THE CODING OF THE WOOSTERS

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Introduction

During his lifetime P. G. Wodehouse had all the aspects of fame – reader recognition (in book sales\(^1\)), fellow-writer recognition (in praise by Hilaire Belloc, George Orwell and Evelyn Waugh\(^2\)), and financial success\(^3\) with an obligatory tax-scandal – in the 1930s Wodehouse owed the IRS an estimated $32,753\(^4\) in backpay (though, seemingly, not through a fault of his own).

And his fame lingered – not only was he, a writer concerned primarily with British (in content) plots, popular on both sides of the Atlantic during his considerable life time (born in 1881, Wodehouse became famous internationally at the beginning of the 1920s and stayed so until his death in 1975), but his fiction survived translation into other languages and cultures\(^5\) as much as the passage of time. In Russia Wodehouse was published only in 1992 (after the fall of the Soviet Union, seventeen years after Wodehouse’s death in 1975) and to great success\(^6\). Yet Wodehouse is consistently overlooked by critics – either omitted completely or mentioned in passing as a “comedy” writer.

\(^1\) For example, in 1945 (April 22) Wodehouse wrote to his friend William Townend that he sold around half a million paperback copies from 1942 to 1945. All letters taken from \textit{P. G. Wodehouse: a Life in Letters}, edited by Sophie Ratcliffe.
\(^3\) McCrum, Robert. \textit{Wodehouse: a Life}. Robert McCrum notes that it is hard to estimate Wodehouse’s earnings exactly (\textit{Wodehouse: a Life}, 56n). In 1937 Wodehouse was payed around $26000 (converted for inflation) a week for his work in Hollywood. The minimum wage at the time was around 191 dollars for a 44-hour workweek. Minimum wage information: https://www.historynet.com/the-first-minimum-wage.htm. All currency conversions in this essay were done with www.historicalstatistics.org (for non-US currency) and http://www.in2013dollars.com (for US currency).
\(^4\) $500,000 in 2019. McCrum, 207-208.
\(^5\) In “P. G. Wodehouse in Translation to Japanese”, Petronella Stille examines the success with which Wodehouse was translated into Japanese. The first Japanese translations of Wodehouse appeared in print in 2005.
I will not spend time to list the omissions of Wodehouse from the British literary canon – others have done that before. Laura Mooneyham (relying partially on an analysis by Anthony Quinton) writes: “[the standard general guides to English literature] have ‘nothing or next to nothing to say about Wodehouse.’”

A plausible reason for this critical silence is P. G Wodehouse’s “indiscretions” during the Second World War. While under house arrest in Nazi Germany, Wodehouse made a set of radio-broadcasts to Britain that sparked outrage and accusations of treason. In these broadcasts, in his usual light and comic style, Wodehouse described his experience in prison. This is a representative sample:

It has been in many ways quite an agreeable experience. There is a good deal to be said for internment. It keeps you out of the saloons and gives you time to catch up with your reading.

More aware of literature than politics, Wodehouse even referenced Bertie Wooster in the first lines of his first broadcast, stating of his own “goofiness”: “the matter, as Bertie Wooster would say, is susceptible of a ready explanation”. Wodehouse’s “ready explanation” of his own optimistic attitude and general happiness was that he had just been released from prison.

Many in Britain believed that Wodehouse produced the broadcasts in exchange for his release – but this has never been confirmed and Wodehouse argued that his release was consistent with the Nazi policy of not keeping prisoners of war in internment past their sixtieth

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7 A 2016 essay on Wodehouse by Françoise Dupeyron-Lafay begins with the phrase: “P. G. Wodehouse has long been neglected, if not ostracised [sic], by academia and critics, because of a persistent prejudice against light writing and reading.”
8 In Wodehouse: In and Beyond the Tradition of Comedy Quinton lists overviews that do not mention Wodehouse: Albert Baugh’s The Literary History of England, David Daiches’s Critical History of English Literature, F. W. Bateson’s Guide to English Literature, and Martin Seymour-Smith’s Guide to Modern World Literature. All were published after the Second World War and before 1988 and so during the decline of Wodehouse’s popularity. Quinton finds one text (W. W. Robson’s Modern English Literature) that gives substantial credit to Wodehouse.
9 P. G. Wodehouse and the Anachronism of Comic Form, 135.
birthday. Wodehouse was released with another prisoner who was that same age and, according to Wodehouse’s timeline, it was only afterwards that he suggested he make the broadcasts to respond to the many fan-letters he received while in prison. So criminal intent was not present. A more plausible explanation for the broadcasts (one on which most modern critics agree), is that Wodehouse was childishly ignorant of the world around him and had no understanding of the implications of his appearance on German airways.

In her biography, Wodehouse: A Life in Letters, Sophie Ratcliffe details the slow process by which Wodehouse came to understand his mistake while still in Germany. And despite a great move to defend him, Wodehouse never recovered from the ordeal and stayed away from Britain for the rest of his life. He wrote to the British Foreign Office of an “inexcusable blunder” and referred to his broadcasts as “insane.” In later years he was uncomfortable with the reprintings of the broadcasts and asked biographers to remove them from publication.

“Light Humor and the Dark Underside of Wish Fulfillment: Conservative Anti-realism”, an essay by Kathy MacDermott, written in 1988, provides a more potent explanation to the omissions of Wodehouse from the literary canon:

By the mid-1950s it was commonplace to observe that light humor was falling victim to Cold War earnestness. Musical comedy “plumped for romantic escapism, whether into Scotland, the islands of the Pacific, or the United States in the mid 1920s”; the little piece [short humorous writing] “developed into a righteous cause or two and became important”; each new product of the Wodehouse formula was received and read nostalgically, its comic mode as much a sign of the past as its setting.

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13 Letter to The Foreign Office, November 21, 1942.
14 For example, in a letter to J. D. Grimstick (January 31, 1961) Wodehouse claimed to have destroyed all the broadcast materials in the manuscript of an upcoming biography by Richard Usborne.
In the 1980s Wodehouse was becoming a reading of the past, a “conservative anti-
realist”, and this may have contributed to his absence from overviews as well as from the general
critical canon. But MacDermott’s analysis is dated. Since her essay came out in 1988
Wodehouse has gained a renewed popularity – including the above-mentioned translations into
Japanese and Russian, cultures that had no “pre-war Britain” to be nostalgic about.

Wodehouse’s fiction is nostalgic, but it is not nostalgic for a world that ever existed. In
1961 Evelyn Waugh said\(^ {16} \) that “Mr. Wodehouse’s idyllic world can never stale. He will
continue to release future generations from captivity that may be more irksome than our own. He
has made a world for us to live in and delight in.” Wodehousian nostalgia is not a nostalgia for a
lost world – his 2019 Readers never knew the world he transcribed. Robert McCrum, author of a
critical biography on Wodehouse, wrote: “on the break of both world wars, [Wodehouse]
watched from the sidelines, and carried on writing about an imaginary world that seemed far
more vivid to him than the reality of his own times.”\(^ {17} \) Wodehouse is then, in terms of world-
building, somewhere between the naturalistic John Galsworthy who wrote the epic and realistic
*Forsyte Chronicles* and J. R. R. Tolkien who wrote the epic and fantastical *The Lord of the
Rings*. Wodehouse’s canon has the textures of Galsworthy – Wodehouse’s characters are aunts
and uncles, rich young people, posh Englishmen – but Wodehouse’s canon also contains (as
pointed out by McCrum, MacDermott, Waugh and others\(^ {18} \) an over-worldly essence reminiscent

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\(^{16}\) Quoted from Brad Leithauser’s article “Plenty of Room for Stupidity: on P. G. Wodehouse”, *The New Yorker*,
March 26, 2014.

\(^{17}\) McCrum, 108

\(^{18}\) In *In Defense of P. G. Wodehouse* George Orwell wrote: “In [Wodehouse’s] radio interview with Flannery,
Wodehouse wondered whether ‘the kind of people and the kind of England I write about will live after the war’, not
realizing that they were ghosts already. ‘He was still living in the period about which he wrote,’ says Flannery,
meaning, probably, the nineteen-twenties. But the period was really the Edwardian age, and Bertie Wooster, if he
ever existed, was killed round about 1915.”
of Tolkien. Wodehouse’s world is “British” but not British. It has the posture and visual qualities of Britishness but it is still imaginary, not British.

Wodehouse sold “British” to the Americans by creating his own little19 “British”. In this essay I will attempt to dissect the methods of writing that allowed Wodehouse to create a canon that remains popular and funny throughout translations (over language, culture and time) while remaining recognizably “British”. I argue that to solve the problem of writing for an American audience Wodehouse developed20 an algorithm for translatable humor, and this algorithm forced Wodehouse (as algorithms do) to generate a unique couple of characters – Bertie Wooster and Reginald Jeeves as agents of this humor. As I will explore later in this essay, they are the embodiment of the classic lovers couple as described by Roland Barthes and Plato but at the same time transcend modern studies of sexuality. And, therefore, I argue that Wodehouse belongs in the canon of trans-national 20th century literature. This inclusion is not meant to be an apology for the critical mistreatment of Wodehouse or even a recognition of his popularity. Wodehouse is an innovative writer who succeeded in bridging cultural gaps in a historically overlooked genre and his methods need to be recognized and analyzed because of the insights they can provide into humor as a global and not language specific.

I am not the first to write about an algorithm or mechanism in Wodehouse’s fiction. In the 1920s The Times wrote of the “Wodehouse manner” and the magazine Playhouse of “so-and-so” as a “Wodehouse character”21. In her 1988 essay MacDermott referred to the “Wodehouse

19 If a canon of over ninety books can be referred to as “little”.
20 It is not my goal to prove intentionality on Wodehouse’s part but Robert A. Hall’s The Comic Style of Wodehouse makes a strong argument for Wodehouse’s awareness of his own strengths and his ability to adapt to produce popular fiction.
21 Quoted by P. G. Wodehouse in a letter to step-daughter Leonora.
formula”. In “Plum Time in Neverneverland22: The Divine Comedy of P. G. Wodehouse” William Vesterman not only refers to the Wodehouse formula but proceeds to treat it as an equation and attempts to solve it mathematically23.

And this “manner” or “formula” is still to be decoded. In a 2018 article “Turning Pages: The enduring appeal of P. G. Wodehouse” Jane Sullivan writes about Jeeves and the Wedding Bells (2013) and Jeeves and the King of Clubs (2018), successful24 Wodehouse “homage” novels: “So what is it about Wodehouse's stories that have inspired such imitation, the sincerest form of flattery? They were never in fashion, exactly, but they have never gone out of fashion either.” The article never ends up with an answer, but the success of derived “homage” works speaks further to Wodehouse’s translatability – his work is successful in any form of recreation.

Sophie Ratcliffe’s25 review of the first of the “homage” novels (Jeeves and the Wedding Bells) in The Guardian also references the Wodehouse algorithm and notes a few basic blocks that are crucial to its structure:

> The best comic turn comes from the [Jeeves and the Wedding Bell’s] own double texture. Faulks [The author of the “homage” novel Jeeves and the Wedding Bells], like Bertie, is involved in his own complicated act of dressing up – the literary equivalent of squeezing himself into someone else’s trousers. Throughout the book we get a sense of what Faulks hears in Wodehouse’s style. There’s zeugma (“Georgiana wore a plain satin dress and a distant look”), etymological daftness (“If Hoad could best be described as inert, Beeching, P. was about as ert as they come”), addresses to camera (“New Readers, as they say, start here”) and abundant literary allusions, including the “gloomy Russians”, Keats, Shelley, and Thomases both Hardy and Gray. Loopy backstories abound, epithets are transferred, and comparisons stretched.26

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22 Again, a reference to the imaginary quality of the Wodehouse world.
24 The Guardian and The New York Times gave the “homages” positive reviews.
25 As mentioned before, Sophie Ratcliffe is the editor of P. G. Wodehouse: a Life in Letters, and is so well familiar with her subject.
26 Ratcliffe, Sophie, The Guardian, Jeeves and the Wedding Bells by Sebastian Faulks – Review, first published on Wed. 6 Nov. 2013 02.30 EST
Ratcliffe points out some of the tools Wodehouse uses in his prose – and all can be transcribed as code. Azeugma is the use of two meanings of a word in two different grammatical structures\textsuperscript{27}. The “etymological daftness”, Bertie’s common misuse of the English language is, at its core, a play with the existing rules of language, a form of grammatical abuse that can only work \textit{if} the Reader is aware of both the original rule and the rule governing Bertie’s creations. Bertie’s reference to his own head as a “an old lemon, slightly clouded” in \textit{The Inimitable Jeeves} is funny because the head could be referred to as a “lemon” for geometrical reasons, but it usually not described as such. The address to the camera is logical in that it is a switch between two modes of writing. The allusions to literature are a more complex aspect of Wodehouse (who quotes his reading even in personal letters\textsuperscript{28}). I will spend some time with them in this essay, concentrating on the Biblical reference to Jael, the wife of Heber.

Ratcliffe points out three characteristic qualities of Wodehouse’s Jeeves canon. Lawrence Dugan, in “Worcestershirewards: Wodehouse and the Baroque”\textsuperscript{29}, argues for seven which only partially align with the three outlined above (Dugan’s qualities are less grammatical and do not cover zegma, although he does mention it and admits that his list is limited). These works as well as the three responses Dugan’s essay received\textsuperscript{30} work to show how invested Wodehouse theorists are in the Wodehouse style and how it is still not described perfectly. The responses

\textsuperscript{27} There is a detailed analysis of many of Wodehouse’s tools in \textit{The Comic Style of P. G. Wodehouse} with extensive quotations and comparisons.

\textsuperscript{28} For example, in a page-long letter to Eric George (September, 1899) Wodehouse mentions \textit{Faust, Palamon and Arcite, Elegy written in a Country Churchyard} as well as Shakespeare, the Bible, Thackeray, Watt and others, with some appearing as puns or misquotations.


\textsuperscript{30} Written by Sarah Säckel, author of “Jokes Don't Jump from Nowhere: Comic Dialogism in P.G. Wodehouse’s “Jeeves and Wooster” Novels”; William Vesterman, author of “Plum Time in Nevereverland: The Divine Comedy of P. G. Wodehouse”; and Laura Mooneyham White, author of “P. G. Wodehouse and the Anachronism of Comic Form.”
Dugan received are not pushing against him as much as they are trying to explore the same themes. Wodehouse’s critics still have a lot of space to cover before they can start to actively disagree on topics in the Wodehouse canon.

I argue that it is not just that “Wodehouse’s style” can be broken down into basic blocks – it is important that those blocks can be repeated or reused. This essay is an attempt to dissect this “Wodehouse’s style” (“manner”, “formula” or “algorithm”) and to describe its most unique and important quality – replicability. When critics talk of style, they often invoke unique works or those that are considered unreproducible such as Ulysses. As I argue throughout this essay Wodehouse’s style is the opposite of that – not only is it reproducible, it is structured around replicability.

It is this style that made Wodehouse successful during his lifetime – as it was the process by which he recreated his imaginary Britain in the minds of his American Readers – and it is why he remains popular in 2019, forty four years after his death, in languages he never spoke and as rewritten by people he never met.

The Wodehouse Algorithm, an Essay on Open Source Literature

An algorithm, in computer science, is the process by which a computer, using input data, produces certain output. This output is presented to an inquirer through interface – that is what I see on a computer screen after an algorithm had been used to transform my data. With Wodehouse the output is evident – funny, and, more importantly, universally funny, stories.

31 Wodehouse sometimes reused himself. In a letter to Leslie Bradshaw (January 20, 1915) he admits that a scene would have to be cut from his novel (ironically titled) Something New for its British publication because he had previously used the same scene in The Lost Lambs (Mike). In the same letter Wodehouse jokes about lifting a character from Booth Tarkington’s The Guest of Quesnay. This attitude – the reuse of a complete element of a novel, in this case the “heroine”, is representative of Wodehouse’s treatment of writing as a process of building or coding.

32 Ben Schoff, the author of the second “homage” novel, was born a year before Wodehouse’s death.
books they are published in are the interface – the books are the representation of the transformed data. The original data, the input in the Jeeves canon, is Wodehouse’s knowledge of British customs and life. The algorithm is then the process by which the knowledge Wodehouse had about Britain becomes the stories Wodehouse wrote. Here I tread lightly – I have no interest in examining P. G. Wodehouse’s writing process. Instead, I argue that Wodehouse is one of the first writers of an ideology that would only become an entity years after his death – and that ideology\textsuperscript{33} is open source software.

The term “open source” in reference to software was coined by Christine Peterson in 1998\textsuperscript{34}. It describes computer code that is made readily available for any user to access, copy, redistribute and modify\textsuperscript{35}. Wikipedia is a famous example of open source software.

Open source software can be turned inside out, exposed. Opensource.com, a hub for the online open source community, lists four crucial aspects of such software: Control, as this technology allows a user to come up with new ways to adapt the software; Training, as this technology lets beginners see inside the code; Security, as all of the code is available for checks and configurations and cannot have hidden aspects; and Stability, as open source software, like written works in the public domain, cannot be taken from the user by a controlling entity\textsuperscript{36}.

Wodehouse’s work, as described in my introduction, has at least three of those qualities – Control, as it has been adapted, translated in a multitude of mediums – from language to language, from page to screen, from era to era with success; Training – as the successful “homage” novels show, a different writer can take the tools created by Wodehouse and adapt

\textsuperscript{33} I use the word “ideology” here because the move towards open sourcing software in the twenty first century has been deeply political and anti-power.

\textsuperscript{34} Peterson describes this process in a blog-post on https://opensource.com/article/18/2/coining-term-open-source-software.

\textsuperscript{35} OED, open-source.

them into new writing; and Stability as P. G. Wodehouse’s writing is open to critical analysis, such as this one. The power to analyze it will not fade away or be taken away by an owner. But my argument goes beyond a simple comparison between a concept in computer science and a famous twentieth century canon of comedy. Open source technology serves to solve (through all of its four benefits) the problem of understanding that may arise for a computer user facing a complex interface. When I use open source software, I can always check every piece of code that I am using. It is similar to IKEA furniture or a Lego castle – every little piece can be taken out for inspection.

I argue that Wodehouse designed his algorithm as similar to modern open source software to solve the problem of trans-Atlantic readership. He was writing to an American audience using British context or input; he had to perform the work of a writer who transforms information into text and also fulfill the task of a cultural translator who makes the text accessible to readers without a certain cultural background.

The easiest way to do that would be through language, that being the most literal form of translation but Wodehouse’s language did not change significantly after his move to the US. There are some distinctions between Wodehouse’s, in translation terms, source language (British English) and target language (American English). In *The Comic Style of P. G. Wodehouse* Robert A. Hall points out that after moving to America Wodehouse switched to the use of the American subjunctive (“it is essential that Polly go”) instead of the British subjunctive (“it is essential that Polly goes”)37. But in general Wodehouse’s language remained unchanged, British both in grammar and syntax, which means that the Wodehouse algorithm is a construction beyond language – and as I argue, a more fundamental one, as Wodehouse succeeded in creating texts

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37 Hall, Robert A. 71-72. The “Polly” example is taken from the text.
that can be presented with the same intention to a British, American, Russian or Japanese audience and to an audience of times other than his own. In creating his little “Britain” Wodehouse undertook a project that had been tried before – he attempted to create a new historical narrative in one country (America) while using the cultural signifiers of another (Britain). To use a term from Douglas Robinson’s essay on the construction of native “origin” stories, Wodehouse wrote a “hyperbolic crossover” and discovered British characters that could be popular in America (and then, by extension, the world).

In this essay, “The Tropics of Translation,” Douglas Robinson compares Longfellow’s *Song of Hiawatha* to Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*, claiming the latter to be a successful national epic because Americans were not interested in any sort of past (either “native” American as in *Hiawatha* or European as in *Beowulf*) but instead wanted an epic of a future in which America encompassed “everything”. While this may be true for the 1850’s, P. G. Wodehouse’s success in America seems to represent a change from this narrative. Wodehouse was certainly selling Americans an epic of their British past and in Robinson’s words, “creating ‘modernism.’” Wodehouse was selling the British past, but he was not copying it – his texts are British in texture but their logic, their mechanisms had to be trans-national, because American readers could identify with the first (they knew what “British” was), but they would have had a harder time with British logic.

Robinson wrote about the poet Ezra Pound who performed his “hyperbolic” crossover or translation by taking texts in Latin, Greek, Italian and Chinese and finding in each language “that spark, that Poundian touch” which Pound then “fanned” into his English. Both *Hiawatha* and *Leaves of Grass* were published in 1855. Robinson, Douglas. “The Tropics of Translation”, from *Transatlantic Literary Studies: A Reader* edited by Susan Manning and Andrew Taylor.
same with his British source language and his American target language – except that he came up with an algorithm that allowed him to almost automate the translation from the first into the second. Because Wodehouse did not change his language from British to American, his Algorithm existed beneath his language as a fundamental structure of trans-national humor. It is this structure that I refer to as Wodehouse’s “open source algorithm”.

The same way in which open source software can be examined from inside out, so can be Wodehouse’s writing. In *The Code of the Woosters*, Bertie describes his hangover employing an open source description:

I sat up in bed with that rather unpleasant feeling you get sometimes that you’re going to die in about five minutes. On the previous night, I had given a little dinner at the Drones to Gussie Fink-Nottle as a friendly send-off before his approaching nuptials with Madeline, only daughter of Sir Watkyn Bassett, CBE, and these things take their toll. Indeed, just before Jeeves came in, I had been dreaming that some bounder was driving spikes through my head — not just ordinary spikes, as used by Jael the wife of Heber, but red-hot ones.\textsuperscript{40}

There is some extreme British and Western detail in this passage (The “CBE”, a royal honor, the “Jael the wife of Heber”, of the Bible) and it is possible that a reader, coming to this text, is unaware of them (the passage above appears on the first page of *The Code*). Yet the words that matter are universal. This same passage can be rewritten to transmit its basic concept as such:

[I sat up in bed with that rather unpleasant feeling you get sometimes that you’re going to die in about five minutes.] On the previous night, I had done something with a person because of his dealings with another, a daughter of a third (somehow different), and this project tired me. [Indeed, just before Jeeves came in, I had been dreaming that] a person [was driving spikes through my head — not just ordinary spikes, as used by] a character, [but red-hot ones].

I am of course, making assumptions in this dissection. I am assuming the reader to be aware of a number of subjects: death, familial relationships of the basic “birth” kind, sleep,

\textsuperscript{40} *The Code of the Woosters*, 1.
spikes and the human physic – but this is not much to ask of a reader. A simple passage of the first pages of the above-mentioned Forsyte Saga (which deals with subjects similar to that of the Jeeves canon – property, class and family) cannot be dissected so:

When a Forsyte was engaged, married, or born, the Forsytes were present; when a Forsyte died—but no Forsyte had as yet died; they did not die; death being contrary to their principles, they took precautions against it, the instinctive precautions of highly vitalized persons who resent encroachments on their property.41

This passage (not a complex one by the novel’s standards) contains a paradox and one that the Reader is invited to revel in – the Forsyte principle of immortality. The Jeeves canon contains no paradoxes – it is self-sufficient in that it does not require the reader to gasp with the realization of an implied statement, the “Ha! Those British nouveaux riches are so entangled in their wealth that they believe they cannot die!” This is not to say that a Wodehouse Reader cannot gasp in recognition of this type (and many do, for example if they recognize any of the names in this passage which have appeared in Wodehouse fiction before), but this gasp, enjoyable, certainly, is not a requirement for the humor.

The humor comes from the fact that Bertie believes he is close to dying because he overdrank the night before and, instead of stating it as such, a simple “I drank too much and I feel bad”, he attempts to allude to a multitude of sources. The important aspect of this device is that the Reader does not have to know what sources Bertie is trying to access or what the words “Drones”, “CBE”, or “wife of Heber” mean. They, the reader, need only be made aware of the lengths that Bertie goes to in his description, the speed at which he produces his sources – the humor comes from this hustle. The reader, in the modern, hyperlink world, can Google the wife of Heber– and encounter a simple expansion on the Code of the Woosters scene: Jael and Sisera,

a painting done by Jacopo Amigoni (or the same scene depicted by Artemisia Gentileschi) in which Jael attempts at Sisera’s temple with a metal spike, – but this image in the text is itself already a hyperlink. It is not a meant to access a message preserved in the reader’s mind but to expand the reader’s knowledge.

Wodehouse is both advanced beyond his time and yet secured from the future – his texts are prone to cultural hyperlinks but not to cultural memes – that opposite of the hyperlink, a reference to the common knowledge. That is not to say that Wodehouse is devoid of memes – there are many throughout the canon – but they are reserved to referencing things inside of the Wodehouse world. In The Code of the Woosters Bertie and his Aunt Dahlia exchange a joke about Gussie Fink-Nottle’s drunken speech in a previous novel, Right Ho, Jeeves. The conversation42 starts with a meme – Aunt Dahlia refers to Gussie as “Spink-Bottle”, a nickname she made up during the affairs of Right Ho.

Of course, the simplification I provide above in my discussion of the hypertext may be extreme. It is possible that the reader could be aware of the concept of “nuptials” but not the wife of Heber or the pre-nuptial tradition of a bachelor party, the “friendly send-off.” But there is no need for the reader to know what “Sir” or “CBE” stands for – they are only here important as signifiers of difference. The name “Sir Watkyn Bassett, CBE” is distinct to the reader even if they are ignorant of British honors and titles. Two pages later Bertie gives Sir Watkyn Bassett, CBE a proper introduction:

I spoke [about Watkyn Basset] with strong feeling, and I’ll tell you why. A few months before, while celebrating Boat Race night, I had fallen into the clutches of the Law for trying to separate a policeman from his helmet, and after sleeping fitfully on a plank bed had been hauled up at Bosher Street next morning and fined five of the best. The magistrate who had inflicted this monstrous sentence –

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42 The Code of the Woosters, 7.
to the accompaniment, I may add, of some very offensive remarks from the bench – was none other than old Pop Bassett, father of Gussie’s bride-to-be.\footnote{The Code of the Woosters, 3.}

This passage allows the Reader to connect the prior significant of “Sir” and “CBE” to the power that Watkyn Basset holds over Bertie here. “Sir” is a hyperlink for the reader because it allows them to Google “Sir” and read about knighthood on Wikipedia; but the reader is not required to know this – the power of Watkyn Basset comes from inside the novel, from the fear he instills in Bertie.

Other names in the given paragraph work similarly. There are four people mentioned beside Watkyn Basset: Gussie Fink-Nottle, Madeline Basset, Reginald Jeeves and Jael the wife of Heber. None of them have titles like Sir Basset, yet all are presented with their own importance. Gussie receives his full name, Madeline only her first, Jeeves only his second and Jael is described through her marital status.

Those five different names describe the five character functions of the Jeeves code: the power function, the plot function, the motive function, the solution function and the literary function. Those functions are the core of the Wodehouse Algorithm,

I argue that the problems the algorithm solves are these:

What trouble of interest has occurred? (the motive function)

How is this trouble unavoidable or significant? (the power function)

How does Bertie Wooster become a part of this trouble? (the plot function)

How is this problem resolved and Bertie saved? (the solution function, or the Jeeves function, as it is the only function that is consistently performed by the same character.)

How are the four functions presented to the trans-Atlantic and trans-cultural reader? (the literary function).
The paragraph quoted above (“I sat up in bed...”) refers to all five functions by a name, a tag which is instantly distinct – as no two names are formed similarly.

Gussie is Bertie’s “fish-faced” pal. He represents the function of plot – the force that starts every Jeeves story. In different stories this role is fulfilled by different characters, but all can be described as “pal” in one way or another. To break down the Jeeves collection *Carry On, Jeeves*: six plots are introduced through Bertie’s “traditional” pals, young men of his age (*The Artistic Career of Corky, Jeeves and the Hard-boiled Egg, The Aunt and the Sluggard, Without the Option, The Rummy Affair of Old Bifffy, Fixing it for Freddie*); one through an aunt, the familial “pal” (*Jeeves and the Unbidden Guest*); one through a combination of both aunts and pals (*Clustering Round Young Bingo*); and one through a fiancé, Florence Cray (*Jeeves Takes Charge*). Thus out of the ten stories in *Carry On, Jeeves*, six are generated by regular pals and two by more complex “aunt-pals”. The Florence Cray story can be excused – it is the story that introduces Jeeves into Bertie’s life. Gussie Fink-Nottle in *The Code of the Woosters* is then a Wodehouse regular – a suitable value for the plot function. And his name is given in full – to install him as an autonomous entity – with the addition of “friendly” to signify the “pal” quality.

Madeline Basset, here “Madeline”, is the opposite of Gussie. She is described through her relation to her father which removes her last name. She is a “romantic” interest, a type of female

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44 I will complicate the word “friend” later in this essay and so won’t use it now.
45 The last plot of the collection is so different from the rest that it should not be considered as a part of any statistics that attempt to represent the Jeeves canon. The last story of *Carry On, Jeeves is Bertie Changes His Mind*, is the only story in the canon that is written from the perspective of Jeeves and one of two that do not feature Bertie as the protagonist. Wodehouse positions the story as distinct by referencing Bertie’s first name in the title which never happens again in the Jeeves canon. I will return to this story later as it provides a lot of insight into the Jeeves–Bertie relationship.
character Wodehouse is known for\textsuperscript{46}. She is the “motive” function, something that cannot be autonomous because it requires subjects. A “pal” comes to Bertie to begin a plot:

Corky, \textit{The Artistic Career of Corky}: “Bertie, I want you to meet my fiancé, Miss Singer”

Rocky, \textit{The Aunt and the Sluggard}: “Read this, Bertie, […] Wake up and read this!”

Biffy, \textit{The Rummy Affair of Old Biffy}: “Bertie! […] Thank God! […] Don’t leave me, Bertie. I am lost.”\textsuperscript{47}

But a romantic interest is the motive for such an appearance by the pal; the beginning before the beginning:

\textit{The Artistic Career of Corky} is built around Corky trying to tell his uncle about his engagement – his fiancé, Muriel Singer, is present only to create this conflict (and then a second one, after she marries Corky’s uncle).

\textit{The Aunt and the Sluggard} has an aunt take on the motive function, as the lazy and introverted Rocky receives a letter from his aunt instructing him to “be the life and soul of brilliant supper parties”\textsuperscript{48}.

\textit{The Rummy Affair of Old Biffy} again employs a younger woman, Mabel, who primarily exists as an absence – the plot of the story revolves around Biffy trying to remember her address and last name. The second motive in the story is also a young woman – Honoria Glossop.

Lawrence Dugan writes of women in the Jeeves canon: “The women rarely threaten anything,

\textsuperscript{46} Not all young women of the canon fall into the category of romantic interests. Apart from servants, there are Stephanie “Stiffy” Byng, Rosie M. Banks, Daphne Dolores Morehead and Angela Travers (with exception of childhood romance) who are major young women of the canon and are never engaged to Bertie; the more complicated case is Roberta “Bobbie” Wickham, once Bertie’s love interest and later friend. Roughly half of the young female population of the canon can be considered “romantic” interests. I classify the kid Clementina and Peggy Mainwaring (of \textit{Bertie Changes His Mind}) as “Pals” because both are children and their relationships with Bertie follow more to the “pal” function.

\textsuperscript{47} \textit{Carry On, Jeeves}, 42, 109, 140.

\textsuperscript{48} \textit{Carry On, Jeeves}, 112
they only warn, but they motivate nearly every one of the Jeeves–Wooster novels”⁴⁹. These women are cause for plot, but they are not plot themselves.

Thus the motive function creates the story as separate from Bertie – Corky, Rocky and Biffy are in trouble because of the motive function, not because of their relationship to Bertie. The plot function attaches Bertie to the motive – it invites him into the story.

Jeeves represents the solution function – he resolves each story in ways that range from ingenious (he recommends that Corky should become a comic artist and stop relying on his uncle’s wealth) to full-on deus-ex-machina acts (Jeeves tells Bertie, at the end of *The Rummy Affair*, that he was able to save Biffy because the girl in question was his, Jeeves’s, niece).

The fourth function, one that is represented by Sir Watkyn Basset, CBE in the passage from *The Code of the Woosters*, is the power function. It is similar to the motive function in that it is usually the frame of the story – it is the rich uncles in *The Artistic Career of Corky* and *Jeeves and the Hard-boiled Egg*. But it is distinct from the motive function (even if they are often presented in the same character) because it is what forces Bertie to involve himself in the troubles of his friends. “The Code of the Woosters” is a form of the power function, the code that stops Bertie from breaking off engagements because

> If a girl thinks you're in love with her and says she will marry you, you can't very well voice a preference for being dead in a ditch. Not, I mean, if you want to regard yourself as a preux chevalier, as the expression is, which is always my aim.⁵⁰

In some way this mechanism is the most enigmatic of the Jeeves canon because it is never fully explained – it seems the only part of Bertie’s personality that is not controlled yet accepted by Jeeves who always acts discreetly on Bertie’s behalf. But, even if its *existence* is not

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⁴⁹ Dugan, Lawrence, “Worcestershirewards: Wodehouse and the Baroque”.
⁵⁰ *Much Obliged, Jeeves*, 10
fully explained, it is, as in the passage above, describes consistently and self-sufficiently. When, or, to use coding terms, “if”, Bertie becomes engaged \(\rightarrow\) then Bertie cannot break off engagement. This is the power function – the unbreakable rules of the imaginary world of Wodehouse.

It is also the function that has landed Wodehouse in the category of “conservative” writers because, as critics, such as Kathy MacDermott, argue, Wodehouse governs his stories within the confines of the pre-war class and gender systems. While it is true that Wodehouse’s characters exist in a class-defined imaginary world, it is not true that “imaginary” and “escapist” mean the same thing. J. R. R. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* is imaginary in that it deals with, among other subjects, elves and dwarves, yet it is not ultimately escapist – as death, illness and corruption are core aspects of its imaginary world. Bertie *is* oblivious of many controversial subjects – politics, race, colonialism, mental health, sexuality and sexual assault are mostly absent from the canon – and Bertie’s only class-like distinction between people is their financial situation and even there he reserves judgement. But just because Bertie is oblivious of those subjects does not mean that they do not exist or cannot be discussed in the confines of the Jeeves canon.

*The Comic Style of P. G. Wodehouse* contains the aptly titled part 3.5, “Love, Death, and Violence” in which Robert A. Hall refutes the idea that Wodehouse’s “comic view” does not deal with dark subjects. After providing examples to the contrary (invoking suicide, homicide and bodily-harm in Wodehouse’s fiction), Hall concludes: “… as long as we realize that [the comic view] is intentionally partial, [it] is fully as satisfying and perhaps even more so”51. War is absent from the Jeeves canon, taxation is absent, nationalism is only lightly touched upon

through the Oswald Mosley-like Roderick Spode, but, because of the open source nature of the Wodehouse algorithm, his fiction follows the open source stance on security – it is not free from being flawless but, as Hall shows, it is actually more open to dissection and so its flaws are easier to find and expose.

As with an open source computer program, I can dive into the texts of the Jeeves canon and produce problematic use of stereotypes. The hysterical cook Anatole is described as having a “impulsive Provençal temperament”. By the rules of the algorithm, Wodehouse does not let the reader place their own meaning on the “Provençal” and expands in the next sentence: “These Gauls, I should have remembered, can't take it. Their tendency to fly off the handle at the slightest provocation is well known.”52 The algorithm forces Wodehouse to expose all of his concepts. This makes the texts more susceptible to criticism, as Wodehouse would have a hard time saying “Oh, that is not what I meant by ‘Provençal!’” and act as if he wasn’t indulging in stereotypes, yet it makes the text more secure for the reader as it is much harder for Wodehouse to hide malicious code. If he is to use stereotypes – he will detail them as such.

The power function then serves to create structures of power in the Jeeves canon. Wodehouse is not transcribing the power structures of the Britain that he knows – he is recreating them from scratch in his little “Britain”. This does not defend him from accusations of, broadly, “conservatism” because the structures he is taking are inherently colonial, racist, sexist, etc. But, as I argue, the difference between “transcribing” and “recreating” is crucial as it exposes any abnormalities in the text. Wodehouse is unable to copy a French stereotype from British culture into his writing without explaining it as Bertie’s opinion because Wodehouse’s American (and then trans-national) readers may not be aware of those stereotypes. Instead,

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Wodehouse has to recreate the whole mechanism of the stereotype in his text which, while conservative in that it produces a conservative view, is, at the same time, progressive because it forces the stereotype to unravel. To compare the Jeeves canon to one of the most famous pieces of open source software, Wikipedia: articles on Wikipedia are not always true and may contain factually inaccurate information, but a user can examine the edits that led to the current state of the article and the discussions that surrounded each edit. The Wodehouse algorithm allows the readers to access a similar data-base for the statements in the text. Bertie could, for example, say of Sir Watkyn Basset that he, Basset, is a judge – and that would be enough to establish a power structure. The reader knows the power of a judge. But it is not enough to establish power in Wodehouse’s world. Basset’s power over Bertie comes from the fact that Basset fined him for money – this power is personal, produced one-on-one. Every relationship, even one that could be dictated by “society” at large (as could be the fear of legislative power), has to be recreated in the algorithm. Every motion has to have a described cause. As I will show in the next part of the essay, this leads Wodehouse to (possibly unintentionally) create a unique queer relationship in Jeeves and Bertie as Wodehouse is forced by his own algorithm, again and again, to leave no stone unturned in their interactions and opinions of each other.

The last of the five functions is the literary function – it governs how all the other functions are performed in the text. In the paragraph about Bertie’s hangover, it is signified by Jael the wife of Heber who serves as both a hyperlink and a meme in the text. I have already described its hyperlink quality – it is a reference to the Biblical story of Jael who killed Sisera by driving a metal spike into his head. Its meme quality, on the other hand, is dual. First, inside this paragraph, it serves as an introduction to a description of physical pain: “some bounder was

53 At the top right of any article on Wikipedia there is a tab titled “view history”.
driving spikes through my head”. Bertie is accessing here a fundamental quality of the human experience – the ability to reference the experience of other people. He could have said “I had been dreaming that some bounder was driving spikes through my head” and stopped there but instead he attaches this dream to the human experience of Jael. Bertie is in fact stating: “This happened to Sisera through Jael and now I was experiencing something similar”. There is, for the reader, a crucial difference between a character stating “I feel this” and “I feel the same as another person”. The second is more trustworthy and grounded. It is crucial for Wodehouse that his logical connections work flawlessly – a hyperlink that cannot be clicked is a not a hyperlink. Because of this, Wodehouse relies on smoothing techniques, such as the use of easily recognizable human motions (like comparing your experience to that of another person), to improve the quality of his links.

The biblical reference is also a meme on the grand scale of the Jeeves canon because it is a reference to the fact that Bertie won a prize for scripture knowledge while in school. It is one of Bertie’s proudest moments and comes up frequently in stories. And so, Bertie’s biblical knowledge is another example of the literary function of the Wodehouse Algorithm – Bertie quotes the Bible because he knows it well; he knows it well because he studied it in school and was good at the studying. Another facet of Bertie is fully exposed, open sourced.

The question then becomes: Is there anything about Bertie Wooster that Wodehouse tells the reader but does not explain? While interesting in terms of character study, this question is actually crucial to the dissection of the Algorithm because it is the question of security. Can Wodehouse hide anything about Bertie from the reader? Is open source fiction actually more

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54 Most visibly in Right Ho, Jeeves when Gussie Fink-Nottle accuses Bertie of having cheated in the competition.
exposed to criticism? Does it allow for more control and security like its computer counterpart or is it a smoke-and-mirror scheme meant to trick the reader into trust?

**Bertie Wooster’s Status Quo**

I will not use the rest of this paper to give examples for all of Bertie’s qualities and the ways they are justified in the text but will concentrate on a few that are mentioned frequently to show the work of the Algorithm and the improbability (or even impossibility) of a writer hiding anything malicious inside of it. To simplify, Wodehouse had to make his texts transparent so that they could be accessed by an American reader. He succeeded to such a degree, that his texts can be accessed by a trans-national, trans-cultural and timeless reader. But transparency is two sided – and so Wodehouse’s texts became so transparent that they cannot hide anything, including Wodehouse’s missteps and flaws.

The first quality of the Jeeves canon that I want to examine is Bertie’s relationships with his aunts. When introducing the reader to his aunts and their plans (for example Aunt Dahlia’s scheme which involves Bertie stealing a cow-creamier) Bertie could say “You know how it is with aunts? You must always do what they say”. Instead he goes into detailed descriptions of his personally established relationships. In *The Code of the Woosters* Bertie writes about his aunts:

Dahlia — she, as I may have mentioned before, being my good and deserving aunt, not to be confused with Aunt Agatha, who eats broken bottles and wears barbed wire next to the skin. Apart from the mere intellectual pleasure of chewing the fat with her, there was the glittering prospect that I might be able to cadge an invitation to lunch.55

Bertie justifies his rapport with his “good” aunt through her fun conversation (which later presents itself when they exchange a laugh over Gussie Fink-Nottle) and her lunches prepared by

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Anatole, the celebrated chef. This relationship parallels the “You know how it is with aunts?” sentiment, as most people with a “good” aunt can probably come up with reasons for why she is “good”, but by stating his personal reasons, Bertie makes his observation less generalized because he is talking about a specific aunt, yet more universal because every aunt is a specific aunt and reasons for liking her are always specific.

When talking of the above-mentioned Aunt Agatha, Bertie says:

I find it extraordinarily difficult to explain why it is that she has always put the wind up me to such a frightful extent. I mean, I’m not dependent on her financially or anything like that. It’s simply personality. I’ve come to the conclusion.\(^{56}\)

He then proceeds to explain that she has had this effect on him since childhood and he is still under the influence. And when introduced on the next page, Aunt Agatha instantly attacks Bertie justifying this feeling – she claims he is supposed to “breed”, whereas Bertie would prefer not to. And so again, Bertie is invoking a feeling that many readers may have – the fear of a relative that stems from childhood trauma – but Bertie describes it in enough detail so that any reader can understand his sentiment.

Bertie uses a similar tactic to describe his potential fiancés – he piles on comparisons stretching in all directions so that the reader has at least something to latch on. In *The Inimitable Jeeves* Bertie describes Honoria Glossop:

To me the girl was simply nothing more nor less than a pot of poison. One of those dashed large, brainy, strenuous, dynamic girls you see so many of these days. She had been at Girton, where, in addition to enlarging her brain to the most frightful extent, she had gone in for every kind of sport and developed the physique of a middle-weight catch-as-catch-can wrestler. I’m not sure she didn’t box for the Varsity while she was up. The effect she had on me whenever she appeared was to make me want to slide into a cellar and lie low till they blew the All Clear.\(^{57}\)

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\(^{56}\) *The Inimitable Jeeves*, 23.

\(^{57}\) *The Inimitable Jeeves*, 44-45.
All the qualities that Bertie describes in Honoria are not “bad” inherently. A good person can be large, brainy and dynamic and Wodehouse does not want the reader to think of Honoria as bad because of her qualities. These qualities are bad in how they would interact with Bertie who is not very strong and admittedly not very smart. He is lazy and the dynamic Honoria would undermine his “drone” lifestyle. As Aunt Agatha puts it: “she is strong, self-reliant and sensible, and will counterbalance the deficiencies and weaknesses of your [Bertie’s] character”58. Honoria is bad, that is, for Bertie. All of Bertie’s opinions, even those that sound like generalizations, are in fact statements about the influence of people on his own life instead of the world at large.

This positioning of personal as public and vice versa is the exact mistake that Wodehouse made in his wartime broadcasts – he spoke about his personal experience in a German prison which was overall “fine” as far as prison experiences during the Second World War go, but his listeners perceived it as a general statement about German internment. This mistake is at the same time at the core of the success of Jeeves canon. Wodehouse is building all of Bertie’s opinions in the Jeeves canon as personal and personally justified in each instance. He is forced to do this because he cannot rely on his reader’s knowledge. He succeeds in producing texts that do not require a lot of knowledge from the reader because they existed in a self-contained rule-bound universe intended for widespread consumption.

The “personal” aspect of Bertie’s existence described above is expressed clearly in this short exchange between Bertie and Aunt Agatha:

“[Honoria] will mould you.”
“But I don’t want to be moulded.”59

58 The Inimitable Jeeves, 46.
59 The Inimitable Jeeves, 47.
This conversation is the most axiomatic of the Jeeves canon – it expresses the idea that there is a status quo for Bertie which he doesn’t want to be changed from the outside. This is the idea that Wodehouse wants the reader to share – and this is the fundamental structure of the algorithm. Everything else Wodehouse builds in the Jeeves canon exists in relationship with this concept. The five functions of the Algorithm act solely to restore the equilibrium of Bertie’s status quo. The power function is the ability of the system in which Bertie exists to change his status quo. Power includes his aunts trying to force him to do their bidding. Power also includes society stopping Bertie from trying to express himself, which comes mainly in the form of two desires – to wear colorful clothes and to play musical instruments.

The plot function is the process by which Bertie’s status quo becomes stressed. The motive function is the connecting tissue between the power function and the plot function – it is the direction in which the power function acts which leads to the creation of the plot function. For example, in *The Artistic Career of Corky*, a short story in which Bertie helps his friend, the portraitist Corky, the power-function is Corky’s uncle, who does not want to support Corky’s art financially. The motive function is Mabel, Corky’s fiancé – as it is because of her that Corky has to engage the power function and come up with a way to ask his uncle for more money and a blessing. Corky himself is the plot function – he brings the motive-power tandem to Bertie’s attention. Jeeves, as usual, performs the solution function by proposing A. that Corky should trick his uncle into liking Mabel and then (when Corky’s uncle marries Mabel) B. that Corky should become a comic artist. The literary function ties all of the other functions together.

For example, one of the basic concepts in the story is that Corky is his uncle’s only heir. This is not made exactly clear, although there is a whole paragraph dedicated to Corky’s fear that his uncle will never die. Until the middle of the story Wodehouse *seems* to rely on the idea that
the reader can figure this out for themselves. But, once Corky’s uncle has a son (leaving Corky without an inheritance), the literary function comes into play in Corky’s monologue about the newborn:

Here’s the first commission I have ever had to paint a portrait, and the sitter [the baby] is that human poached egg that butted in and bounced me out of my inheritance.60

Any wonder the reader could have had about the financial Corky’s inheritance is swept away as the literary function once again saves trans-national reader’s from having to understand the intricacies of British society like primogeniture.

This story may seem very removed from Bertie – he is not the victim of power here. Yet the story is about his status quo. He is first moved to help Corky because of his personal Code of Honor which is triggered by the “quiet” and “appealing” Mabel – rest assured the Algorithm performs again and Bertie goes on a tangent explaining in great detail and with many metaphors, what exactly causes him to care for Mabel (“She was rather like one of those innocent-tasting American drinks” etc.). Following the Code is a part of Bertie’s status quo – his world would be upturned if he couldn’t follow it. He describes this possibility (which is never performed in the stories) by comparing himself to a “lost child” who needs a father (Jeeves) to save him from being unable to help his friend.

In the second part of the story (after Mabel marries Corky’s uncle) Bertie starts walking around Washington Square (Corky’s home) so as not to encounter him. As time passes Bertie realized that the potential stress of seeing Croky sad is being replaced by a stress of letting Corky wallow alone. This demonstrates the complexity of Bertie’s status quo – he is not just “lazy” in that he is not always looking to do the least possible work. Instead he is constantly balanced

60 Carry On, Jeeves, 51-52.
between personal comfort and the comfort of his close friends. And the closest of his friends (not “pals”, friends) is Reginald Jeeves.

**Bertie’s Closest Friend**

As I draw to a close in my analysis of the Wodehouse algorithm and before I describe its greater implications for trans-national humor, I want to examine one of the successes the Algorithm lead to – the complex homosocial relationship between Bertie Wooster and Reginald Jeeves. I argue that, while Wodehouse does not, in general, analyze serious subjects, this does not mean that the Algorithm cannot be applied to them. This process is complicated because the public does not always take well to light descriptions of serious topics – Wodehouse’s war-time broadcasts are a perfect example of this. While it seems, by all accounts, that the broadcasts represented Wodehouse’s internment experience honestly, the public was disturbed by his light tone and general attitude. As MacDermott pointed out: during the second half of the twentieth century dark humor became the vehicle for trenchant, academically acceptable critique. Light humor became the humor of “conservatism” as it did not visibly attempt to criticize the world. I argue that light humor, when performed in an open source way, can produce extremely detailed accounts of serious topics – such as Eve Sedgwick’s important concept of homosociality or homoeroticism.

It is easy to claim a homoerotic connection between Jeeves and Bertie, though I am arguing that it is not the whole story, but rather a simplification of the relationship. The same way that the Algorithm forces Wodehouse to elaborate on stereotypes, it also forces Wodehouse to elaborate on the relationships of his characters. Wodehouse cannot leave Bertie and Jeeves’s relationship closeted because of the open source nature of his writing. At the same time, he
cannot rely on gay stereotypes with Bertie and Jeeves (as he does with French stereotypes for Anatole) because that would simplify the characters too much. So instead Wodehouse is left with creating actual human characters that cannot be simply labeled as “such” and “such”.

The simple, even traditional, homoeroticism is evident in Bertie and Jeeves’s clothing rapport – the ways in which Jeeves controls and cares for Bertie’s visible body. On the second page of *Jeeves Exerts the Old Cerebellum* the master and servant have an exchange that echoes so many others throughout the Jeeves canon:

“Talking of shirts,” I said, “Have those mauve ones I ordered arrived yet?”
“Yes, sir. I sent them back.”
“Sent them back?”
“Yes, sir. They would not have become you.” *(The Inimitable Jeeves, 2)*

Here Bertie serves in a traditionally feminine role – the controlled, the abused – and it is for him a common one. Jeeves often shames his master for his choices of dress – in the same novel it happens at least twice, in chapter three (this time concerning a “fruity cummerbund”, *The Inimitable Jeeves, 23*) and in chapter nine (in regards to Bertie’s “priceless purple socks”, *The Inimitable Jeeves, 78*) – and after such a shaming Jeeves always emerges the victor: the shirts are sent back, the cummerbund is given away and the socks are presented to a lift attendant. Those pieces are all colorful – “mauve,” “pretty brightish scarlet” and “a blaze of mauve” – and all involve Bertie stepping outside the lines of societal norms to satisfy his own motions. In regards to the cummerbund, Bertie even claims that he was mustering up the courage to wear it – Jeeves describes the effects of this piece of cloth as “loud in the extreme”. Bertie wears it despite Jeeves’s warning because “[Bertie] was feeling pretty low and the cummerbund was the only thing which could cheer [him] up”61. This control Jeeves exerts over Bertie’s status quo is unique in the canon because it is the only one to which Bertie willingly submits.

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61 *The Inimitable Jeeves, 26*
In this control the relationship between Bertie and Jeeves is similar to that of two lovers. Roland Barthes writes in *A Lover’s Discourse*:\(^62\) “I am twice subject: to the one I love and to *his* dependency”. Jeeves is subject to Bertie’s wishes and to Bertie’s dependency on him. Similarly, Bertie is subject to Jeeves’s wishes and to Jeeves’s wish for the control over his, Bertie’s, body. In *The Inimitable Jeeves*, Bertie states:

> 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.\(^63\)

The sustenance of the Master-Servant relationship, as is in BDSM, here is in the control and the ground rules. Modern, twenty first century lovers would share a bed and revel in the process of encountering the body of the other in the morning; Bertie and Jeeves have a different form of comfort in their relationship – their comfort comes from supporting each other’s boundaries.

On the next page Bertie describes Jeeves as a “guide, philosopher, and friend” but the last word is not perfect because Bertie’s friends, who I referred to as “pals” until now, are in the habit of barging into his room before he is awake – in the same book Mr. Little attempts to contact Bertie while he is asleep. Jeeves serves as the protector of Bertie’s boundaries. Jeeves is also the author of a cocktail that often wakes Bertie up after a late night – and this cocktail is the simple way the Algorithm reproduces this relationship. Bertie does not want to talk to anyone if he is sleepy. Jeeves helps him wake up by providing him with his “morning reviver”.

Bertie and Jeeves’s relationship is different from that of Bertie and his friends through a complication of consent. Bertie and Jeeves both have a stronger relationship in the department of

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\(^62\) *A Lover’s Discourse*, 82-83  
\(^63\) *The Inimitable Jeeves*, 1
unspoken rules – that is why Jeeves is such a great valet – and at the same time they are much better at resolving consent issues. When Jeeves and Bertie disagree on an issue the disagreement is usually resolved through an experience (such as Bertie realizing that he does not in fact want to adopt a child in *Bertie Changes his Mind*) as opposed to the more questionable tactics of Bertie’s friends and family. In *The Inimitable Jeeves*, for instance, Mr. Little, Bertie’s old pal, manipulates Bertie into agreeing to impersonate a famous writer by invoking their school time together and Bertie’s Aunt Agatha forces him into a potential commitment with Aline Hemmingway through fear.

Bertie submits to Jeeves because of his, Jeeves’s, superior knowledge, not because of prior commitments, social constructs and blackmail. Their friendship is as fundamental as are the structures of humor in the Jeeves canon. Bertie and Jeeves make decisions regarding each other based on their perceptions, even if misguided, of what would be the best for both. A curious reader can look at any of their interactions and, because of the open source quality of the Algorithm, see why they acted one way or another – and those ways always support their relationship. They are a perfect, evolving model of consent.

In *A Lover’s Discourse* (Chapter *Union*), Roland Barthes proposes Achilles and Patroclus to be a perfect couple: “Patroclus was the lover, Achilles the beloved”⁶⁴. Plato writes in *Symposium* (Barthes’s text of origin):

… the notion that Patroclus was the beloved one is a foolish error into which Aeschylus has fallen, for Achilles was surely the fairer of the two, fairer also than all the other heroes; and, as Homer informs us, he was still beardless, and younger far…⁶⁵

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⁶⁴ Barthes, 227
The couple is then so: Achilles, a younger and fairer beloved, one that must be protected, and the older Patroclus, the protector (Patroclus fought and died as Achilles had removed himself from battle). This is the dynamic of Jeeves and Bertie. The older Jeeves\textsuperscript{66} protects Bertie who he describes as “an exceedingly pleasant and amiable young gentleman, but not intelligent.”\textsuperscript{67} In \textit{Bertie Changes his Mind} (The only story of the canon narrated by Jeeves), Jeeves goes so far as to fear his demise as valet if Bertie was to marry – thus Jeeves positions himself in place of the caring wife or, to be more precise, he imagines that he takes up the same space in Bertie’s life as a wife would.

In \textit{Bertie Changes his Mind} the reader is able to see Jeeves perform a whole plan of his to dissuade Bertie from achieving a goal that Jeeves disapproves of. I argue that the way Jeeves does this – by placing Bertie in a situation that challenges Bertie’s status quo (in this case – the dream of child adoption) – and the reasons for which Jeeves does this – his fear for his and Bertie’s happiness – make the consent in Bertie and Jeeves’s relationship more complex and much better (in the sense of more acceptable \textit{as} consent) performed than it is performed in Bertie’s relationships with his other friends and family.

In \textit{Bertie Changes his Mind} Jeeves says: “I am fond of Mr Wooster, and I admit I came very near to melting as I looked at his face. He was staring at me in a sort of dumb despair that would have touched anybody”\textsuperscript{68}. This is the epitome of the perfect couple relationship described by Barthes and Plato – Jeeves, an older, more experienced (and his experience here is represented by the fact that he, Jeeves, knows how to protect Bertie from the dangers of the

\textsuperscript{66} While the ages shift throughout the canon, in the first Jeeves story Bertie is twenty-four, and P. G. Wodehouse wrote in a letter to Robert A. Hall, Jr. that Jeeves was “about thirty-five” at the time.

\textsuperscript{67} \textit{The Inimitable Jeeves}, 43.

\textsuperscript{68} \textit{Carry On, Jeeves}, 266.
world and consciously decides against it) lover is enchanted by Bertie, a younger, naïve beloved, dumb and in despair.

The friendship of Bertie and Jeeves, the “trusted” friendship or the friendship of developed consent, is not the same as any other friendships that Bertie has. Jeeves’s relationships on the other hand are closer to this trusted friendship – even if sometimes he has relations similar to that of his master (he even becomes involuntarily\textsuperscript{69} engaged at the beginning of \textit{The Inimitable Jeeves}), his relationships with other servants seem to have a similar, more complex, consent.

Thus while the relationship between Bertie and Jeeves can certainly be construed as a homoerotic one and it fits well into Barthes’s definition of a perfect love relation, it is most importantly a relationship of consent and proximity – in both the bodies and the wishes of master and servant. This relationship is presented in bits and pieces throughout the Jeeves canon and is the inevitable by-product of the Wodehouse Algorithm. Wodehouse’s goal was to write funny stories about Britain for an Americanized or global context. In achieving this, perhaps unintentionally, Wodehouse created a fundamental structure of humor which enabled, and required, him to be open about every little aspect of his characters. The deep connection between Bertie and Jeeves is only one of these aspects. Future critics of Wodehouse can examine his takes on family and wealth. They can also, because of the open source structure of the Algorithm, analyze the abuses of the Jeeves canon – the absence of characters of color\textsuperscript{70}, mental health, gender etc. The Algorithm provides this transparency.

The Algorithm is my attempt to understand humor as transcending language and culture. Wodehouse’s success relies heavily on the translatability of his texts and the Algorithm is the

\textsuperscript{69} The nature and cause of the commitment are never revealed but Jeeves is eager to get out of it and schemes similarly to how he would to assist Bertie to break the commitment off.

\textsuperscript{70} In my work I encountered one such character, the aforementioned lift attendant in \textit{The Inimitable Jeeves}. 
underlying structure that allows for such translatability. Today, in a global world, it is more important than ever to dissect texts that seem to imply a shared vision for all their readers – and rely on basic human concepts such as death, family and personal space, because Algorithms such as that of Wodehouse, can connect the study of literature to the growing and ever-expanding study of computer science and philosophy. As I show in this essay, “open source” as an ideology can work as well in literature as it does in computer science and can be an important aspect of trans-national literature.

“Open source” does not mean safe or protected. It does mean accessible, open to criticism and adaptation. The same way that Wikipedia has been a vehicle and a launch-site for many independent Wiki projects (including wodehouse.fandom.com, a Wiki dedicated to the works of P. G. Wodehouse), Wodehouse’s fiction can and has served in the past (as a source for the “homage” novels and many parodies) as a vehicle for derivative works. The understanding of the Wodehouse Algorithm is a step towards the understanding of humor and translation as well as the production of new material that uses a similar perpetual algorithm.

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71 April 11, 2019.
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