptual gap between the public and private, between the social and the psychological, or the political and the poetic, between history or society and the 'individual,' which – the tendential law of social life under capitalism – maims our existence as individual subjects and paralyzes our thinking about time and change just as surely as it alienates us from our speech itself. (4)

In other words, all literature is to some extent underpinned by politics. In the Jeeves and Wooster novels the way Capitalism, Conservatism, gender and power over decision-making are portrayed can give an indication of what kind of ideology the book promotes. In the passage about the loan it can be seen that Wooster represents the upper classes and the man who wants the loan is a representative of a liberal capitalist world view. But it is Jeeves who makes sure no money transaction is made. He is portrayed as a very intelligent man and he has power over Wooster's decisions. In the novels he is a representation of Meritocracy. He has no inherited power or capital but his brains give him the unique power position of gatekeeper. What can be extracted from the passage about the loan is that the ideology of venture capitalism is not promoted because Mr Gorringe does not receive his loan from Wooster. However, conservatism is not promoted either, at least not in a clear-cut way because it would require Wooster to be active in the decision-making. Meritocracy is held as the highest form of power in this sequence but since it is effectively doing the bidding of Conservatism it has a supporting function more than being a social power on its own.

The pattern found in the Jeeves and Wooster novels makes the reader draw the conclusion that Jeeves is the one person to be trusted and in a way he is the fixed ideal. If Jeeves says something or comes with advice it is more than likely that following his suggestions will lead to a
happy or desired outcome in the world of the books. In this sense Jeeves' actions work as Jameson's symbolic act – the act that serves to negotiate contradictions and antagonism by not actually solving them but by providing a pleasant outcome. Even though Jeeves could outwit Wooster and take over his fortune he chooses not to because he is happy with his position – which could be linked to the symbolic act at the second political horizon Jameson mentions.

Jeeves being the ideal can also imply a critical stance towards the higher social classes because they cannot solve their own problems. However, since Jeeves always puts things back the way they were, effectively stopping the main character from developing, it is implied that status quo is to be preferred. In essence the stories end the way they started; with Wooster as a happy and careless rich aristocratic bachelor and Jeeves as his loyal valet. The circular structure of these stories also effectively maintains the homosocial state of affairs, a point to which I shall return.

The Unreliable Narrator

All three primary novels featured in this study are narrated from a first person point of view. The narrator is the same as the protagonist, Bertie Wooster. Wooster is quickly established as an unreliable narrator, in Zerweck's definition of the term, at the beginning of all three of the novels. In Right Ho, Jeeves it is shown by Bertie not being able to start the novel off in a conventional way. The novel begins with a dialogue between him and Jeeves, but Wooster interrupts himself mid sentence claiming that he has “gone of the rails” (9). Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit has Wooster singing a romantic and sentimental song in the bathtub and then immediately telling the reader that he is not feeling “boomp-s-a-daisy” (7). Much Obliged, Jeeves finds Wooster eating breakfast in a splendid mood but constantly having to ask Jeeves for the right expressions and words to describe how he is feeling. Bertie Wooster is an unreliable narrator in the sense that he does not deliberately
try to mislead the reader, he just lacks judgement and self-awareness.

The unreliability of the narrator is firmly grounded in all novels and the reader is constantly reminded that Wooster's judgement cannot be trusted. This effect is often reached with bathos which is an “unsuccessful, and therefore ludicrous, attempt to portray pathos” (Encyclopedia Britannica). When Wooster makes numerous attempts at being serious, it often falls flat and in all and throughout the three books lines of this type can be found: “If inception is the word I want” (Right Ho, Jeeves 10), “If juxtaposition is the word I want” (Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit 13) “I was conscious of a strange exhilaration, if I got the word right” (Much Obliged, Jeeves 7).

But why is it important that Wooster is seen as unreliable and what effects does it have on the novels? Literary critic David Lodge argues in The Art of Fiction that the purpose of an unreliable narrator “is indeed to reveal an interesting gap between appearance and reality” (155). This gap allows for interpretation and makes the reader question the information that is presented in the novels. If Wooster says something or thinks something the reader is invited to analyse the meaning of what is said but also how it will be perceived. This style lends itself well to comedy because it allows for the reader to know more than the protagonist and the intricacies are showcased well.

More important for this study it establishes the main protagonist as someone who is slightly silly and hence does not need to be taken very seriously. It is here satirical elements of the novels make themselves known. Looking at this from a social class perspective Wooster represents the higher social stratum and when he is shown as someone with poor judgement the aristocracy is judged by association. It is not only Wooster who comes across as silly in these novels. His aunts and his friends who belong to the same social level are not portrayed as reliable or sensible very often. The only reliable character is Jeeves.

This is relevant to Jameson's theory; if people of the higher social class appear silly to the reader, this says something about how they are portrayed and this in turn shows a political tendency.
Aristocrats are represented as underserving of their position, while Jeeves is promoted as a reliable character. This pits two different value systems against each other - Conservatism contra Meritocracy. However, since Jeeves, the dominant power, always puts things right, i.e reinstates the status quo he promotes. It is therefore not possible to say that the novels are entirely critical of the higher social classes since that system is not fundamentally questioned.

**Homosociality**

Wooster is striving to remain a bachelor. He is often engaged to different women but it is never by his own volition. These engagements happen because of misunderstandings or women simply wanting retaliation against their previous fiancées. Wooster agrees to these engagements because he strives to be a chivalrous man – something that is linked to his ideas of Feudalism. Wooster explains it in *Right Ho, Jeeves* in the following way:

> I couldn't back out. If a girl thinks a man is proposing to her, and on that understanding books him up, he can't explain to her that she has got hold of entirely the wrong end of the stick and that he hadn't the smallest intention of suggesting anything of the kind. (115)

In *Much Obliged, Jeeves* Wooster's reason for remaining single is almost identical: “If a girl thinks you're in love with her and says she will marry you, you can't very well voice a preference for being dead in a ditch” (10). His reasoning for not wanting to marry is that he feels that if he was to marry he would have to change his lifestyle and his ways. In *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit* he reflects over why he does not want to get married and after some contemplation where he accuses women of trying to mould the men they marry scarcely before they have “shaken the rice from their hair” he ends up stating that he likes “B. Wooster the way he is. Lay off him, I say. Don't try to change him,
Sexual desire does not play a big part in the novels. Wooster even seems to find physical contact repulsive. In *Right Ho, Jeeves* there is a scene where a woman is so grateful to him that she gives him a kiss on the forehead. Wooster's feels that the event was “[u]npleasant, of course, but, as Anatole would say, I can take a few smooths with a rough” (285).

What does all this mean? It could be connected to Sedgwick's theories of male homosocial desire. Wooster's desire to remain a bachelor can be linked to his homosocial desire toward Jeeves. If Wooster was to marry he would have to separate from Jeeves as his valet. In a collection of short stories called *Carry On, Jeeves* this fear of separation is voiced. The short story is called “Bertie changes his mind” and as an exception features Jeeves as the narrator. Jeeves finds Bertie in an unusually somber mood complaining about the monotony of it all. Jeeves assumes that this could mean that Wooster is considering matrimony. This does not sit well with Jeeves:

> It disturbed me, therefore, I am free to admit, when Mr Wooster addressed me in this fashion. I had no desire to sever a connection so pleasant in every respect as his and mine had been, and my experience is that when the wife comes in at the front door the valet of bachelor days goes out at the back. (256)

It turns out however that Wooster is not thinking of marriage but of having children. He is considering selling his apartment, buying a house and living with his sister and her three girls. Jeeves is not fond of this idea either because it would mean: “the finish of our cosy bachelor establishment if it came into being as a practical proposition” (257). Instead he suggests Wooster should take a holiday. Wooster does not enjoy himself during this break and cuts it off early. On the way back to London they pick up a young girl who presumably is truanting from a girl school. Jeeves takes the opportunity to manipulate the situation so that Wooster is forced to hold a speech in front of the girl school's pupils. This becomes very embarrassing for Wooster who is utterly unprepared for the task and is not a very good public speaker to begin with. The final blow to
Wooster's plans arise after the following dialogue:

'Jeeves – er – did the – er – dear little souls giggle much in your day?'

'Practically without cessation, sir'

...

'Oh no, I say, Jeeves, not really?'

'Yes, sir. They derived great enjoyment from the pastime.'

'I'd no idea small girls were such demons.'

'More deadly than the male, sir.' (264)

The interesting thing about this is that Wooster actually expresses a will to change but is manipulated and made to stay the same by another man. This is repeated in the novels of this study. In *Right Ho, Jeeves* there is a battle of wills regarding a mess-jacket that Wooster wants to wear but Jeeves finds “quite unsuitable” (21). This plot ends with Jeeves “accidentally” scorching the jacket with a hot iron rendering it useless. In *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit* Wooster has grown a moustache that Jeeves describes as a “dark stain like mulligatawny soup” (15). This moustache is shaved off at the end of the novel.

In effect, Jeeves essentially changes Wooster - the very thing he accuses women of doing and the very cause of Wooster's not wanting to marry. This is where the novels' theme of homosocial desire really shines through. It does not appear to be change in itself that is the threat towards Wooster. Instead it is women who pose a threat, when in relation to Wooster, to the established homosocial order between him and Jeeves. This seems to take homosocial desire in another direction through its intermingling with Feudal loyalty. Sedgwick writes that “to be fully a man requires having obtained the instrumental use of a woman, having risked transformation by her” (40). Wooster does not want to take this risk to be changed which could signify that he actually is not fully a man, at least not the post Enlightenment where masculinity implies individual independence. Wooster and Jeeves's homosociality is deeply coloured by Feudal loyalty.
Sedgwick mentions the love triangle as a means for men to get closer to other men without threatening the norm of heterosexuality. Love triangles are very common in the Jeeves and Wooster novels but not in the same way as Sedgwick theorizes it. Since Wooster never intends to become entangled in the love affairs of others, the triangle is not identical to the one Sedgwick presents. Although it could be said that the novels are playing with the readers expectations of how a conventional love triangle usually plays out for the sake of comedy.

In *Right Ho, Jeeves* Wooster is drawn into two different love triangles. The first one involves helping a childhood friend, “Gussie” Fink-Nottle, court a female acquaintance, the romantic Madeleine Basset. When Wooster tries to put down some “preliminary spadework” (104), meaning he is going to put in a good word for his friend to the lady in question, she misunderstands and thinks that it is Wooster who is in love with her. The second triangle involves his cousin Angela and her fiancée “Tuppy” Glossop. Tuppy is also an old friend of Wooster's. Angela and Tuppy have broken up the engagement over a small and insignificant squabble and Wooster is determined to get them back together. But his efforts lead to Tuppy believing that Wooster is in fact pursuing Angela for himself. Angela is never really interested in Wooster but she uses him to get back at Tuppy.

The Wooster – Angela – Tuppy triangle is most interesting from a homosocial perspective because it showcases the importance of approval from other males. In the events leading up to the block quote below, Wooster attempts to speak with Angela alone in the garden but because of wet grass she wishes to go back inside. Wooster, who is planning to try to manipulate her to go back to Tuppy, does not wish her to leave so he offers her to put her shoes in his lap. Angela agrees to this and says that he may tickle her ankles. Angela and Wooster have known each other since Wooster “wore sailor suits and she hadn't any front teeth” (229) so he does not think anything of it. At the same time Tuppy, unbeknownst to Wooster, is hiding in the bushes. The reader is aware of this because the bushes rattle at certain points in the conversation and Angela seems to be transfixed by them. Wooster, as the unreliable narrator he is, simply assumes it is some kind of animal. Wooster's
plan is to talk ill of Tuppy in hopes that her love for him will blossom up and she will rise to his defence. This naturally fails and at the end of the conversation, after Angela has left, a furious Tuppy emerges. Tuppy accuses Wooster of trying to backtalk him and wanting Angela for himself. Wooster denies this but Tuppy is not convinced:

'You tickled her ankles.'

'In a purely cousinly spirit. It didn't mean a thing. Why, dash it, you must know that in the deeper and truer sense I wouldn't touch Angela with a barge pole.'

'O? And why not? Not good enough for you?' (172)

This scene shows the importance of other men's approval of the lady in question. When Wooster puts Angela down as a woman not worth pursuing, he omits the symbolic worth of her – her value as a trophy. If the woman is not worth pursuing by another man, of similar social standing as his own, then the desired effect of bringing men closer together will fail.

The story in *Right ho, Jeeves* ends in a kind of deus ex machina fashion with Jeeves back at the reins. The whole party has been locked out of the country house and Wooster is sent on an unnecessary bicycle ride in order to collect some spare keys. When Wooster returns all conflicts are reconciled. Jeeves explains that it was all a matter of psychology – everyone became united in their anger toward Wooster. Jeeves then presented them with the keys and they all felt sorry for Wooster having to cycle several miles for nothing. The love triangles ends with both Tuppy and Angela reunited and Gussie and Madeleine engaged. In other words this ending can be seen in the light of Jameson's theory as a symbolic act that smooths over conflicts but does not solve them.

The love triangle in *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit*, unlike the ones in *Right ho, Jeeves*, ends with the original couple going separate ways. The love triangle in this novel features an old schoolmate of Wooster's: D'arcy “Stilton” Cheesewright and Lady Florence Craye. Florence is the recurring character in the novels and is often described as beautiful, brainy and extremely bossy. This love triangle does have the effect of bringing the men closer together. D'arcy even goes as far
as saying: “I see now that I owe you a deep debt of gratitude. But for you, I might still be engaged to that pill Florence. Thank you, Bertie, old man” (203).

This novel also presents another opportunity to put homosocial desire between men in correlation with the desire for a heterosexual relationship. Wooster has managed to end up in Florence's wardrobe – the reason for him being there has of course nothing to do with him wanting to court Florence. Instead it is a simple mistake of taking the wrong room. D'arcy comes into the room to talk to Florence and Wooster hides. Florence proclaims that she will marry Wooster which startles him and betrays his hiding place. D'arcy is furious and wishes to fight with him outside. There is no fight, however, because D'arcy has money on Wooster winning a dart tournament held annually at the Drones club. The Drones club is a gentlemen's club in London in which D'arcy and Wooster are members. The sum that D'arcy has to gain on Wooster winning is almost 60 pounds. This is of course quite a lot of money for the first part of the 20th century but in the same novel there is mention of pearl necklaces bought to two different wives for 5000 pounds each so it must be considered a relatively small amount compared to winning the love of a desired female. It does in other words not seem like the amount itself is high enough to make D'arcy back out of a fight of honour on its own. Instead, it seems more on the line of saving his face to of the other members of the Drones club. The Drones club is described as a place where the members often drink, smoke and generally gossip and make fun of each other. Wooster mentions in *Right Ho, Jeeves* that Tuppy at one time pushed him into the club's swimming pool and that the event still is embarrassing for him many years later. It can therefore be assumed that it is not only the money that stops D'arcy from beating Wooster up. It can also be linked to how the other men at the Drones club would look at it. The desire to be closer to the men in the Drones outweighs the desire to stand up for his fiancée. To generalise it could be said that men's homosocial desire in these novels exceeds the desire to engage with women.
Women and Power

The female characters although different from one another still fall under what Beauvoir describes as being “other” than the male ones. There are several instances when one can find Beauvoir's concepts in the books. Women as mysterious entities that Wooster never really can relate or have a uncomplicated relation to is an ongoing theme throughout the novels. It is shown in passages of this kind: “Those who know Bertram Wooster best are aware that he is not a man who readily slops over when speaking of the opposite sex. He is cool and critical. He weighs his words” (Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit 173). This passage shows that he is tense when talking about women who he refers to as “the opposite sex” implying that women are the opposite of men – an absolute other.

The idea of women as two-faced also occurs in the books. In Right Ho, Jeeves Wooster reflects on Angela's behaviour towards Tuppy:

Odd how you never realize that every girl is at heart a vicious specimen until something goes wrong with her love affair … A simple, jolly, kindly young pimple she had always struck me as – the sort you could more or less rely on not to hurt a fly. But here she was now laughing heartlessly – at least, I seemed to remember hearing her laugh heartlessly – like something cold and callous out of a sophisticated talkie, and fairly spitting on her hands in her determination to bring Tuppy's grey hairs in sorrow to the grave. (229)

In Much Obliged, Jeeves even the romantic airhead, Madeleine Basset, breaks off an engagement because her fiancée is considering exchanging his inherited title of Lord Sidcup to become Mr Spode in order to be able to go into politics in the house of commons (151). Madeleine's decision is met with understanding from both Wooster and his aunt Dahlia. Dahlia reasons about it the following way and even claims to have done the same in her situation:

I can understand how she feels. No joke for a girl who thinks she's going to be the
countess of Sidcup to have the fellow say 'April fools, my little chickadee. What you're going to be is Mrs Spode'. If I had been told at Madeleine's age that Tom had been made a peer and I then learned that he was going to back out of it and I wouldn't be able to call myself Lady Market Snodsbury after all, I'd have kicked like a mule. Titles to a girl are like catnip to a cat. (151)

Not only does this quotation show Madeleine Basset's two-facedness; it also exhibits how intricately social power is woven into the mix with gender. We have the power of politics – where Lord Sidcup is considering dropping his title to be in the house of commons. He is in other words in a sense moving from a Conservative life style to one closer connected with Capitalism. The idea of this transition, regardless of the influence on society that it would entail, does not seem to have any worth in the eyes of the higher social classes. The female power position here is limited to choosing who to marry and in this way it also promotes inherited power – Conservatism - over power by Democracy. The action in itself has this affect but it should be noted that since both Wooster and his aunt are unreliable their views do not necessarily correspond with the views that the novel itself promotes.

Wooster's aunt Dahlia is an interesting character in the novels because she seems to have a lot of power over Bertie. When she calls he usually comes. She is a bossy loudmouth who constantly makes jibes at Bertie. However, she usually has to bribe him to come to her at Brinkley Court with her French chef, Anatole's cooking. What is interesting here is that it is only with the help of men that she can get her will through. She uses her husband to finance her paper “Milady's boudoir” (Right Ho, Jeeves 68) and her chef to make Bertie come to her aid. She is by no means an independent woman and can very much be seen as an “other”, in Beauvoir's term. But she is not passive, gentle and kind – in other words she is not very feminine. This fact, combined with that she is a married relative of Wooster and never pressures him to marriage at least not in the texts featured in this study, makes her no threat to his homosocial lifestyle and hence the female character that he
is closest to.

The book *Much obliged, Jeeves* is the most recent novel in this study, first published 1971, and it is the only one that acknowledges the female sex as a power to be reckoned with on the political scene. Although it should be noted that at the same time this happens at the cost of femininity.

Wooster is going to help yet another childhood friend, Harold “Ginger” Winship to win a by-election where he is the candidate for the Conservatives (19). Ginger is not running for the election out of idealistic values. His reason for wanting to win is to stay engaged to the recurring female character Lady Florence Craye. Florence has put Ginger up to the task because she thinks he ought to have a career. Wooster is horrified with his friend being tied up with Florence because of her habit and ambition to change the men she is engaged to. He asks Ginger if he wants a career, to which Ginger answers: “Not much, but she insisted” (24). Still, Wooster does not want to hurt his friend by criticising Florence's ways and is instead persuaded to help with the canvassing for the election.

Ginger prepares Wooster for the canvassing with platitudes in the style of cutting taxes, straightening out the foreign policy, double the trade, “two cars in the garage and two chickens in the pot for everyone and give the pound the shot in the arm it had been clamouring for for years” (82). Wooster starts off in a great mood but at the very first house he visits he is brought down. The first blow is that the one he is going to canvass for is a woman and not a man which is something he has not been mentally prepared for. The reason given for his awkwardness is that he had prepared a joke to break the ice but deems it not really suitable for “the ears of the gentler sex” (81). Again this scene shows Wooster's desire for homosociality and his views of women as something that must be treated differently to men. The woman he finds himself face to face with is not only female she is also the candidate for the opposition and described in the following way:

Mrs McCorkadale was what I would call a grim woman … well up in the class of
Jael the wife of Heber and the Madame Whoever-it-was who used to sit and knit at the foot of the guillotine during the French Revolution. She had a beaky nose, tight thin lips, and her eye could have been used for splitting logs in the teak forests of Borneo. Seeing her steadily and seeing her whole, as the expression is, one marvelled at the intrepidity of Mr McCorkadale in marrying her – A man obviously whom nothing could daunt. (81)

There are many interesting things to bring up in the above passage when it comes to gender and power. Mrs McCorkadale is described as a terror. She represents some kind of threat to Wooster and his kind. It appears that this threat could be twofold. Wooster refers Jael the wife of Heber a bible reference where a woman murders a man with a tent peg in his sleep in order to free her people from oppression. In other words, this is a woman who poses a very real threat to men who are against her.

The same goes for the reference to the French Revolution where the growing bourgeoisie revolts against the aristocracy's inherited power. The two references reveal Wooster's fear of women in power and of structural changes in society both in combination and set side by side. Women may kill you in your sleep which means that it is impossible to have a relaxed relationship to them. Furthermore Mrs McCorkadale is not powerful by inheritance, she works as a barrister, and is not a lady or countess but a “Mrs” which makes the differences between her and Wooster even more salient. The reader is faced with a political antagonism between Labour/Socialism versus Conservatism and Capitalism, which have joined forces against the Socialist threat against the system in which they coexist. Wooster thinks of the French Revolution when he looks at her and in a way considers that social changes may lead to him losing his head while a cold hearted woman is knitting – creating – a new world indifferent to whatever fate will be bestowed upon him. Mrs McCorkadale becomes “the McCorkadale” (82) in Wooster's mind. She is not fit to have a female epithet which can be connected to Beauvoir's idea about the myth of femininity. If woman is
deemed unfeminine she is the one who should change, not the myth (267).

Homosocial desire can also be read into this quote through Wooster's contemplation of the fearlessness of Mr McCorkadale. Wooster cannot understand how anyone could marry this unfeminine woman and this can be seen as Wooster failing to find any value in her as a means to getting closer to other men. Later in the text the reader finds out that Mr McCorkadale “… got run over by a municipal tram” (88) to which Wooster responds “I don't blame him. I'd have done the same myself in his place. It is the only course to pursue when you're married to a woman like that” (88). These statements further support the idea that she serves no purpose from a homosocial desire standpoint.

The fact of Mr McCorkadale's presumed suicide is interesting when put in relation to the connection made between Mrs McCorkadale and Jael from the bible. Wooster implies that she drove him to suicide which in a sense could mean that she is responsible for his death. It is not as bloody as hammering a tent peg through somebody's temple in their sleep but it does imply a connection. The parallel could show that she had to drive a man to suicide in order to free her people – the women – in order to gain some influence and social power.

It could be easy to assume, because of the above stated, that this novel is purely sexist and reinforcing the ideology of Conservatism as the ideal one. But it is not this simple. Wooster is an unreliable narrator and the way he sees things are not always connected with how the reader might perceive the events. Even if Wooster feels a certain way it does not necessarily follow that the novel as a whole shares his opinions or promotes the same ideals as him. In fact the novel shows Mrs McCorkadale to be an honest and fair minded type of person. She is offered an opportunity to get her hands on some incriminating material about Ginger's background that will make him lose the election. Not only does she not even consider the proposal, but she also goes directly to find Ginger to warn him about the foul play. This puts her in a unique position in comparison with the other characters throughout the books who intrigue and go behind the backs of each other. She is
portrayed as proud, intelligent, honourable and witty. Although she is the butt of a lot of jokes, these jokes seem to say more about the other characters than about her. In the scene where she is going to inform Ginger of the foul play, Ginger is not available leaving aunt Dahlia to be the one she informs. Mrs McCorkadale explains that she has had a “disgraceful proposition” (101). This sentence is of course misunderstood by both Aunt Dahlia and Wooster who think she is referring to an indecent proposal and they are shocked about it because of her looks. Mrs McCorkadale ends up winning the election but here it is important to note that she does not win it because she has the most support to start with. She wins by default because Ginger has realised that he does not love Florence after all and has instead fallen for his secretary. In order to get out of the engagement to Florence he is advised by Jeeves to declare that he has been converted to Mrs McCorkadale's political views and advises everyone to vote for her during the big debate between the candidates.

Even if Mrs McCorkadale's victory is not straightforward it is still a victory. If Jameson's theories are to be applied to the text as promoting some kind of political agenda, it could be that the political ideology is that women should be let into politics but cannot make it into power without the assistance of a male power source first allowing them access. Or it is simply another symbolic act settling another conflict but not solving it.

Conclusion

There are clearly a number of political and ideological agendas at work in the texts. In order to interpret the text's political and ideological standpoint it has been important to illustrate it from different positions. Jameson's theories were used to show that all texts are political in substance regardless of their form. Even if these novels are meant to be innocent entertainment they are still political and worth being read as such. Jeeves's position as a gatekeeper visualised Meritocracy and
the Conservative/Feudal ideology shared by him and Wooster. In *Jeeves and The Feudal Spirit* the passage about the loan shows that Jeeves is the one with power over decision-making and that he does not wish to support venture capital with its link to Capitalist practice. However, since Wooster and Jeeves are essentially employer and employee they do have to coexist with the capitalist practice. The inherent antagonism between these ideologies are in the end quieted down by symbolic acts.

The unreliable narration brought an additional layer of interpretation making it possible to discern between the Conservative/Feudal ideology of the narrator and the more ambiguous ideology of the novels as a whole. It is really hard to pinpoint what kind of ideological stance or mode of production that is promoted by the novels partly because of this style of narration and the “gap between appearance and reality” (Lodge 155) that it causes. The reader is encouraged to sympathise with Wooster but at the same time knows that his view of reality, as it is presented in the books, does necessarily correspond to the way things actually are. This puts his ideology into question. In *Much Obliged, Jeeves* Mrs McCorkadale is on the one hand described by Wooster as someone who induces terror in him but on the other hand her actions are noble and imply a different image of her.

Sedgwick’s theories about male homosocial desire appear to play an equally strong part in character motivation as ideology does. Especially when it comes to Wooster whose reason for not wanting to be engaged, i.e. changed, does not add up by closer inspection. Jeeves influence on Wooster speaks another language altogether. It is clearly not change in itself that is the problem, it is instead a matter of who is trying to change him.

In the novels women function as a means to bring men closer together by love triangles and it always seems that the relationship between the men is more important then the actual love interests. The women are portrayed as figures who are bound to men and cannot gain power on their own accord. Aunt Dahlia is bound to her husband for support and money. Mrs McCorkadale has to have the support of a man to win the election. She does gain power but this only seems to happen at
the cost of her femininity. Lady Florence Craye, Angela Travers and Madeleine Basset only have power when in relation to infatuated men. They are limited to choose to marry or not. As the events with Madeleine Basset and Lord Sidcup suggest: this power, although it could appear small, has implications for the reinforcement of the current status quo. If a conservative woman of a high social standing refuses to marry a man who does not have a socially inherited title, she will reinforce a Conservative aristocratic ideology. This means that if Lord Sidcup chose to become Mr Spode he would lose access to the people who represent old money.

The findings of this essay are that even if these novels are of the comedy genre one can still look for and find political and ideological contents. In order to interpret the political and ideological contents of these novels it is not enough to just look at social class or gender because they effect each other. Therefore, it is necessary to use several and different sources and theories in order to understand the text and its ideological content.
Works cited


