When All Comes down to Clothes:

An Interpretation of P.G. Wodehouse's *The Inimitable Jeeves*

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Abstract
My aim for this paper is to analyse the character Jeeves' obsession with perfect clothing in P. G. Wodehouse's *The Inimitable Jeeves* (1923). My method has been to study the historical context of the British aristocracy at the time of the first publication of the book in 1923, as well as the previous four decades during which the author grew up and decisive changes in the British class society took place. This paper studies sources on the significance of clothing in general, and examines its importance at the time in particular. For my analysis I have borrowed elements from new historicism. The norms, traditions and values of the aristocracy lost in importance during this time, and the aristocracy was divided into individuals who were willing to adopt to these changes and others who fought to defy them. My conclusion is that Jeeves considers the strict dress codes to be an important symbol of the old aristocratic values that he has to defend, in order to legitimize his own position, as he is profoundly devoted to his calling of being a first class valet faithful to the old traditions. Wooster, then, acts as Jeeves' opponent on the matter as he embodies the part of the aristocracy willing to embrace the changes instead.
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**Introduction**

Well, there was only one thing to do, and I did it. I'm not saying it didn't hurt, but there was no alternative. “Jeeves” I said, “those spats.” “Yes, sir?” “You really dislike them?” “Intensely, sir.” “You don't think time might induce you to change your views?” “No, sir.” “All right, then. Very well. Say no more. You may burn them.” “Thank you very much, sir. I have already done so. Before breakfast this morning. A quiet grey is far more suitable, sir. Thank you, sir” (Wodehouse 204).

While reading P. G. Wodehouse's *The Inimitable Jeeves* (1923), I became aware of the emphasis put on clothing in the story, and how this is manifested by the uncompromising opinions of Jeeves, the valet. The character of Jeeves could actually be described as uncompromising in every matter, as no aspect of his duty is left to chance and his perfection as a valet is widely recognized in London's high society. Although Jeeves is obviously loyal to his master, there is one matter where he simply will not yield. When Wooster ignores his guidelines on proper clothing, Jeeves displays a defiant coldness against his master until his opinion is finally respected.

My aim with this paper is to analyse why the question of clothing is so fundamental to Jeeves, that it makes it the only thing able to strain his otherwise stoic patience with his master. My thesis statement is that Jeeves, being renowned for his impeccable professionalism, passionately tries to uphold and protect these very strict and exclusive dress codes as they symbolize the old, elaborated aristocratic traditions that were under severe threat during this time in history. The same threat was indirectly pointed at Jeeves and his honour too, as without these traditions being kept alive, most of his reputation as “the best valet in London” would fade. Since Jeeves regards Wooster to be first of all a
member of the aristocracy, with an obligation to uphold the aristocratic values of appearance, then any individual traits might diminish Wooster's level of commitment to these values. Wooster, then, acts as Jeeves' opponent on the matter as he instead embodies the part of the aristocracy willing to embrace changes in society.

**Theoretical Framework**

The perspective for my analysis will borrow elements from new historicism, as I intend to create an understanding of Jeeves' actions by interpreting the historical, cultural and class-based circumstances at play in the story. Stephen Greenblatt explains his view on new historicism in Kiernan Ryan's *New Historicism and Cultural Materialism (1996)* by stating:

New historicism, by contrast, eschews the use of the term “man”; interest lies not in the abstract universal but in particular, contingent cases, the selves fashioned and acting according to the generative rules and conflicts of a given culture. And these selves, conditioned by the expectations of their class, gender, religion, race and national identity, are constantly effecting changes in the course of history. Indeed if there is any inevitability in the new historicism's vision of history it is this insistence on agency, for even inaction or extreme marginality is understood to possess meaning and therefore to imply intention. Every form of behaviour, in this view, is a strategy: taking up arms or taking flight are significant social actions, but so is staying put, minding one's business, turning one's face to the wall. Agency is virtually inescapable (55).

The concepts of class and culture will be closely intertwined in my analysis, as most of the cultural behaviour I concentrate on is based on class. The historical concept will be used both to describe the conflicts but also to interpret the different intentions and consequences related to the actions of the two characters Wooster and Jeeves. Greenblatt continues:
Inescapable but not simple: new historicism, as I understand it, does not posit historical processes as unalterable and inexorable, but it does tend to discover limits or constraints upon individual intervention: actions that appear to be single are disclosed as multiple; the apparently isolated power of the individual genius turns out to be bound up with collective, social energy; a gesture of dissent may be an element in a larger legitimation process, while an attempt to stabilize the order of things may turn out to subvert it (Ryan 55).

This paragraph offers plenty of points to be made on the analysis of the argument between Wooster and Jeeves. Jeeves' struggle comes from the social energy within the “culture” that he is supporting and protecting. Wooster's “gesture of dissent” is an attempt to diminish the effects of this culture, and it is questionable whether Jeeves' strict manners will save his culture in the long run, or make it seem even less attractive.

How then might Wodehouse's perspective on the changes in his contemporary society differ from ours? Gallagher and Greenblatt writes in *Practicing New Historicism* (2000):

> still, the notion of a distinct culture, particularly a culture distant in time or space ... is powerfully attractive for several reasons. It carries the core hermeneutical presumption that one can occupy a position from which one can discover meanings that those who left traces of themselves could not have articulated ... something that the authors we study would not have had the sufficient distance upon themselves and their own era to grasp (8).

Today we have the advantage of some ninety years of history having past after the first publication of *The Inimitable Jeeves* (1923). Still, Wodehouse had a way of producing escapist stories with few remarks of past events or predictions for the future. The focus is on a present that happens to be situated at a certain inconstant time in history that is in itself made
into a static state in the book.

Even though the terms of the British class society is of vital importance in Wodehouse's many books about Wooster and Jeeves, my analysis will abstain from any claims regarding Wodehouse's possible view on the class values depicted in his books. It is true that the relationship between Wooster and Jeeves promotes a highly ironic view on class society, as the master is presented as being so obviously inferior to his servant in every aspect of his character. Even though this might appear to be an obviously critical view, Kirby Olson suggests in his journal article “Bertie and Jeeves at the End of History: P. G. Wodehouse as Political Scientist” (1996) that “[w]here Marx sought the withering away of hostile classes; and many of his successors sought their active obliteration … Wodehouse finds competition between groups to be the motor that drives society; it is that which makes society chaotic and disturbing, but also fun and worthwhile” (86). Irrespective of what Wodehouse might have felt about these values, they were obviously of great interest or concern to him, as he would portray them so frequently, using prejudices about classes and contrasting values for humoristic effect.

I have based my analysis on the historical context of British class society contemporary with the first publication of *The Inimitable Jeeves* (1923), as well as on the four decades prior to this, during which P. G. Wodehouse was born and raised. First, I will review the dramatic changes that the British aristocracy and their employees experienced starting in the 1880s, and how this caused a diversion where some embraced, or at least accepted, these dramatic changes of society while others stubbornly tried to protect the last remains of a glorious past. I will then apply this context on my analysis of *The Inimitable Jeeves* (1923), presenting how the two characters of Wooster and Jeeves could be said to represent these two different attitudes towards a changing society.
The concept of history is of considerable importance as the stories depict a very specific and decisive part of history. Wodehouse wrote about a society that was contemporary to him, and which had seen such great changes during his lifetime. The concepts of class and culture concerns the old traditional codes and values specific for the aristocracy. Those are the ones that came under threat as a result of the great changes in society, and they are ultimately, in the form of non-negotiable dress codes, the source of Jeeves' and Wooster's disagreements.

One reason why clothing could prove such an important means of preserving traditional values in a changing time can be found in Diana Crane's *Fashion and Its Social Agendas: Class, Gender and Identity in Clothing* (2000):

> Explaining the construction of identity and resistance to hegemony through clothing requires an interpretation on how clothes express meaning. Clothing as a form of nonverbal, visual communication is a powerful means of making subversive social statements, because these statements are not necessarily constructed or received on a conscious or rational level. Changes in the significance of certain types of clothing and in the ways clothes communicate meanings are indications of major alterations in how social groups and groupings perceive their relationships to one another (237).

In the light of imminent changes, the significance of already strict codes increased, especially when deemed essential to demonstrate a clear distance between one's own group and other groupings.

**Historical Context**

As background information on the British class society contemporary with the characters of Wooster and Jeeves, I would like to start by referring to David Cannadine's exhaustive work *The Decline And Fall of the British Aristocracy* (1996). Cannadine argues
that the radical changes of British class society actually started already in the 1880s, and “[b]y 1914, exclusive, aristocratic society had been transformed so fundamentally that it was no longer clear that it existed in its traditional sense” (351). What was it then that had changed, and what sparked the change? Cannadine states that the wealth and power of the British aristocracy up until the last quarter of the nineteenth century was based on vast ownership of land. According to the statistics that he uses, some 7,000 families owned four-fifths of the land of the British Isles in the late 1870s, all of these estates counting a minimum of 1,000 acres each. (9). The families that owned the most formidable assets in this group formed the aristocracy. As Cannadine writes, “[v]iewed as an economic class, the gentry and grandees were thus both the wealth élite in that they encompassed most of the richest men in the country, and the territorial élite in that they owned most of the land in Britain” (10).

Besides claiming most of the wealth in the Kingdom, the aristocracy also had a claim to considerable political strength. It was simply considered obvious before the 1880s that anyone who were to be trusted with a position and influence must come from the noble and educated ranks of society. Zygmunt Bauman explains this in *Between Class and Elite* (1972) by stating “[t]he middle classes felt respect for the hierarchical traditions and shibboleths of the aristocracy, and an almost superstitious fear of storming the castles that were their historical possessions ... In the political sphere it retained its monopoly of the key positions in the state administration” (76).

Given that the British society of the time obviously provided these aristocrats with a serious amount of privileges and political influence, it may look astonishing that they were to lose so much of their power in such a relatively short period of time. It is often said that the traumatic experience of the First World War changed British society forever. Although this is considered to be a well known fact, Cannadine writes, as stated before, that the aristocratic
society had transformed fundamentally already at the breakout of war in 1914. What actually started this transformation, as early as in the 1880s according to him, was

the sudden and dramatic collapse of the agricultural base of the European economy, partly because of the massive influx of cheap foreign goods from North and South America and the Antipodes, and partly because of the final and emphatic burgeoning of the fully fledged, large-scale, and highly concentrated industrial economy (26).

For this reason, the financial advantage of the aristocrats that had seemed virtually untouchable just a few years earlier had begun to crumble. It is true that a lot of them had invested in important areas of the new economy, for example the industry and the railroad, but the backbone of their wealth had still always been the income of their land. With high expenses for their luxurious lifestyle, it is clear that the reality of the aristocracy as a whole was in for a dramatic change. Paul Thompson states in *The Edwardians: the Remaking of British Society* (1992):

> the open display of wealth was an essential element in the upper-class style of life. Wealth, birth and manners constituted the three prime qualifications for commanding obedience and respect from others. Although many of the rich already wintered abroad, most of their money was spent in Britain on highly visible comforts such as country houses, personal servants and lavish entertaining (3).

Unfortunately for them, what caused this economical decline, and in many cases an impoverishment of lifestyle, also caused a serious decline in political and social influence, as explained by Cannadine:

> Agricultural depression spawned peasant revolts and nationalist movements in
each of the four great polyglot countries: Germany, Russia, Austria-Hungary, and the British Isles. The increasingly prosperous and assertive middle class shaded imperceptibly into the new and fabulously rich international plutocracy. By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, these men were no longer satisfied with mere wealth: they craved both the political power and the social recognition to which they believed their fortunes entitled them. At the same time, urban and industrial growth brought into being a new world of strikes and riots, socialists and anarchists, and working class political parties … At the same time that the economy became global, politics became democratized (26).

One can easily imagine the sense of humiliation and despair that self-proclaimed guardians of the old order must have felt in the face of these changes. Once, real wealth and influence was reserved for the people who, to their own mind, were best fit to handle it. They were of course people of their own kind and taste, sharing their values and their sense of class and heritage. They were also people who had gone to the finest public schools and universities, who had learned the proper way of speaking, thinking and acting. Undoubtedly, many in this class of people saw themselves as living national treasures, the pride of the nation as a whole.

In the wake of these changes, several members of this former élite had to see themselves being surpassed by the newly rich. These were the people who, despite being highly successful in business, were still looked down on for lacking the refinement and heritage of the aristocracy. Still, they were the ones who were willing and able to buy the properties that some of the aristocrats were forced to sell. Art collections, land and estates that might have been in the same families for centuries were now sold to people without any relating history or affection. A number of magnificent palaces and town houses in central London were bought by opportunists just to be demolished and replaced by hotels, flats,
offices and shops. Just like the aristocracy had been deprived of their dominance in wealth and political influence, they were also losing their dominance over high society.

From the 1880s onwards, this carefully integrated and functionally significant social system began to break down. In London high society, the aristocratic monopoly was broken, as the new super-rich stormed the citadels of social exclusiveness, and flaunted their parvenu wealth with opulent and irresistible vulgarity (Cannadine 342).

This “vulgarity” provoked members of the aristocracy to express a clear distaste for the way they felt the newly rich tried to gain prestige and recognition by wasting huge amounts of money on ostentatious parties and events. It is noteworthy how these changes must have affected the aristocracy's perception of themselves. Without any doubt, different individuals tackled this in different manners. Some accepted this new order, whether reluctantly or even secretly in relief. It is likely that younger individuals were more prone to accept this order as they would be the first to mingle across the social boundaries that their parents had never tread upon. After all, there were still a lot of young and rich aristocrats who were drawn to the night life that was by now dominated by non-aristocrats. “[b]y the 1890's, the aristocratic “man about town” was a well known phenomenon. He spent his days (and nights) in sporting clubs and near the stage door, mixed with book-keepers and racing journalists, squandered his allowance, and got into all kinds of mischief” (Cannadine 348). To mingle with the lower classes was one thing, yet something even more astonishing was the fact that the aristocratic men increasingly started to marry outside their class, a behaviour that would have been considered nothing less than a social scandal just a few decades earlier (Cannadine 347). Others would of course reject this as a part of the degradation that they saw in their contemporary society. As they witnessed the noble wealthy class from just a few decades ago
being largely replaced by, in their mind, a crowd of uncivilised and vulgar newcomers, they
decided to emphasize and cherish the things they considered being exclusively theirs: true
class and heritage. For them it was natural to despise the newly rich and the adventurers for
their lack of good taste and manners as well as marking a clear distance to their lot.

Within social classes, individuals compete for social distinction and cultural
capital on the basis of their capacity to judge the suitability of cultural products
according to class-based standards of taste and manners. Cultural practices
which include both knowledge of culture and critical abilities for assessing and
appreciating it are acquired during childhood in the family and in the
educational system and contribute to the reproduction of the existing social
class culture (Crane 7).

So, if one wanted to keep certain people out of an exclusive class, these practices,
including dress codes, were a means of doing so. They were also vital for maintaining the
sense of common purpose within the group. Thompson mentions these strict dress codes in

*The Edwardians – The Remaking of British Society (1992):*

The Edwardian gentleman, too, needed a full wardrobe: … They had to take
notice of remarkably fine distinctions as to what dress was, or was not,
appropriate for a particular moment. Brown boots, for example, could be worn
at Ascot, but no nearer town. Like blue spotted ties, they were for country wear.
In London itself one had to be careful in case one's dress was right for the place
but wrong for the moment (10).

When a member of the aristocracy challenged these rules and became more liberal in clothing
and appearance, his or her initiative, in a way, actually posed a threat to the whole shared
conservative value of being an aristocrat in an increasingly more liberal society. Regarding
“the reproduction of the existing social class culture” (Crane 7), it is of course not only vital to pass it on to the new generations, but also to keep it a priority for all members of the group. Once again, this is precisely the commitment that I suggest that Jeeves has made.

Of course, not all of the newly rich were even interested in trying to achieve the standards of the most conservative-minded aristocrats. Instead, they were free to seek out different ways of expressing their status and enjoying themselves, irrespective to the, to their mind, oppressive standards of the decreasingly influential aristocracy. This is the freedom that Wooster seems to be longing for, and that recurrently creates a tension when colliding with Jeeves' firm opinions and provoking his resentful attitude.

There was also an important aspect of masculinity to what a gentleman was supposed to wear. One reason why old-fashioned aristocrats disliked colourful and expressive garments in men's dressing at this time, was because it was historically associated with women's clothing.

The slow advance of masculine mode in the last two hundred years has made men more likely victims than women of this desire to resist fashion, but they also have social and moral tradition behind them in the form of conventional male superiority to female folly. Devotion to fashion in dress was adduced as a natural weakness of women, something they could not help. This view was strengthened in the nineteenth century, when masculine and feminine clothing became so much more different in fabric, trim and construction. Elegant men’s clothing during this time was actually no less complex, demanding, and uncomfortable, but it tended to be more subdued and abstract in the way it looked. Women’s clothing was extremely expressive, almost literary, and very deliberately decorative and noticeable (Hollander 360).
This notion was so remarkably strong that even the snipers of the First World War found themselves to be ridiculed for being feminine because of their necessary means of camouflage. John Potvin writes in *The Places And Spaces of Fashion, 1800-2007* (2009):

> Yet this unconventional and feminized decoration of the head with straw, leaves, and even flowers saved lives on the battlefield. Public perception of the sniper picked up on the potential ridiculousness of the sniper's disguise. In a popular song called *Camouflage, or the Tale of the sorrowful sniper*, a Cockney sniper is dressed for battle in a “coiffure” “trimmed” with grass and hay like a ladies' bonnet and “painted” with green makeup (99).

Even if Jeeves' concern about Wooster's style is purely based on following the traditional dress code of the aristocracy, it would be relevant to analyse the background of some of these codes, as it is always the colour, or “expressiveness” of the garments that causes Jeeves to react. “I turned round and Jeeves shied like a startled mustang...“The effect, sir, is loud in the extreme” (Wodehouse 26). There is nothing in the text that suggests that Wooster is deliberately trying to express femininity by his colourful accessories. On the contrary, when arguing with Jeeves about a waistband, he says “I consider that it has rather a Spanish effect. A touch of the hidalgo. Sort of Vicente y Blasco What’s-his-name stuff. The Jolly old hidalgo off to the bull fight” (26). When mentioning bullfighting, Wooster of course addresses a sense of masculinity in his garment. The problem is that even if bullfighting is a symbol of masculinity and heroism in the Spanish culture sphere, which is also acknowledged in the rest of the world, the style of clothing itself might simply appear rather feminine to British society contemporary with Wooster and Jeeves. The focus on colours, embroidery, tassels and tights resembles the idea of British women's clothing traditionally being “extremely expressive, almost literary, and very deliberately decorative and noticeable”, while
men's clothing were “more subdued and abstract in the way it looked” (Hollander 360). As Hollander discusses the “conventional male superiority to female folly” (360), she offers this as an explanation on why men were supposed to dress elegant rather than modish.

The following of fashion, the vanity of modishness, was still supposed to be a feminine weakness – possibly a feminine wile, a form of black art ... For men seriousness about elegance, as opposed to modishness, for centuries had a perfectly respectable justification in accord with male wisdom, sense of responsibility, steadiness of purpose, even godliness. For men in public life, elegant dress (not just decent clothes) was necessary to sustain rank and dignity. One owed it to one's audience not to masquerade as poor if one were rich, not to violate degree in outward appearance and upset social morality. Proper attention to dress was a sign of self-respect and respect for the order of things (361).

Although Wooster is merely trying to inject something individual in his style, this would harm the “order of things” in Jeeves' opinion. Even if both of them regard the question to be purely of taste and not gender, it appears as the strict, male dress code that Jeeves is promoting owes its view of elegance as opposing modishness to traditional ideas about masculinity that were enhanced and idealised by the aristocracy.

Analysis

P. G. Wodehouse's *The Inimitable Jeeves* was first published in 1923. We learn that Wooster is a young aristocrat living a comfortable life in the upper class society of London. He lives on an allowance from his family, has no job nor any intention to get one. Instead he starts every day by sleeping through the morning. His waking hours are spent on mingling
with his friends, who share the same lifestyle, going to clubs, golfing, travelling and so on. The only expectations placed on him by his environment is his aunt's firm opinion that he ought to be married soon, naturally to an eligible woman from a respected family. This is however of no interest to Wooster, who is quite happy with a life free from obligations for as long as he can maintain things that way. In order to avoid his aunt's interference, he can trust to his loyal and remarkably intelligent valet Jeeves. Jeeves is depicted as the ideal valet. His knowledge and dedication to every aspect of his profession seem boundless and, with a great deal of integrity, he cunningly solves any given problem, mostly in a discrete manner. He has, however, quite firm and conservative opinions on how Wooster should dress and appear as a gentleman.

Here we find an example of the differences in values between the two characters. Wooster represents the new order of things; even though his wealth and privileged lifestyle are a result of his family's aristocratic heritage, he has little interest in strict codes and manners. His life is all about enjoying himself, and experimenting with a few elements of his wardrobe is for him a harmless contribution to this purpose. Jeeves, on the other hand, has an intense distaste for any garment compromising with his own conservative views on proper clothing for a gentleman. For Jeeves it is really a question of perfection. Not even a pair of socks can be allowed to ruin the perfect image of his master.

Throughout the book there is a recurring situation where Wooster has bought some kind of garment that causes Jeeves severe distress. It might be a purple pair of socks, a brightish scarlet waistband or a pair of spats in Etonian colours. Jeeves will then plead to his master not to show himself dressed like that in public. However, Wooster will usually not let himself be lectured, at least not to begin with. This forces Jeeves to accept the situation, for the time being, with a cold “very well, sir”. These situations are the only ones where there is a
sense of disagreement between the two of them. Wooster notes that Jeeves is keeping his cold attitude even after the question has, to Wooster's mind, been settled. Of course, Jeeves will still see to his duties in his typical impeccable way, but his frosty position will not be altered as long as Wooster is holding on to the garment in question. Complete peace will simply not be restored until Wooster is forced to ask Jeeves for assistance in one of the many inconveniences that Wooster is destined to find himself entangled in. Jeeves will, of course, take care of matters, and as a sign of gratitude Wooster then decides to follow Jeeves' advice to let go of the piece of clothing in question. This is always the way these situations are solved, but that does not prevent them from recurring time and again.

Wooster, as well as his friends and family members of similar age, seem to fit quite well with the term “man about town” (Cannadine 348) previously mentioned on page 11. This in the sense that they are practically standing with one foot in each world as they are depending on their traditional bound families to provide them with their maintenance but not willing to be restricted by these very traditions. One eloquent example from The Inimitable Jeeves (1923) is when Bingo, Wooster's old friend from school, involves Wooster in a complicated plan for making Bingo's uncle accepting Bingo marrying a simple waitress without the uncle withdrawing his allowance (Wodehouse 16). Wooster's own major family-related problem is, ironically enough, a planned marriage to a girl from a family “above suspicion” that could “counterbalance the deficiencies and weaknesses” of his character (46).

The family, especially my Aunt Agatha, who has savaged me incessantly from childhood up, have always rather made a point of the fact that mine is a wasted life, and that, since I won the price at my first school for the best collection of wild flowers made during the summer holidays, I haven't done a dam' thing to land me on the nation's scroll of fame (15).
Wooster is fairly uninterested in family obligations and responsibilities. He seems to have a hard time understanding why he should be hindered from enjoying himself. This also goes for his appearance. The recurring situations when discussing proper style with Jeeves show their great differences in opinion on the matter. Why then is it so important for Jeeves to make sure that his master's appearance is impeccable down to the last detail? Obviously, Wooster is making his way in a society where these excessively strict dress codes are acknowledged by a diminishing number of people. Probably, few would hold it against him, or even notice, if he were to bend the rules just a bit every now and then. I would suggest that this could be explained by Jeeves regarding Wooster as being first and foremost a representative of the aristocratic class that he has found as his call in life to serve. It does not seem to matter to Jeeves if the people that Wooster mixes with, or even Wooster himself, fail to see the point of these codes. This view could be interpreted as follows: in order to keep the few precious remains of a glorious past alive, there simply must be an aura of exclusiveness preserved for the aristocrats. With the determination and passion that Jeeves has invested in his calling, what would be the point of all of his perfection, the minute endeavours and the pride that he can take in being a “topping valet... none better in London” (225) if his master would be no more than a plain, undemanding person of no importance?

As far as Jeeves and Wooster's relationship is concerned, there are indications suggesting that it is first and foremost Wooster's social position that Jeeves is paying his loyalty and respect to, as Wooster's sophistication and intellectual abilities are far below those of his servant. Throughout the book, Wooster is left dumbfounded by the twists and turns of Jeeves' cunning. Kirby Olson writes in “Bertie and Jeeves at the End of History: P. G. Wodehouse as Political Scientist” (1996), that “Jeeves' ministering to his master's every wish allows him to get a bead on Bertie to the point that he can anticipate and even invent his
master's needs. Bertie is the master, but he is completely dependent on the slave, Jeeves. Therefore, Jeeves is the one with true freedom, because he has no true master” (73). Jeeves is hence well aware of his master's shortcomings. At one awkward moment Wooster happens to overhear Jeeves instructing an understudy, who is to replace Jeeves during his two annual weeks of vacation “‘[y]ou will find Mr Wooster,’ he was saying to the substitute chappie, “an exceedingly pleasant and amiable young gentleman, but not intelligent. By no means intelligent. Mentally he is negligible – quite negligible’” (Wodehouse 43). Wooster's character is thus described as “exceedingly pleasant and amiable”, but apart from that, not very impressive or advanced. This would add to the notion that it is predominately his social position that renders him respect. I suggest that these are the values that Jeeves is trying to protect and retain. If the aristocracy were to completely lose its exclusiveness, much of Jeeves' attainment would be outdated and meaningless. It is precisely his immaculate professionalism that makes him stand out; his attention to every detail and his ability to guide and assist his master in every matter. Wooster acknowledges this on the very first page of The Inimitable Jeeves (1923):

He put the good old cup of tea softly on the table by my bed, and I took a refreshing sip. Just right, as usual. Not too hot, not too sweet, not too weak, not too strong, not too much milk, and not a drop spilled in the saucer. A most amazing cove, Jeeves. So dashed competent in every respect. I've said it before, and I'll say it again. I mean to say, take just one small instance. Every other valet I've ever had used to barge into my room in the morning while I was still asleep, causing much misery; but Jeeves seems to know when I'm awake by a sort of telepathy. He always floats in with the cup exactly two minutes after I come to life. Makes a deuce of a lot of difference to a fellow's day (1).
Why then does Jeeves seem to concentrate on Wooster's clothing, above everything else, to uphold the values of the aristocracy? Jeeves is aware of Wooster's intellectual shortcomings, but that does not mean that Wooster could not, or should not, act and feel like the gentleman of birth that he is. Even if there has, most likely, not occurred any alteration in Jeeves' view on differences between the aristocracy and the non-aristocrats, it has become much more important to stress these differences. Jeeves' impeccable, detailed sense of style is something that the less refined cannot decode. They may have “stormed the citadels of social exclusiveness” (Cannadine 342) but they could not obtain true class to the last, crucial details any time soon. By dressing more deliberately than them, one might have demonstrated a distance and a superiority to them. To learn these codes of taste and manners properly was of course very time-consuming and hard, which helped to keep them exclusive. Yet another example in the book concerns a pair of spats.

Some dashed brainy cove, probably the chap who invented those coloured cigarette-cases, had recently had the rather topping idea of putting out a line of spats on the same system. I mean to say, instead of the ordinary grey and white, you can now get them in your regimental or school colours. And, believe me, it would have taken a chappie of stronger fibre than I am to resist the pair of Old Etonian spats which had smiled up at me from inside the window. I was inside the shop, opening negotiations, before it had even occurred to me that Jeeves might not approve. And I must say he had taken the thing a bit hardly. The fact of the matter is, Jeeves, though in many ways the best valet in London, is too conservative. Hide-bound, if you know what I mean, and an enemy to Progress. “Nothing further, Jeeves”, I said, with quiet dignity. “Very good, sir.” He gave one frosty look at the spats and biffed off. Dash him! (Wodehouse 185).
Wooster is attracted to garments that can “cheer up” and “smile” to him, something with an individual touch, for example his school colours. I want to argue that the question of individuality verses the attributes of a group is of crucial importance here. Nathan Joseph writes in his book *Uniforms And Nonuniforms: Communication through Clothing (1986)*, that “one of the distinguishing characteristics of a uniform is that it suppresses individuality. The tie, conservative or flashy, serves as an indication of the wearer's level of commitment to the message conveyed by the suit” (qtd. in Crane 174). If Jeeves regards Wooster to be first of all a member of the aristocracy, with an obligation to uphold the aristocratic values of appearance, then any individual traits might diminish Wooster's “level of commitment” to these values. There is obviously no room for individualism within this dress code, according to Jeeves, as the belonging to the group in itself seems to be the most important asset of identity for its members. Once again I interpret this as being a sign of Jeeves first and foremost trying to protect the conservative values of the aristocratic class as a whole, with less regard for the individual members.

**Conclusion**

To sum up my analysis, I would like to stress that P.G. Wodehouse's characters Wooster and Jeeves were portrayed during a period of our history when the British class society had undergone extreme changes during a comparatively short period of time. The privileged position of the aristocracy, both as regards wealth and social and political power, was so strong up until the 1880s that it ought to have seemed unlikely that anything less than a revolution could have turned the tables. Despite this, unforeseen effects of global trade and changing social circumstances deprived the aristocracy of its dominance in economical, social and political power. Suddenly, newly rich could buy their way into
environments where, to a large extent, the conservative and tradition-bound aristocracy were used to dominate. The culture clash between a class that was used to judge others by their heritage, and attend traditions and family holdings for centuries, and newcomers who compensated their lack of history and manners with waste and show, was partially severe, but the reaction of the “former élite” was mixed.

Wooster and Jeeves appear to take very different positions in this matter. Wooster's main concern is to live an easy and enjoyable life, supported by his family's money. He is really a rather simple-minded person, happy as long as he can go on with his business without being burdened by responsibilities or demands. Jeeves, on the other hand, is in many ways Wooster's contrast. He is profoundly devoted to his calling of being a first class valet. While Wooster is simple-minded and plain, Jeeves is uncannily intelligent and nimble. It soon becomes obvious in the story that one of Jeeves' most serious dedications is that of keeping his master dressed to perfection according to Jeeves' own extremely strict sense of class. Wooster, being rather more relaxed about the thing, is eager to find accessories and garments in somewhat more lively colours to spice up his style, but Jeeves is relentless in his distaste for any such ideas.

In my analysis, I have concentrated on Jeeves and his adamant determination to bring such resistance even to the most insignificant of details. This appears to be a matter of principles well advanced into obsession, and I have tried to find out what the main reason for this stunning determination could be. At first glance, it would be easy to assume that Jeeves, in line with his professional attitude towards his duties, is simply eager to keep Wooster properly dressed and respectable for the sake of Wooster's social rank and dignity. But Wooster has few ambitions regarding social rank and dignity. He makes his way in a society where his heritage has a descending importance, where he gets everything that he wants by
means of money instead of lineage. He is also a simple-minded person without any ambitions for a career or a position of any kind. So, if both Wooster and the people he associates with fail to see the reason behind Jeeves' strict codes of dressing, why is it still so desperately important to keep them up?

My conclusion is that Jeeves first and foremost is trying to protect the old values of the aristocratic class as a whole, where Wooster, as a member, must be forced to uphold these values for the sake and principal of the whole group. Although Jeeves himself is no member of the aristocracy, he is as dependent on, and faithful to, the old conservative values as any member would be. He is the ideal valet, perfected in his profession. He is a master in his trade with complete knowledge of every aspect, every professional secret there is. If the old order would finally become extinct, his vocation would go with it, his passion for his trade would become redundant.

We know that Jeeves is well aware of Wooster being “mentally negligible”, but this does not matter, as Jeeves' loyalty and respect are based on Wooster's social position and the honour that Jeeves recognizes in the relation between master and servant. In fact, if Jeeves was to judge his master strictly by his personal qualities, much of Jeeves endeavours would probably seem wasted. But this does not matter as long as Wooster is first and foremost treated as the aristocrat that he, despite all, still is. He might not even understand the finesse of the system that makes his valet able to shine in his profession, but this is not important as long as Wooster himself is made to serve as the proper master.
Works Cited


