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**British Social Class as Reflected in the Novels
of P. G. Wodehouse**

Bakalářská práce

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Introduction

The books of P. G. Wodehouse are without a doubt primarily appreciated for their humour and light-heartedness. For some, they are one of the funniest the English literature has ever produced. But though they are prevalently humorous, we can explore many important elements in his books and one of them is his stance on the British social class system. The aim of my thesis is to explore the ways in which he portrays the social class of the characters and the relationships between them. I will also try to define whether he treats the social class system in a standard way, especially as far as the master-servant relationship is concerned. For this, I will use examples from his novels, particularly *The Code of the Woosters* and *Right Ho, Jeeves*.

In the first part of my thesis I will try to define the term social class and describe the history and present of the social class system in Britain as it has always played a very important role in the everyday life of the British population. The social class system sets many —often unspoken— social rules that the individual classes abide by and they also influence the way others perceive the members of a particular social class. Consequently, they define the behaviour and individual personalities of the characters in Wodehouse's books as they are set in Britain around the time when these rules were very strongly enforced. I will present the typical characteristics of each individual class, which will serve as the basis for analysing the social class of the characters in the second part of my thesis. I will also include a chapter specifying the master-servant relationship in the Victorian era and the years following after that. The reason for this is the fact that both of the books I will be analysing feature the main characters of a master and his manservant.

In the second part of my thesis I will be analysing the notion of social class in the novels of P. G. Wodehouse and the ways in which he describes the British social class system of his time. Firstly, I will define the social class of the characters to help us better understand the relationships and social rules between them. Then, I will try to study the social class rules governing their relationships and my aim is to see whether Wodehouse abides by the rules set by the social class system and whether any deviations to this system can be found in his books. Finally, I will

present some ideas on what the reasoning behind his particular treatment of social class in his books might be.

1 Social Class

Like many technical terms used in the field of sociology, social class is one that professionals find rather elusive and very difficult to describe and therefore define. It is a term most people are familiar with and are usually able to express in their own words but for the purpose of clarity, it is necessary to define what exactly the term 'social class' stands for. There exist a lot of definitions but we can agree on the fact that the term is overarching and permeates all parts of society. Sociologist A. H. Halsey sees class as one of the dimensions through which power and advantage are distributed in a stratification system in society. He says that "classes—for example professional people or factory workers—are formed socially out of the division of labour"¹ and that "they make up more or less cohesive and socially conscious groups from those occupational groups and their families which share similar work and market situations."² Drawing on the general ideas of Max Weber, which I will be discussing later, he concludes that "in short, classes belong to the economic structure of society."³ He continues to argue that "...classes emerge out of occupational structure, and power and advantage are unequally distributed between them. It is this definition of class in terms of occupation which is widely used in European sociology."⁴

Other sociologists go even further than that. For example, professor of sociology Margaret L. Andersen adds that class is not purely about the amount of money one earns and about one's economic security; class also means culture. She says that class determines one's understanding of the world and their feeling of 'fitting in'. How one talks and behaves, how they think, even such small things as how one walks, looks, moves, where they live or who they are friends with—all these things are indicators of class. It permeates all levels of people's lives. She also points out the important fact that class is socially constructed and all-encompassing.⁵

¹ Albert Henry Halsey, *Change in British Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 28.

² Halsey, *Change in British Society*, 28.

³ Halsey, *Change in British Society*, 30.

⁴ Halsey, *Change in British Society*, 30.

⁵ Margaret L. Andersen, and Patricia Hill Collins, *Race, Class, and Gender: an Anthology* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1995), 101-102.

Richard Centers looks on class from a psychological point of view and he states that “a man’s class is a part of his ego, a feeling on his part of belongingness; an identification with something larger than himself.”⁶ Thus, he understands class as an integral part of one’s mind, which provides a new and original way of grasping this elusive term.

The notion of class is based upon two major traditions, one defined by Karl Marx and the other by Max Weber. These two traditions have served as the basis for understanding the term social class in sociology. However, through time, many sociologists have developed these theories and modified them, making them more suitable for the ever-changing society of their time.⁷ I will now briefly discuss the Marxist and the Weberian theory of class. Although they differ in many ways, there is a certain affinity between them and that is that they both see classes as “groups structured out of economic relationships.”⁸ As we can see, they do not take into account culture or psychology specifically when they try to define class.

1.1 The Marxist Theory of Class

Karl Marx, a major German sociologist of the 19th century, created “a two-class model of classes divided by ownership and non-ownership of the means of production (capital).”⁹ Society is divided into two classes called the ‘bourgeoisie’ and the ‘proletariat’ by Marx and his associate Friedrich Engels. He defined the relationship between them as ‘exploitation’, because the workers in the ‘proletariat’ class create products in exchange for a wage but the products are taken from them by the ‘bourgeoisie’ and sold for a profit. This creates social polarity and inevitably a conflict between the two classes.¹⁰ Consequently, classes struggle against each other and the only way to resolve this struggle is a revolution which would aim for a class-less society.¹¹

⁶ Richard Centers, *The Psychology of Social Classes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949), 27, https://books.google.cz/books?id=IO_7qC4CEEAC&pg=PA30&hl=cs&source=gbs_toc_r&cad=3#v=onepage&q&f=false.

⁷ Maureen Mackintosh, and Gerry Mooney in *Questioning Identity: Gender, Class, Nation*, ed. Kath Woodward (London: Routledge in association with the Open Univ., 2004), 97.

⁸ Mackintosh and Mooney, *Questioning Identity*, 97.

⁹ Halsey, *Change in British Society*, 29.

¹⁰ Mackintosh and Mooney, *Questioning Identity*, 98.

¹¹ Halsey, *Change in British Society*, 29.

A very important term that Karl Marx mentions is ‘class consciousness’. The book *Questioning Identity* edited by Kath Woodward summarizes this term as “an awareness of a shared class interest and of the existence of classes with opposing interests.”¹² Class consciousness necessitates solidarity and collective action by its members. It sprouts out of the restrictions of society and is vital for the development of a new and improved society.¹³

1.2 The Weberian Theory of Class

Max Weber’s theory is more complex than the bipolar Marxist model of two social classes. He presents his idea of social stratification, or fragmentation, where class is only one of its forms. As far as social class is concerned, unlike Marx, he puts emphasis on individuals and sees class as groups of individuals who have similar opportunities and also similar ‘life chances’ in the market position. He also stresses the fact that class is not a bipolar concept and that there is complexity even within the same classes.¹⁴

This complexity is highlighted by the fact that he introduces another form of social stratification—something he calls ‘status’. Status is linked to the amount of prestige and importance given to a certain group of people by society. To better explain the difference between class and status, we can give an example of a member of an ethnic minority, who might occupy a certain economic class position but is treated differently based on their difference in status.¹⁵

¹² Mackintosh and Mooney, *Questioning Identity*, 98.

¹³ Mackintosh and Mooney, *Questioning Identity*, 98-99.

¹⁴ Mackintosh and Mooney, *Questioning Identity*, 100.

¹⁵ Mackintosh and Mooney, *Questioning Identity*, 100-101.

1.3 Class in Britain

For the purpose of this thesis, I will now focus on the British class system in particular, rather than analyse class as a general concept and its evolution.

What has been the significance of class in Britain? How important a role has it played in history and where does it stand today? These are some of the questions I will discuss here. Because class is such a broad term, it has many variations around the world and every nation has its own form of class and it also differs in its importance in the society.

When talking about class in Britain, Halsey mentions the phrase ‘a class-ridden society’ that is commonly used in relation to British society.¹⁶ This makes sense, considering that many of the most popular classic British books, films and TV series reflect the great division in British society in different times and eras and it often plays an important, if not a crucial role in their stories. There is for example Galsworthy’s *The Forsyte Saga* which describes the life of English upper classes, the Austen novels treating mainly the lives of upper and middle classes while also highlighting the differences between them, Dickens’ novels treating injustice and inequality in the society, focusing mainly on working-class people, Elizabeth Gaskell’s *North and South* exploring the Victorian class system, G. B. Shaw’s *Pygmalion* analysing the possibility of an upward social mobility, the works of the Brontë sisters as a whole or the popular TV series *Downton Abbey*, *Call the Midwife* or *Upstairs Downstairs*, to name just a few. And of course, P. G. Wodehouse’s novels and most of his work, even though he does not treat this topic in a conventional way as we will see later.

George Orwell himself, when exploring the notion of ‘Englishness’ wrote in his essay “England Your England” in 1941 that “England is the most class-ridden country under the sun.”¹⁷ This statement affirms the role of social class in British history.

To look closer at these divisions and how they evolved through time I will now look at class evolution in Britain up to this day.

¹⁶ Halsey, *Change in British Society*, 26.

¹⁷ George Orwell, “England Your England” (1941), Accessed February 27, 2019, <https://web.archive.org/web/20060227024942/http://whitewolf.newcastle.edu.au/words/authors/O/OrwellGeorge/essay/England/england.html>.

1.3.1. History of British Class

If we, once again, take into consideration Halsey's point of view of the British class system, we will claim that class is a key concept when analysing British history.¹⁸ The class system is closely linked with the fact that throughout history the form of government in Britain has been monarchy, which plays a great part in shaping the form of the social class system of the nation.

In the Middle Ages the main class system in England was called feudalism. In this system all the land was owned by the king. Different kinds of people were in charge of maintaining the land; these were called barons, knights and serfs and an appreciable part of land was also held by the church. The ranks in the hierarchy were based on the ownership of the land. Consequently, the king's main concern was the army, the wars and the conquest of territory.

The king was at the top of the social hierarchy, followed by lords, knights, priests and serfs. There were also other peasant like soldiers, retainers, merchants and a rank of artisans who were talented in crafts.

Great inequality, oppression, dependence on higher ranks and emphasis on obedience were the main characteristics of feudalism. Naturally, this led to a revolt of the lower ranks called the Peasant's Revolt in 1381 which contributed to the fall of feudalism together with the Black Death, which killed a great part of the population resulting in a lack of subordinates to work for the landowners.¹⁹

The Industrial Revolution was a pivotal event in the history of Britain and hugely important for the evolution of the British social class system. The main changes in the society in this period were the building of factories and the need for workers to work there, massive urbanisation, new technology and inventions and an ever-increasing population.

The social stratification of that time comprised an immensely wealthy aristocracy, then squires and gentry owning land and employing many servants. They were considered an ideal, leading an enviable life and were respected by the lower classes as was the case in feudalism. This hereditary class of landed aristocracy is sometimes called 'the idle rich'.

¹⁸ Halsey, *Change in British Society*, 26.

¹⁹ Michael Argyle, *The Psychology of Social Class* (London: Routledge, 1995), 29-30, https://books.google.cz/books?id=IX1XFrI6qgAC&pg=PA24&hl=cs&source=gbs_toc_r&cad=3#v=onepage&q&f=false.

The Industrial Revolution saw the rise of entrepreneurs, the founders of factories, initially middle-class merchants. These were a prosperous and hard-working class. Another class that emerged during the Industrial Revolution were the managers, who, as the name suggests, managed and organised the functioning of the growing factories. These comprised the so-called middle class, together with various experts and engineers in various industries and technologies and people working in commerce and banking. The middle class contained another smaller group of clerical workers considered a lower middle class. The middle class found themselves in the middle of a three-tier society: above them stood the self-contained aristocracy and below them crouched the working class.

Formed out of the peasants and craftsmen in the times of feudalism, the working class were manual workers either in factories or in agriculture and it is fair to say that it is a class created and shaped by the Industrial Revolution. In the middle of the 19th century, five-sixths of the population were part of this class. Domestic servants belonged to this class as well. The biggest challenge for these workers were extremely low wages and harsh conditions, which led to riots eventually put down by authorities—as Michael Argyle points out, we could describe this as a real class war. Eventually, with the establishment of trade unions, Acts were passed to better the conditions of the workers.

The Industrial Revolution enabled greater social mobility than the feudal system, people could now move upwards in the social class system through education, hard work and dedication, which marks a significant progress of the society. Poor people were now able to entertain the hope of becoming rich.

In terms of geographical dispersion, the aristocracy, also called the upper-class, generally lived in the country, the middle classes lived in the suburbs and working-class people occupied industrial slums.²⁰

It may be of interest to add that not everyone agrees with the claim that new classes (the upper, middle and lower) were created out of the Industrial Revolution. For example, Ross McKibbin suggests that the word ‘class’ was used in that time as an alternative to ‘rank’ or ‘order’. He disagrees with the notion that old hierarchies of feudalism were dismissed and new collective classes made.²¹ He

²⁰ Argyle, *The Psychology of Social Class*, 30-33.

²¹ Ross Mac Kibbin, *The Ideologies of Class. Social Relations in Britain: 1880-1950* (Oxford: Oxford Clarendon Press, 1990), 62.

emphasises the fact that during the Industrial Revolution the old social hierarchy flourished and evolved and that the time period only created more of its own hierarchies.²²

The evolution of class in the 20th century is characterised by the shift from manual work to non-manual work. This is evident from the fact that at the beginning of the 20th century over three quarters of the population were manual workers while in the mid-century this number declined to two thirds and towards the end of the century manual workers constituted only around one third of the employed population. Above these working-class people there was the middle class, divided into lower-middle class and upper-middle class containing white-collar workers and professionals in different fields, respectively. At the top of this structure was the upper class, very modest in number.²³

The period after 1945 is characterised by increased individualisation and a certain erosion of class. People's identities gradually ceased to be collective and workplace-based, they were rather characterised by their consumption and lifestyle.²⁴ Maureen Mackintosh and Gerry Mooney state that for example in this period "well-paid sections of the working class were increasingly adopting middle-class values and lifestyles, thus eroding working-class identities."²⁵

1.3.2 Social Class System in Modern Britain

Although the role of social class in modern Britain has been contested by many sociologists as we will briefly mention later, there is no doubt that it is still an inseparable part of today's society. I had the opportunity to come across this phenomenon myself. When I was working as an au-pair in London in 2017, my main duty was to take care of a four-year old boy. The family considered itself middle-class and the mother of the family was upset when her son picked up the 'wrong' pronunciation of the word 'water', inserting a glottal stop in the middle of the word instead of pronouncing the 't' sound. She said only working-class

²² Mac Kibbin, *The Ideologies of Class*, 107.

²³ Halsey, *Change in British Society*, 31.

²⁴ Mackintosh and Mooney, *Questioning Identity*, 106.

²⁵ Mackintosh and Mooney, *Questioning Identity*, 105.

people talked like that and tried to get him to say it properly, because she did not want her son to give the impression he belongs to a lower class.

In 2013 the BBC released the results of the largest survey of social class in the history of Britain with over 160 000 respondents participating. It was called the Great British Class Survey (GBCS). It explores the economic, cultural and social capitals of the British population. The economic capital covers income, savings and the value of owner-occupied housing.²⁶ The notion of the cultural capital was developed by Pierre Bourdieu who did not see economic capital as the only one existing in the society. For him, the cultural capital is related to lifestyle and includes leisure activities, education and sports.²⁷ The researchers of the Great British Class Survey adopted this approach and in addition included people's music and food preferences and use of media. Lastly, the social capital—also inspired by Bourdieu—looks at the scope of people's social ties. The results showed an existing division of the British population into seven classes. Savage et al. provide the results in their article “A New Model of Social Class?”:²⁸

²⁶ Mike Savage et al., “A New Model of Social Class? Findings from the BBC's Great British Class Survey Experiment,” *Sociology* 47 (2) (2013): 223-224, Accessed February 22, 2019, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0038038513481128>.

²⁷ Mackintosh and Mooney, *Questioning Identity*, 107.

²⁸ Savage et al., “A New Model of Social Class?”, 224.

Table 5. Summary of social classes.

	% GfK	% GBCS	Description
Elite	6	22	Very high economic capital (especially savings), high social capital, very high highbrow cultural capital
Established middle class	25	43	High economic capital, high status of mean contacts, high highbrow and emerging cultural capital
Technical middle class	6	10	High economic capital, very high mean social contacts, but relatively few contacts reported, moderate cultural capital
New affluent workers	15	6	Moderately good economic capital, moderately poor mean score of social contacts, though high range, moderate highbrow but good emerging cultural capital
Traditional working class	14	2	Moderately poor economic capital, though with reasonable house price, few social contacts, low highbrow and emerging cultural capital
Emergent service workers	19	17	Moderately poor economic capital, though with reasonable household income, moderate social contacts, high emerging (but low highbrow) cultural capital
Precariat	15	<1	Poor economic capital, and the lowest scores on every other criterion

Table 1: Summary of social classes.²⁹

This indicates that there are currently seven classes distinguished in Britain. We should however point out that the GBCS might not be entirely relevant, because as it was found out, the majority of respondents were from well-educated social groups. That is why the BBC decided to conduct a much smaller survey, which would be more national representative. Its results can be found in the GfK column.³⁰

Although this research confirms the standing role of social class in modern Britain, society has changed massively in recent years. So much so, that, as Argyle points out: “The kind of ‘Upstairs-Downstairs’ situation shown on TV, of an immense social gap between the gentry and their servants, is so remote from present-day experience as to make it a suitable topic for entertainment.”³¹ He concludes that “the earlier authoritarian and hierarchical forms of organisation have been modified by industrial democracy, the power of employers and managers has

²⁹ Savage et al., “A New Model of Social Class?”, 230.

³⁰ Savage et al., “A New Model of Social Class?”, 224.

³¹ Argyle, *The Psychology of Social Class*, 20.

been reduced and supervisors have been taught more skilled and less authoritarian styles of working.”³²

Nowadays, many sociologists question the importance of social class in modern-day Britain and whether the term can still be applied. As we have seen above, Maureen Mackintosh and Gerry Mooney talk about certain erosion of social class identities, while Gordon Marshall et al. in the book *Social class in Modern Britain* go as far as to say that the concept of class is obsolete. The reasons for this are fundamental changes in social hierarchy, individualism, privatism and lesser importance of class-based politics in Britain. According to them, “the proletariat and bourgeoisie have had their day”³³ and “only the dinosaur of class analysis persists and perpetuates the mythology [of class terms].”³⁴

Kate Fox, when talking about class in the modern day, mentions the notion of ‘political correctness’, where middle class people avoid using the term ‘class’ in general and substitute it with the term ‘background’ and when talking about lower classes than themselves, they use phrases such as ‘less-educated’, ‘ordinary people’, ‘the man in the street’ and so on, rather than saying ‘working class’.³⁵

George Orwell provides a whole new perspective on social class, when he writes that although extreme gaps between classes do exist, class-hatred is not stronger than patriotism. He explains this: “There is no question about the inequality of wealth in England. It is grosser than in any European country, and you have only to look down the nearest street to see it. Economically, England is certainly two nations, if not three or four. But at the same time the vast majority of the people *feel* themselves to be a single nation and are conscious of resembling one another more than they resemble foreigners.”³⁶ He also states that “somehow these differences fade away the moment that any two Britons are confronted by a European.”³⁷ Therefore he plays down the disaccord between the British social classes.

³² Argyle, *The Psychology of Social Class*, 20.

³³ Gordon Marshall et al., *Social Class in Modern Britain* (London: Routledge, 1993), chap. 1, https://books.google.cz/books?id=hNdvm0oLY2kC&pg=PT34&hl=cs&source=gbs_toc_r&cad=2#v=onepage&q=obsolete&f=false.

³⁴ Marshall et al., *Social Class in Modern Britain*, chap. 1.

³⁵ Kate Fox, *The Hidden Rules of English Behaviour* (Hodder & Stoughton, 2004), 81.

³⁶ Orwell, “England Your England”.

³⁷ Orwell, “England Your England”.

1.3.3. Detailed Characteristics of the Individual Classes

For simplification, most sociology books divide the British society into three main classes, with further distinctions within these classes. I will draw on Michael Argyle's classification and briefly describe the individual classes and later make distinctions between them in terms of language, education, clothing, housing and leisure activities. It would seem obvious that occupation serves as the main clue when defining somebody's social class, but this assumption might be far from true. Kate Fox claims that the British class system is specific in that it is judged rather on the grounds of non-economic indicators like speech, manner, taste and lifestyle choices.³⁸

The traditional upper class in Britain was the landed aristocracy which later assimilated the founders and owners of large businesses. This class is known for its scarcity in number and immense wealth, at one point owning a third of the nation's wealth, which has however changed in later years. Usually, members of this class have been wealthy families and membership in this class has been secured by heredity.³⁹ This is a specificity of the British class system: power and advantage is not conditioned solely by an activity in labour or capital, but also by birth and breeding.⁴⁰ Moreover, social mobility into this class has been extremely hard. A specific feature of this class is that its members are bound not only by familial ties but also by marriage.⁴¹

Originally families who owned some property or business, middle-class people later transformed into managers or professionals. The middle class being such a varied and broad class, Argyle mentions another two sub-classes within it: the lower middle class and 'petite bourgeoisie' or what can otherwise be called the upper middle class. The members of the lower middle class can usually rely on good working conditions and job security. The majority of this class are women. There is a thin line between this group and the working class, mainly because some jobs—for example shop assistant jobs—exercised by lower middle-class people provide very little autonomy, which is typical for the working class. 'The petite bourgeoisie'

³⁸ Fox, *The Hidden Rules of English Behaviour*, 406.

³⁹ Argyle, *The Psychology of Social Class*, 15.

⁴⁰ Halsey, *Change in British Society*, 30.

⁴¹ Argyle, *The Psychology of Social Class*, 15.

are people who usually own their own small businesses with a modest number of employees.⁴²

When we talk about the working class, we usually mean a group of people who practice manual work. Argyle divides this class into the ‘traditional working class’ and the ‘new working class’. The traditional working-class people generally work in traditional industries and live in row houses in big industrial cities. They are poorly paid and their work conditions are often harsh. As a result, a tight bond and solidarity exists between them. The new working class is less tight than the traditional one, solidarity between its members is not that apparent and they are more likely to live a lifestyle that could be considered middle-class. As opposed to the traditional working class people, they often live in new housing estates or own council houses.⁴³

The term ‘underclass’ is linked to a term sociologists call ‘culture of poverty’, denoting people who live on the margins of society. Members of this class usually live in unpleasant conditions and might deal with many social issues like unemployment, teenage pregnancy, crime, single parenting. The British underclass usually live on council estates.⁴⁴

It is necessary now to cover in more detail different aspects of lifestyle of individual classes to point out in what way they differ and what is specific for a particular class.

1.3.3.1. Language

Language has been one of the most important indicators of social class in Britain to this day. It makes a huge difference if one talks in ‘posh’ English or in the Cockney accent. Originally, it was generally accepted that working-class people talked in regional dialects including the London Cockney accent and middle-class and upper-class people used the RP or ‘received pronunciation’ which is not influenced by any regional accent. This distinction is a little less relevant today.⁴⁵

The main difference in pronunciation between classes is that upper-class people pronounce consonants very carefully, while working-class people tend to

⁴² Argyle, *The Psychology of Social Class*, 16-17.

⁴³ Argyle, *The Psychology of Social Class*, 17-18.

⁴⁴ Argyle, *The Psychology of Social Class*, 18-19.

⁴⁵ Hiroko Tomida, “The History and Development of English Class System”, 274, Accessed February 24, 2019, <http://www.seijo.ac.jp/graduate/gslit/orig/journal/english/pdf/seng-43-15.pdf>.

speak in a more casual way, often omitting the sound 't' and replacing it with a glottal stop, dropping the 'h' sound, pronouncing 'k' in final 'g' sounds or pronouncing the 'th' sound as 'f'. Conversely, the upper-classes tend to drop vowel sounds. Put another way, they use clipped vowel sounds. It should be noted that the upper-classes consider their speech to be the right way of speaking and call the speech of working-class people an 'accent'. Working-class people are also more likely to mispronounce certain words resulting from a lack of education.

It is not only the way people speak that gives away their social class, it is also the words they use. This will be particularly relevant for us when studying the characters' language used in novels. There is a distinction in the English language between so-called 'U' and 'non-U' words. The former are used by the upper classes and the latter by non-upper classes. They represent words that could linguistically be called synonyms but they give away one's social status pretty infallibly.

For example, the word for apology can say a lot about one's class: saying 'pardon' is considered lower-class, 'sorry' classifies one as upper-middle class and the word 'what' is used both by the upper classes and the working classes. Another divisive term is 'toilet' which is looked down on by the upper classes. They employ the words 'loo' or 'lavatory'. Another example is the term for a midday meal: upper classes will refer to it as 'lunch', while the working classes as 'dinner'. And lastly, upper classes usually relax on the 'sofas' in their 'sitting rooms' or 'drawing rooms' while lower classes do the same thing on 'settees' in their 'lounges' or 'living rooms'.⁴⁶

1.3.3.2. Education

Education is another telling factor while indicating somebody's class. Britain has a long tradition of public and private schools and prestigious universities, Oxford and Cambridge at their top, where access has been allowed mostly to upper-class and upper-middle class students. The situation is a little bit better nowadays, with universities offering financial support for students from poorer backgrounds. However, it is still difficult for disadvantaged students to gain access to these universities and the system is far from providing equal opportunities to all. Middle-class and working-class children usually attend state schools, which provide education free of charge.

⁴⁶ Fox, *The Hidden Rules of English Behaviour*, 73-78.

Education is crucial for social mobility, enabling children from disadvantaged backgrounds to climb up the social hierarchy and through studying get a better job than their parents.⁴⁷

The type of education one receives also has a direct impact on one's manners. It is said that students educated at public schools usually exhibit better manners and are more encouraged to do so than those educated at state schools. This was the case especially in the past and concerns especially gentlemen's behaviour towards women.⁴⁸

1.3.3.3. Clothing

We might argue about the truthfulness of the saying "You are what you wear" but as with most sayings there is definitely some truth to be found. And if we accept this statement as true, there is no doubt that social class is a part of our identity and thus clothes also demonstrate our social class, at least to some extent. Today, the clothing is not as indicative of social class as in the past, although some generalisations could be made. Members of the upper classes, to give an example, tend to wear high-quality clothes made from natural materials like wool and cotton produced by retailers like Burberry, Aquascutum, Jaeger and so on. The typical portrayal of an upper-class gentleman is him wearing a bowler hat, a black jacket, pinstriped trousers, a white shirt and a black tie. It is not unusual, however, to see upper-class people wearing jeans and t-shirts nowadays. The typical middle-class person might wear an ordinary suit, white shirt and a tie. The traditional portrayal of working-class people is them wearing a cap, shabby working clothes, a coat, and a scarf. Today, working-class people usually prefer wearing sweatshirts, jeans, trainers and peaked caps.⁴⁹

Just to demonstrate how important fashion was earlier for denoting the social class, we can cite Veblen from his book *The Theory of the Leisure Class* published in 1899: "...expenditure on dress has this advantage over most other methods, that our apparel is always in evidence and affords an indication of our pecuniary standing to all observers at the first glance. It is also true that admitted expenditure for display is more obviously present, and is, perhaps, more universally

⁴⁷ Tomida, "The History and Development of English Class System", 276.

⁴⁸ Tomida, "The History and Development of English Class System", 280.

⁴⁹ Tomida, "The History and Development of English Class System", 278-280.

practiced in the matter of dress than in any other line of consumption.”⁵⁰ He points out that clothing is a way for upper-class people to demonstrate their wealth by wearing highly expensive and often impractical clothes.⁵¹

1.3.3.4. Housing

In the past, social class was very much based on whether people owned their own houses or flats but this distinction is not so valid anymore. It is maybe more important to note what area people live in to be able to tell their social class, because people of the same class usually inhabit the same area. As a rule, the working class live in the least expensive homes out of the three main classes. Middle classes live in more expensive homes and some upper class people still own large country houses, as was typical in the past.⁵²

1.3.3.5. Leisure Activities

We have seen that social class does not solely stem out of the occupation one exercises, but is a combination of many factors. Leisure time is one of the most important parts of human lives, therefore it naturally reflects people’s social lives as well. Typically, the leisure activities practiced by upper-class men have been shooting birds in the country, fishing, hunting and playing sports, such as tennis or golf. In the city, especially in London, they are members of exclusive gentlemen’s clubs where they get together with other men to discuss news and politics, eat and drink. In their free time, upper-class women usually occupy themselves with organizing parties and balls and maintaining acquaintances. The upper class attend such prestigious events like the Ascot Race and the Henley Royal Regatta where they show off their attires.⁵³ At the Ascot Race, it is customary for women to wear extravagant and costly hats.

Activities considered typical for middle-class people include for example reading, going to museums and galleries, frequenting cafés, going to concerts and other cultural events. The general agreement is that these people like to practice

⁵⁰ Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), chap. 7, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/833/833-h/833-h.htm>.

⁵¹ Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, chap. 7.

⁵² Tomida, “The History and Development of English Class System”, 282.

⁵³ Tomida, “The History and Development of English Class System”, 282.

intellectual and cultural activities. This group is also specific in that the range of their activities is very broad and diverse.

Working-class people have not been given much chance to develop leisure activities due to their long working hours and straining working conditions. When they do have free time, they generally gather in their local pubs where they play games and watch sports with other working-class people. Others do gardening or DIYs or go on trips to the countryside.⁵⁴

In recent years, the difference between the ways middle-class and working-class people spend their free time is less and less profound and it is common to see people practice activities that are otherwise considered typical for a different class than their own.

1.3.3.6. Marriage

Because marriage plays one of the most important roles in the novels of P.G. Wodehouse, I will just lightly touch on this subject. As Kate Fox states, in Britain there exists a class-endogamy rule, which means that inter-marriage between classes is not encouraged and that it does not happen very often. She even mentions that “outside the pages of Barbara Cartland and P. G. Wodehouse, the sons of dukes and earls do not tend to disoblige their families by insisting on marrying humble waitresses.”⁵⁵ However, marriage can be a reliable way to move upwards in the social class system and, together with education, is a way of achieving social mobility.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Tomida, “The History and Development of English Class System”, 283-284.

⁵⁵ Fox, *The Hidden Rules of English Behaviour*, 341-342.

⁵⁶ Fox, *The Hidden Rules of English Behaviour*, 342.

2 Servants in Britain

I have mentioned domestic servants very briefly in the previous chapter though it is necessary to have a closer look at the life of the British servants and some of their specificities to better understand the role of Jeeves' character in the novels of P. G. Wodehouse. We could say that in the Bertie and Jeeves canon the relationship between a master and his servant is the most important element. To be able to analyse how Wodehouse approaches this topic, we need to first establish the conventional rules of this relationship and define the position of the manservant in the context of the Victorian and Edwardian eras and also in the first half of the 20th century as that is the time the Bertie and Jeeves stories and novels were published.

It is not an exaggeration to say that the Victorian society was stood on the backs of its servants. They were the pillars carrying the weight of the society and its class system. Without them, it would be very hard to establish who belongs to the upper classes and later on, to the middle classes as well. It is clear that servants and domestic servants belonged to the working class. In fact, they were so numerous that some books describe them as a class of its own, the 'servant class'.

At the turn of the 20th century, the servant class was the single largest group of employees in Britain. In 1891, out of a population of twenty-nine million 1 444 694 workers were employed as domestic servants in England and Wales and the vast majority of these servants were women. And by the Victorian standards, these people were considered inferior to their employers.⁵⁷

The functioning of this whole system was based on the idea that everybody in the society 'knew their place'. And this place could be either 'upstairs' if one belonged to upper and middle classes or 'downstairs' if one was a member of the working class and being employed as a domestic servant. When describing the British tradition of domestic service, the term "Upstairs Downstairs" is often used. And not only metaphorically. The country houses owned by the wealthiest aristocrats in the Victorian era always comprised of two levels: the upstairs was inhabited by the owners of the house and downstairs one could find a world of its

⁵⁷ Frank Victor Dawes, *Not in Front of the Servants: A True Portrait of English Upstairs, Downstairs Life* (London: Century, 1990), 15.

own, the world of servants. The running of the house was made possible because of them.⁵⁸

There existed a strict hierarchy in the servants' world. The butler and the housekeeper were the ones in charge of the house and of other servants who were below them: the coachmen, footmen, hall-boys and housemaids. Another servant in the house was the cook who overlooked different kinds of maids who helped him in the kitchen. The ones taking care of the masters' children were governesses — who were usually middle-class— and nurses. Separate from other servants were the lady's maid and valet who attended to their masters' needs and were their close assistants.⁵⁹

It was incredibly important for the upper classes to make their world separate from the servants' world, which resulted in designing secret passages and hidden doorways in their houses so that the servants could do their work almost invisibly and enter and leave the masters' rooms without being noticed.⁶⁰ Servants were also kept in their place by wearing uniforms, which was a Victorian invention. They clearly defined the kind of work one did and what class they belonged to and were also used to suppress individual personalities of the servants. The upper classes went to such extremes as to give their servants different names that went better with their position and that did not resemble the names of the higher classes. Consequently, maids were often called Mary and footmen were called William or Henry.⁶¹

This is very well demonstrated in the first episode called “On Trial” of the British TV series *Upstairs Downstairs* from the year 1971. The story, set in the beginning of the 20th century, follows a young Cockney girl who gets to be on trial for a job as an under-parlourmaid in a townhouse in London. She is introduced to the family and presents herself as Clémence but this is unacceptable for the lady of the house. Here is a scene where Lady Marjorie introduces Clémence to Hudson, the butler:

⁵⁸ Pamela Cox, presenter, ‘Episode 1: Knowing Your Place,’ in *Servants: The True Story of Life Below Stairs*, YouTube video, 58:58, documentary by BBC, 2012, posted by ‘batuchkam,’ Accessed March 17, 2019, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b19M8ZOenaM&list=PLUi_lxCT70vD8GvdQIHlWds_Na0oM7hPB.

⁵⁹ Cox, ‘Episode 1: Knowing Your Place.’

⁶⁰ Lucy Lethbridge, *Servants: A Downstairs View of Twentieth-Century Britain* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 19-20, https://books.google.cz/books?id=4svkLzDO27MC&pg=PR7&hl=cs&source=gbs_selected_pages&cad=2#v=onepage&q&f=false.

⁶¹ Cox, ‘Episode 1: Knowing Your Place’.

“Hudson: ‘And, the young person's name, my lady?’

Lady Marjorie: ‘Sarah.’

Clémence: ‘No, my name is Clémence!’

Lady Marjorie: ‘Clémence is not a servant's name.’

Clémence: ‘Yes, but I don’t like—’

Lady Marjorie: ‘Go with Hudson, Sarah. Remember, you're here on trial.’

Clémence: ‘Yes, my lady.’

Hudson and Clémence leave.

Clémence: ‘Mr. Hudson, do I have to be called Sarah?’

Hudson: ‘Yes.’

Clémence: ‘I don’t like it.’

Hudson: ‘It is not for you to question your betters.’

Clémence: ‘Are you my better?’

Hudson: ‘Indeed I am.’

Clémence: ‘What makes you better than me? I’m not being rude. I just want to know.’

Hudson: ‘I am older than you, and therefore wiser, and I've learned humility. It is a hard lesson, but once learnt, never forgotten.’”⁶²

In this short excerpt, we can observe the rules that governed the master-servant relationship in this time. Besides the obvious superiority of the lady of the house, we can also clearly see the hierarchy between the servants. The butler is the ‘better’ of an under-parlourmaid just like the lady of the house is the ‘better’ of the butler. Hudson uses a very fitting word: ‘humility’. In order to be a good servant, one must be humble and meek. Another phenomenon we can observe is that it does not matter at all what the servant likes or does not like. Their emotions do not really count.

F. V. Dawes mentions a former servant who expresses incredulity over the fact that the masters did not really see their servants as human beings. They were not interested in their personal lives at all and they expected unflinching loyalty from them. Another servant asserts that this system was a continuation of

⁶² “Upstairs, Downstairs s01e01 On Trial,” Youtube video, 1:22:54, posted by ‘Robert Giardina,’ December 21, 2017, Accessed March 10, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3XEcHJ5qItA&list=PLr0MsaDpKsY8OFrYmWwWC8QRpf8pfX4Xl>.

slavery, because the servants were fully dependent on their masters with their lives. They had to ask permission for every aspect of their lives, even for the permission to go to a doctor when they were ill.⁶³

And it was not difficult to become ill in the sort of conditions the servants lived in. Lucy Lethbridge mentions for example bad nourishment that consisted of lard, herrings, cod, bread and margarine every day.⁶⁴ Another problem was the living space — a kitchen basement without any daylight and often very cold or too hot that “felt like a cave.”⁶⁵ And the servants spent almost all day there, they did not have practically any leisure time. This is however the case of the lower servants, the upper servants like butlers, valets, housekeepers and lady’s maids occupied separate rooms and had their proper meals.⁶⁶

All of the servants had to comply with certain rules stated in guides and manuals written specifically for them. Dawes mentions some of these rules urging the servants to be as quiet as possible, to never be the first to address a master or a lady, to always obey orders saying “Yes, Ma’am” or “I am very sorry Ma’am”, to always address the master “Sir” and the lady “Ma’am”, to never give any unnecessary information to the masters, to never interrupt a family conversation or smile at any stories overheard at the dinner table.⁶⁷

It is not in the scope of this thesis to state all of the different duties of the servants, though I will briefly mention those of a valet, the “gentleman’s gentleman” as he is often called. And the reason for this is that Jeeves is precisely that, a valet. *The Book of Household Management* describes the valet as someone who is always at hand when his master needs him, helps him with dressing and provides him company and naturally obeys all of his orders while the valet himself “being subject to erring judgement, aggravated by an imperfect education.”⁶⁸ The valet is basically the closest a servant can get to his master. Moreover, the book stresses the need to be reserved, polite, controlled, punctual, respectful and even skilful in cutting hair and shaving his master. Valet’s day-to-day duties include helping his master get prepared for the day, taking care of his wardrobe, making

⁶³ Dawes, *Not in Front of the Servants*, 36-38.

⁶⁴ Lethbridge, *Servants*, 128, 198.

⁶⁵ Lethbridge, *Servants*, 67.

⁶⁶ Dawes, *Not in Front of the Servants*, 66-67.

⁶⁷ Dawes, *Not in Front of the Servants*, 35.

⁶⁸ Isabella Beeton, *The Book of Household Management* (1861), chap. XLI, <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/10136/pg10136-images.html>.

sure everything in the house is perfectly ready to welcome its master, deliver any messages for him, then wait for him at the end of the day and make sure he is comfortable in the evening and help him get ready for bed.⁶⁹

Even though the conditions were often harsh for domestic servants in the Victorian era, they were still better off than many other working class people. They were provided with accommodation, food and security. In Edwardian England the conditions were getting better for the servants and they were treated more like human beings rather than machines. During the First World War the number of domestic servants dropped, especially because there were more education and job opportunities for working-class people and they became more independent through time.⁷⁰ In fact, it was in 1945 that P. G. Wodehouse aptly complained in a letter to a friend: “I mean, it seems a waste of time to write about butlers and country houses if both are obsolete, as I suppose they will be [in 1950].”⁷¹ Today, there are still a few people who work as butlers for upper-class families and middle-class families still leave the cleaning of their house to —often international— cleaners and au-pairs, but the times of the extreme “Upstairs Downstairs” inequality is forever gone.

⁶⁹ Beeton, *The Book of Household Management*, chap. XLI.

⁷⁰ Dawes, *Not in Front of the Servants*, 28-30.

⁷¹ Sophie Ratcliffe, ed., *P. G. Wodehouse: A Life in Letters* (London: Hutchinson, 2011), 365.

3 Analysis of British Social Class in the Novels of P. G. Wodehouse

3.1. The Social Class of the Characters

I will now analyse the notion of social class as described above in the novels of P. G. Wodehouse and apply it to the workings and characters of his fictional world. I will particularly focus on two of his novels: *Right Ho, Jeeves* (1922) and *The Code of the Woosters* (1938), which belong to the Jeeves and Wooster canon, portraying the lives of the gentleman Bertram Wooster and his valet Reginald Jeeves. The Jeeves and Wooster canon began in 1915 when P. G. Wodehouse published a short story called “Extricating Young Gussie” where Bertie and Jeeves make their first appearance. Since then, they figured in numerous short stories and later novels, often as the main characters. They kept entertaining readers throughout the first half of the 20th century up until 1974 when the last Jeeves and Wooster novel was published, called *Aunts Aren't Gentlemen*. However, the characters do not really age or catch up with the modern times, they somehow still linger in an era when country houses and servants were in their prime time and do not reflect the gradual disappearing of this phenomenon.

Overlooking for a moment the opinion of the British comedian Stephen Fry who writes of Wodehouse's prose: “You don't analyse such sunlit perfection, you just bask in its warmth and splendour. Like Jeeves, Wodehouse stands alone, and analysis is useless,”⁷² I will try to define the social class of the characters featuring in the two novels. Both books, *Right Ho, Jeeves* and *The Code of the Woosters*, are narrated by Bertie Wooster. On the surface, Bertie is a typical representative of a young upper-class gentleman. He can be described as a man-about-town; he is a bachelor living with his manservant in his flat in Berkeley Mansions in Berkeley Square in London. Berkeley Square is located in Mayfair, an affluent and luxurious part of London occupied mostly by aristocrats. Employing a manservant in itself is a very important factor in establishing the position of a gentleman. When trying to define what being a gentleman really means, Lucy Lethbridge writes that “in the 1920s most people would have hazarded a guess that a gentleman had leisure at his

⁷² Stephen Fry, “What Ho! My hero, PG Wodehouse” (2000), Accessed March 24 2019, <http://www.drones.com/fry.html>.

disposal: he did not have to *do* a great deal.”⁷³ And this perfectly applies to Bertie. On his typical day he wakes up quite late in the morning —usually in a bad state after coming home late the previous night— and after getting dressed in a vest, a shirt, a tie and flannel trousers, he goes around town throughout the day catching up with friends, family and acquaintances. He never skips a visit to the Drones Club, which is an exclusive gentlemen’s club where upper-class men get together and usually drink heavily until the early hours. In fact, the name of the club refers to a male drone bee, who does not work as opposed to its female counterpart, the worker.⁷⁴ During the season, Bertie travels to popular seaside destinations like Cannes or Monaco. He does not have to work as he is clearly very well off. As a member of landed aristocracy he could be considered the ‘idle rich’. He was educated at the prestigious Eton College and at the University of Oxford. Possibly as a result of this good education and upbringing, he prides himself on his chivalry, especially towards women: “Bertram Wooster in his dealings with the opposite sex invariably shows himself a man of the nicest chivalry — what you sometimes hear described as a *parfait gentil* knight.”⁷⁵

Although Bertie is the narrator of the books, we can argue that it is the character of his valet Reginald Jeeves that takes on the main role in the stories. Without him, there would be no contrast to Bertie’s character and the books would merely tell stories about the often turbulent lives of upper-class people. Jeeves is the “perfect gentleman’s gentleman”⁷⁶. He embodies the notion of an ideal manservant, he possesses all the qualities needed for this position while being truly proud of his place in the social hierarchy. He is loyal, polite, punctual, trustworthy and confidential. He meticulously carries out all of the duties usually performed by a butler —and “he can buttle with the best of them”⁷⁷— while at the same time taking care of Bertie’s wardrobe and personal well-being. His pick-me-up cocktails never fail to get Bertie out of bed whatever state he might be in, his anticipation of his master’s needs is unmatched, having a glass of brandy ready even before Bertie knows that is exactly what he needs. He is discreet to the point where he “removes

⁷³ Lethbridge, *Servants*, 208.

⁷⁴ Fry, “What ho! My hero, PG Wodehouse”.

⁷⁵ P. G. Wodehouse, *Right Ho, Jeeves* (London: Arrow Books, 1990), 188.

⁷⁶ Lethbridge, *Servants*, 209.

⁷⁷ P. G. Wodehouse, *Stiff Upper Lip, Jeeves* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008), 10, <https://books.google.cz/books?hl=cs&id=PHyVWtE0LX4C&q=buttle#v=snippet&q=buttle&f=false>.

himself like an eel sliding into mud when the employer has a visitor”⁷⁸; on the way he enters the room Bertie writes: “...he’s not there one moment and is there the next. He just seems to float from Spot A to Spot B like some form of gas,”⁷⁹ and his exiting of the room once he is dismissed is illustrated by Bertie’s words: “...he flickered for a moment and was gone. Many a spectre would have been less slippery.”⁸⁰ He addresses Bertie “Sir” every time he talks to him and never speaks first, unless he has something relevant to say. Not much is known about Jeeves’ background and family besides the fact that his uncle works as a butler and that he was privately educated. He is a member of the Junior Ganymede Club, where butlers and valets get together and discuss all matters concerning their job, employers and it is a place where they spend their free time. In his free time, Jeeves also enjoys going dancing with other servants, fishing, visiting the seaside and reading classic literature, which is a source of his vast knowledge, to which I will return in the following chapter.

The richest and most respectable aristocratic characters in these two books are represented by Aunt Dahlia Travers and Sir Watkyn Bassett. They both own and live in expensive country houses full of “leisured cosiness”⁸¹, where they employ many servants. Aunt Dahlia, as she is most often referred to, is the lady of the house at Brinkley Court and Sir Bassett is the master of the house at Totleigh Towers, which are also the two settings of the two novels, respectively. The country houses swarm with kitchen maids, footmen, butlers and cooks. Both aristocrats treat these lower-class people with haughtiness and comply with the rules of the standard master-servant relationship, although Aunt Dahlia holds Jeeves in great respect after she sees that his advice proves effective in many strained situations. In *The Code of the Woosters* Bertie wants to present Jeeves as a witness to prove that he is not guilty of stealing Sir Bassett’s prized cow-creamer but this idea is quickly dismissed by Sir Bassett who scorns him: “I regret, Mr Wooster, that I am not prepared to accept as conclusive evidence of your innocence the unsupported word of your manservant.”⁸² Moreover, Sir Bassett clearly wants to keep the social classes in their proper place, because he disapproves of his daughter and niece to

⁷⁸ Wodehouse, *Right Ho, Jeeves*, 198.

⁷⁹ Wodehouse, *Right Ho, Jeeves*, 202.

⁸⁰ Wodehouse, *Right Ho, Jeeves*, 225.

⁸¹ P. G. Wodehouse, *The Code of the Woosters* (London: Vintage, 1990), 51.

⁸² Wodehouse, *The Code of the Woosters*, 203.

marry below their class. In the same novel, his niece Stephanie wishes to marry a curate but is afraid to break the news to her uncle, because "...as a broad, general rule, parents do not like their daughters marrying curates... and the same thing applies to uncles with their nieces."⁸³ He clearly believes that his class is superior to the others. Even Aunt Dahlia, the kinder of the two, expresses her dismissive opinions on the servant class when she needs the service of her chauffeur and finds out he is attending a servants' ball instead, and therefore she laments: "Curse all dancing chauffeurs! What on earth does a chauffeur want to dance for? I mistrusted that man from the start."⁸⁴ There are many other details in the books that could serve as indicators of class: Sir Bassett normally wears a tweed dress, checked suits and velvet smoking-jackets, he and other upper-class characters use the word "lunch" for their midday meal and "dinner" for the evening meal and call the room where they socialize the "drawing room". As for Aunt Dahlia's leisure activities, it might be worth mentioning that she owns a women's magazine called *Milady's Boudoir*, which once published an article called "What the Well-Dressed Man is Wearing" written by Bertie and that in her earlier years she was a member of the prestigious Quorn fox-hunting club taking part in many hunts and hunting dinners, whence her "argot of the hunting field"⁸⁵.

Other characters include Bertie's university friends like Tuppy Glossop, Harold Pinker or Gussie Fink-Nottle. If we proposed to define an upper-class gentleman as having an abundance of free time and not really having much to do, Gussie Fink-Nottle must be a perfect example of one. He lives in seclusion and occupies himself with keeping and studying newts. He was privately educated and when he is in London, he occasionally pays a visit to the Drones Club, of which he is a member. A female upper-class character is represented by Madeline Bassett, the only daughter of Sir Watkyn Bassett. She is quite eccentric, dreamy and sentimental. In her leisure time, she fills her time with reading sappy books, poetry and daydreaming. As a result of this, she talks in very flowery language. In the course of the two novels, she falls in love with Gussie and tries to find a way to make her father accept him as a convenient husband for her. A minor character in the story is Police Constable Oates, whose language gives away his lower social

⁸³ Wodehouse, *The Code of the Woosters*, 76.

⁸⁴ Wodehouse, *Right Ho, Jeeves*, 246.

⁸⁵ Wodehouse, *Right Ho, Jeeves*, 54.

position; he lives in the countryside and has an accent which includes pronouncing words in a wrong way, for example he uses the word “bersicle” for “bicycle”, the word “dorg” for “dog”, “zurlled” for “hurled”, he substitutes the phrase “point at issue” with an incorrect form “point at tissue” and makes grammatical mistakes.

As far as the servant class is concerned, a butler called Seppings makes an appearance throughout the two books. He is employed at Brinkley Court. Described as “a cold and unemotional man”⁸⁶, he exercises his job with precision. In *Right Ho, Jeeves* we learn that he is a passionate dancer when he attends a servants’ ball organized by an upper-class family. The butler at Totleigh Towers is called Butterfield, but his role is only a minor one, usually appearing only to satisfy the needs of his master, which is very much the typical portrayal of servants in traditional literature. The last and probably most important servant character after Jeeves is the cook occupying the kitchen premises at Brinkley Court, a very haughty French called Anatole. One can only use superlatives when talking about his cooking skills, because he is extremely competent; once Bertie described him as a “God’s gift to the gastric juices”⁸⁷ and a “peerless artist”⁸⁸ in the kitchen. Dawes writes in her book *Not In Front of the Servants* that it was not unusual in Victorian households for the cook to be a fearsome figure, not only for the servants below him, but also for his employers. The cooks required everything in the kitchen to be ready and perfect for them to exercise their job.⁸⁹ Similarly in Wodehouse, owing to his impulsive French temperament, Anatole elicits great respect in Aunt Dahlia and other occupants of the house. He requires perfect working conditions and gets incredibly upset when his culinary art is not appreciated enough.

As we can see, the two prominent social classes described in Wodehouse’s books are rich aristocrats and their servants and the relationship between these two classes is explored. While some master-servant relationships comply with traditional rules, Wodehouse often breaks these rules quite violently which will serve as the subject matter for the next chapter.

⁸⁶ Wodehouse, *Right Ho, Jeeves*, 110.

⁸⁷ Wodehouse, *Right Ho, Jeeves*, 113.

⁸⁸ Wodehouse, *The Code of the Woosters*, 214.

⁸⁹ Dawes, *Not In Front of the Servants*, 68.

3.2. The Role of Social Class in the Novels of P. G. Wodehouse

In this chapter, I will argue that social class is one of the strongest motives in the novels of P. G. Wodehouse — if not the strongest one. I will give examples of how the author treats social class differences of the characters and try to set out the possible reasons for this phenomenon. Kate Fox in her book on social class in Britain writes that “class pervades all aspects of English life and culture”⁹⁰ and applying this to Wodehouse’s books, George Watson in his article “The Birth of Jeeves” states that “Jeeves and Bertie Wooster are British to the point of absurdity and beyond.”⁹¹ As a matter of fact, he mentions that Wodehouse started writing the Jeeves and Wooster canon in America to entertain the Americans with a portrayal of silly British characters. Thus, he claims that the image of Jeeves and Wooster is presented in a way corresponding to the Americans’ perception of the British.⁹² And being typically British characters includes being very class-conscious. It is true that most plotlines of the novels are somehow linked to class: be it upper-class characters who try to gain approval from their parents or relatives to get married to someone from a lower social class than them or socially clumsy upper-class people getting into some sort of trouble and trying to find a way out and protect their good name.

As we have seen above, in his novels P. G. Wodehouse keeps the form of the British social class system, the characters are subject to class rules and we can clearly define who belongs to a certain social class. The servants respect the rules imposed on them by manuals and guides concerning their behaviour towards their masters and the life of aristocrats is portrayed in accordance with the norms of the times. It is however only the surface form of the class system that Wodehouse maintains. If we have a closer look and analyse the behaviour of the characters, the deeper values of what it means to belong to a certain social class are somehow changed.

If we take a look at the language of the characters, we can notice some deviations from the rules stated above. Bertie often has problems expressing

⁹⁰ Fox, *Watching the English*, 15.

⁹¹ George Watson, “The Birth of Jeeves”, *The Virginia Quarterly Review* Vol. 73, no. 4 (Autumn 1997): 646, https://www.jstor.org/stable/26438951?read-now=1&seq=6#page_scan_tab_contents.

⁹² Watson, “The Birth of Jeeves”, 644-645.

himself and finding the correct words and in these situations he always turns to Jeeves for help. This can be illustrated in quite a comic scene where Bertie wants to reproach Jeeves for something, but he cannot think of the right word, so he asks Jeeves to help him out:

“Bertie: ‘Eloquent? No, it's not eloquent. Elusive? No, it's not elusive. It's on the tip of my tongue. Begins with an ‘e’ and means being a jolly sight too clever.’

Jeeves: ‘Elaborate, sir?’

Bertie: ‘That is the exact word I was after. Too elaborate, Jeeves—that is what you are frequently prone to become. Your methods are not simple, not straightforward.’”⁹³

Situations such as these are not rare, it is common for Bertie to paraphrase a term he cannot recall and for Jeeves to come up with it right away. Once he helps Bertie think up the word “propinquity”, Latin words “qua menace” and even the word “incredible”, which Bertie incorrectly substitutes with “incredulous”. At times during Bertie’s narration when he gets stuck on a word and Jeeves is not at hand, he simply remarks “Jeeves could tell you the word I want,”⁹⁴ and continues his story. This is not to say that Bertie’s vocabulary is poor—he received a very good education after all—it is only that Jeeves’ is much more advanced and over all better. Bertie even mentions that after spending so much time with Jeeves, his vocabulary has been ameliorated. There is another specificity in the language of Bertie but also of other upper-class characters in the novels and that is that they often use extremely childish words, such as “bean” and “lemon” for “head”, they address each other “bird”, they employ interjections like “toodle-oo” and “what ho” or verbs like “toddle” and “whizz” when describing someone walking. This makes the reader laugh at the characters and creates a comic effect. It is interesting to note that we never hear such words come from any of the servants, they talk in a much more dignified manner.

In similar fashion, we can observe a great difference between Bertie and Jeeves in their knowledge, either of classical literature, history or laws of physics. Jeeves is very well-read; while Bertie usually reaches for thrillers and detective

⁹³ Wodehouse, *Right Ho, Jeeves*, 23.

⁹⁴ Wodehouse, *Right Ho, Jeeves*, 146.

stories in his leisure time, Jeeves enjoys reading classical literature authors like Shakespeare, Poe and the English romantics, even philosophy books by Spinoza and Nietzsche and consequently his knowledge seems to be limitless. There are numerous situations where Jeeves quotes long passages from books by heart and where he corrects his master's errors. In *The Code of the Woosters*, Bertie and Jeeves arrive at Totleigh Towers, the house of the dreaded Sir Watkyn Bassett as unwelcome guests and have to await their fate. Jeeves aptly utters the last verse of Richard Browning's "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came", symbolising their similar positions full of anticipation of what is to come, but Bertie misses the point completely and responds with a puzzled "Oh, ah."⁹⁵ In the same novel, incredulously, Bertie shows his lack of knowledge about Shakespeare's Macbeth when he asks Jeeves who is "that fellow you've mentioned to me once or twice, who let something wait upon something?"⁹⁶ Once, Jeeves mentions Archimedes and his theory of displacement and Bertie does not seem to know who he was: "I don't suppose he was such a devil of a chap. Compared with you, I mean."⁹⁷ Later, Bertie uses the acquired information on Archimedes when talking with an upper-class friend who seems similarly lost. Another upper-class character, a young miss called Stiffy, cannot compare her knowledge of literature to Jeeves': when she wants to praise Bertie for being selfless, she intends to compare him to a character from a book who is the epitome of selflessness, but cannot recall his name. She eventually turns to Jeeves for help: "I can't tell you how grateful I am, and how much I admire you. You remind me of Carter Paterson...no, that's not it...Nick Carter...no, not Nick Carter...Who does Mr Wooster remind me of, Jeeves?"⁹⁸ Jeeves responds with the name of Sidney Carton, a character in Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*. The last example illustrating Bertie's cultural and historical ignorance could be the fact that after Jeeves utters "Eureka", alluding to Archimedes, Bertie is confused and says he thought it was Shakespeare who said that. It is clear that Wodehouse's upper-class characters are not made more intelligent by their prestigious education and it is the manservant who possesses greater knowledge of the world. This is in stark contrast with the statement in Beeton's book that valets

⁹⁵ Wodehouse, *The Code of the Woosters*, 35.

⁹⁶ Wodehouse, *The Code of the Woosters*, 34.

⁹⁷ Wodehouse, *The Code of the Woosters*, 86.

⁹⁸ Wodehouse, *The Code of the Woosters*, 200.

are often subject to an erring judgement resulting from lack of education. Stephen Fry even goes as far as to say that Jeeves is Bertie's "incomparable teacher"⁹⁹.

It is not only the learnt knowledge that separates these two classes of characters, Jeeves is also superior to the upper-class characters in problem-solving. In the previous chapter we have seen that servants are usually dependent on their masters' orders and consult their masters in all matters. This is not the case in Wodehouse. Jeeves is very independent, it is rather Bertie who consults Jeeves throughout the novels. When upper-class characters, especially Bertie, bring some sort of trouble on themselves, it is always Jeeves they turn to, who is apt enough to save the whole situation. They are helpless without his help and advice. Jeeves is a very good observer of people, he understands their personalities well and when Bertie asks him for help, he usually employs a strategy resulting from his knowledge of the psychology of the individual, which he applies on Bertie's friends and relatives. It might seem almost as if Bertie is a child who needs the world and situations around him described and explained to him by his manservant. This can be well illustrated on an excerpt where Gussie confides in Bertie about his tricky situation. He wants to marry Madeline but her father Sir Bassett disapproves of this marriage:

Gussie: 'This is frightful, Bertie.'

Bertie: 'Not too good, no.'

Gussie: 'I'm in the soup.'

Bertie: 'Up to the thorax.'

Gussie: 'What's to be done?'

Bertie: 'I don't know.'

Gussie: 'Can't you think of anything?'

Bertie: 'Nothing. We must just put our trust in a higher power.'

Gussie: 'Consult Jeeves, you mean?'"¹⁰⁰

This is a great deviation from the typical understanding of class, to speak of a manservant as of a "higher power" and for the upper-class characters to acknowledge the skills of a lower-class servant.

⁹⁹ Fry, "What Ho! My hero, PG Wodehouse".

¹⁰⁰ Wodehouse, *The Code of the Woosters*, 63-64.

Jeeves is not the only servant character the aristocrats are dependent on. The cook Anatole employed at Brinkley court is also someone who is highly respected by his masters and his cooking is so spectacular that a whole plotline is created from this where the aristocrats go to great lengths to please him and make him stay at their country house, offering him ever more money and even putting their reputation at stake for him. In *The Code of the Woosters* Aunt Dahlia commits a crime when she steals a cow-creamer from Sir Bassett only to make sure Anatole stays at Brinkley Court. Once, Anatole gets incredibly angry when his masters return their dinners untouched and considers this an offence to his skills and decides to give in his notice. The aristocrats are horrified, they plead with him and even offer to bribe him and raise his salary. It was not unusual for masters to fear their cooks, but Wodehouse goes to extremes in his stories. Reading the story from Bertie's point of view, one is tempted to use the words "poor aristocrats" when one reads about their perils and their need to be saved by the servants — the adjective "poor" being typically associated with the lower classes. Thus, the whole class system is turned upside down. It is not the lower classes who are dependent on the upper-classes, but rather the upper-classes are dependent on lower-class people. In Wodehouse's stories they do not seem to be inferior.

Anatole also serves as a reliable threatening device for Aunt Dahlia when she wants to make Bertie do something for her. If he is not willing, she threatens that she will not invite Bertie to Brinkley court anymore and consequently he will not be able to experience Anatole's cooking, which always makes him change his mind and do whatever she wants. The motivation behind his actions is the servant.

Wodehouse deconstructs the typical master-servant relationship in more ways than this. The reader feels that Jeeves is very well aware of his mental superiority and does not comply with the classic servant humility and meekness. Though he is never rude, we can see he is secretly amused by the silly upper-class people and even though he always comes to their help he usually arranges the situation so as to make the most profit of it himself. At the beginning of *The Code of the Woosters* Jeeves wants to make Bertie go on a Round-The-World cruise with him but Bertie does not want to hear about it. At the end of the novel, Jeeves provides Bertie with a very confidential information which settles all Bertie's troubles and in exchange for this, Bertie promises to go on the cruise with him. When he orders Jeeves to get the tickets, Jeeves stoically announces that he has

already procured them without consulting his master. We learn that, in the end, everything was in Jeeves' hands all along. Oftentimes, Jeeves looks amused by his master's troubles and there is a certain air of haughtiness and confidence about him. He almost elicits respect. When he disapproves of something his master says, he replies very politely but with a tinge of aloof disapproval which often annoys Bertie. The deeper values associated with upper-class people like authority and respectability are found rather in Jeeves than in Bertie. Lucy Lethbridge writes in her book on servants that even though Bertie is formally a gentleman, it is rather Jeeves who represents all the deeper values of what it actually means to be a gentleman.¹⁰¹ In *The Code of the Woosters* there is a situation where Bertie is forced to persuade Jeeves to obey his order when they are threatened by a dog when entering a room and Bertie suggests Jeeves make a spring and roll the animal in the sheets from the bed but Jeeves does not feel like doing that. When Bertie asks if Jeeves is going to do it, Jeeves simply answers with a superior expression on his face: "No, sir."¹⁰² Jeeves knows his position is secure and therefore it is possible for him to have pride. In this case, Bertie is hopeless and they both know this well. In one of the novels, Bertie even overhears Jeeves say about his master that "mentally he is negligible — quite negligible."¹⁰³ Jeeves does keep his place and he certainly knows his place as well — but it is far from being below the stairs.

When we further look at the relationship between Bertie and Jeeves, we learn that there is a deviation from the typical behaviour of a master towards his servant in the fact that Bertie acknowledges Jeeves' emotions and opinions and he is interested in him as a person and sometimes treats him more like a friend than a manservant. In *Right Ho, Jeeves*, when Bertie comes back from his holidays in Cannes, he asks Jeeves how he has been while he was away. Later on, he does not agree with a plan Jeeves is suggesting and wants to criticize it:

"Jeeves,' I said, 'may I speak frankly?'

'Certainly, sir.'

'What I have to say may wound you.'

¹⁰¹ Lethbridge, *Servants*, 208-209.

¹⁰² Wodehouse, *The Code of the Woosters*, 130.

¹⁰³ P. G. Wodehouse, *Scoring Off Jeeves* (The Strand, February 1922), Accessed April 14, 2019, https://madameulalie.org/strand/Scoring_off_Jeeves.html.

‘Not at all, sir.’”¹⁰⁴

In those times, masters did not ask their servants for permission when they wanted to speak frankly and for the most part they did not care whether they would hurt their servants’ feelings. Here, Wodehouse portrays a very uncommon relationship between the upper and the lower class. Bertie does not seem to recognize the formal boundaries of their relationship and it is Jeeves who reminds him of the class rules, for example when Bertie asks his opinion on a subject he is discussing with his friend, Jeeves remarks dryly that it is not his place to give it. Bertie also often discusses personal matters with Jeeves and relies on his approval, which is looked down upon by the older aristocrats. For example, Sir Bassett does not even acknowledge the servant’s name and merely addresses Jeeves “Here, you!”¹⁰⁵

There is also a reversal of some typical social roles to be found in Wodehouse. As we have seen, Aunt Dahlia practiced fox-hunting in her youth, which is a leisure activity usually practiced by upper-class men. Here, the male and female social roles are reversed, which again creates a comic effect. If we look at role reversal across the class boundaries, we can perhaps mention the uncommonness of Jeeves annually visiting the Ascot race and betting on horses, a fact which is mentioned in *The Code of the Woosters*. The Ascot is an event normally attended by upper-class people. Another interesting detail is Wodehouse’s choice of Jeeves’ first name. Reginald is generally considered an upper-class name, which is in contrast with the fact that servants’ names were usually used to keep them in their place and were supposed to be typically lower-class. If we compare that to the names of Bertie Wooster, Gussie Fink-Nottle, Hildebrand “Tuppy” Glossop or other upper-class characters appearing in some of his other books like *Stilton Cheesewright*, Cyril Bassington-Bassington, Ronald Psmith, Sir Gregory Parsloe-Parsloe, Richard “Bingo” Little and Frederick Twistleton, the contrast is striking.

As we have seen, in his novels P. G. Wodehouse treats the social class system in a very specific way and often reverses social roles and the inherent values of the class of the characters. This is the main tool he uses to create a comic effect

¹⁰⁴ Wodehouse, *Right Ho, Jeeves*, 22.

¹⁰⁵ Wodehouse, *The Code of the Woosters*, 217.

in his books. And many writers and scholars consider Wodehouse's books the funniest the English literature has ever produced. We can argue that it is not only for the purpose of humour that Wodehouse reverses the social class system in his books; this could also be a kind of mockery, a way to show how bizarre and uptight the relations between classes were at that time in his country. He makes upper-class people look silly and this could be his weapon in fighting the social injustices. While he himself was a member of the upper class and with his wife he did employ servants, he never understood why he should consider himself superior to someone else. Joseph Connolly writes of Wodehouse that he had always had good relationships with his servants because their attitude to life seemed to him less uptight and formal. "In his books, those below stairs are always painted as more warm and human."¹⁰⁶ Wodehouse himself is known to have criticized the social class system in his country. He commented on his first meeting with H. G. Wells: "His first remark, apropos of nothing, was 'my father was a professional cricketer'. A conversation stopper if ever there was one. What a weird country England is, with its class distinctions and that ingrained snobbery you can't seem to escape from...nothing will ever make Wells forget that his father was a professional cricketer and his mother the housekeeper at Up Park."¹⁰⁷ He was not the first, nor the only writer of his time to write about servants and social class, but he stands alone in the way he treated the subject. While others wrote about servants' testimonies of hardship in their masters' homes, or fictional stories about the poor lower-class people and the injustices they faced, Wodehouse's weapon was humour. He did not portray his aristocrats as evil tyrants. Instead, he made the ruling class look silly and pitiable and the lower classes have an air of dignity and pride. We could even talk about a certain deconstruction of the British social class system in Wodehouse's books, notably of the master-servant relationship of that time. Even though modern society does not experience this upper-class and lower-class inequality as strongly as before anymore, Wodehouse's way of fighting injustice with gentle humour makes him an author whose books will not cease to be relevant.

¹⁰⁶ Joseph Connolly, *P. G. Wodehouse* (London: Haus Publishing, 2004), 6.

¹⁰⁷ Alexander Cockburn, *Corruptions of Empire: Life Studies & the Reagan Era* (Verso, 1988), 80, https://books.google.cz/books?id=m9PYNIXp8BMC&printsec=frontcover&dq=Corruptions+of+Empire:+Life+Studies+%26+the+Reagan+Era&hl=cs&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjp-fPzwc_hAhUKkxQKHda4BNEQ6AEIKDAA#v=onepage&q=Corruptions%20of%20Empire%3A%20Life%20Studies%20%26%20the%20Reagan%20Era&f=false.

Conclusion

Praised mainly for his humour, P. G. Wodehouse utilizes many ways in which he creates the comic effect in his books — mainly by playing with language, by getting his characters into absurd and ridiculous situations, by describing the characters and their mishaps in an original way, but also by making use of the social class system of that time. The social class system in his books therefore serves as a tool to create funny situations which often border with mockery. This mockery of upper-class characters can be seen as a commentary on the social class system of the Victorian and Edwardian eras, where the upper-class was the ruling class and there existed great inequality between classes and conditions were very hard for people from the lowest classes.

In the first part of my thesis I presented some typical characteristics of the individual social classes throughout history, defining each class in terms of language, housing, leisure time activities, clothing and education with a special focus on the Victorian and Edwardian eras. I presented the upper-class as being usually privately educated, living in country houses or mansions, wearing expensive and often impractical clothes, spending their leisure time hunting, attending balls and prestigious events and using class-specific synonyms of certain words. I noted that this class is rather closed, based on heredity and upward social mobility into this class is very difficult. The middle classes were defined as having a broad spectrum of leisure time activities, usually being educated at state schools and living in their own houses or apartments. These two classes secured their positions in the Victorian social class system by employing servants. The working-class people usually worked as servants or in factories, enduring harsh working conditions and having very little leisure time. They used specific vocabulary resulting from lack of education that often gave away their social class position. Then, I presented the rules governing a typical master-servant relationship in an era where this system flourished the most and in which the analysed novels are set. This system was based on the idea of superiority of the masters and inferiority of the servants. Servants were encouraged to ‘keep their place’ and respect the boundaries of their social position. They were fully dependent on their masters and were

required to carry out their orders with humility and loyalty. Emphasis was put on the separation of the worlds of the upper classes and lower classes.

Based on an analysis of the class characteristics I observed that the main social classes appearing in Wodehouse are rich aristocrats and their servants. The representatives of the aristocratic class are either older people who live in country houses in seclusion or young gentlemen about town, having an abundance of free time. The characters representing the servant class are either their manservants, cooks or other lower servants working in the country houses. They all abide by the formal rules designated for servants, for example addressing their masters in a certain way. When analysing the social class rules in Wodehouse's novels, I observed that although the surface form of the class of the characters is maintained and their class is clearly defined, Wodehouse often deviates from the standard rules for relationships between these classes. While we can find typical representatives of a certain class in the books and the typical portrayal of the master-servant relationship between them, for example in Sir Watkyn Bassett and his butler Butterfield, the values of some characters' social class can be contested. Bertie, who is a member of the upper class, does not possess greater knowledge of the world than his manservant Jeeves as one would expect from an upper-class gentleman, his language is not better than Jeeves', he does not elicit respect in Jeeves, and he does not maintain his dignity in many situations. His manservant Jeeves is more intelligent than his master, he has a broader vocabulary, he is knowledgeable about the English literature, physics, philosophy, and psychology; he is independent and more aware of the workings of social situations, human interaction and communication. We find that Bertie becomes incompetent without the help and advice of his manservant, sometimes to a point where he resembles a little child who does not know how the ordinary world works. This creates a comic effect in the stories. Upper-class characters are made to look silly and their servants always save the day — they are presented as much more dignified and clever human beings. We can thus see that the deeper values of class are somehow reversed. There is a reversal of superiority and inferiority of the classes in that the lower-class characters seem to be superior to the upper-class ones and their dependence on each other is also shifted. Typically, lower-class people were dependent on their masters, while in Wodehouse it is the other way round. Another important deviation from the usual master-servant relationship rule is that both Jeeves and Bertie know about this

superiority of Jeeves' and respect it. Jeeves even manipulates the situations to serve his own interest. The last deviation from the Victorian ideal of a master-servant relationship can be found in the fact that in Wodehouse the worlds of the different social classes are not separate and Bertie breaks the formal boundaries of his relationship with Jeeves by paying attention to Jeeves' emotions and opinions and treats him more as a friend than a lower-class manservant.

I pointed out that some upper-class characters in the novels are representative of the uptight Victorian aristocracy, striving to preserve the social conventions and the rigid rules of the social class system, imposing them on their servants and abiding by them in their everyday life. They aim to maintain the social hierarchy and frown upon marriage across classes. They believe their class is superior to the others. These characters are especially Sir Watkyn Bassett and Aunt Dahlia, who fill Bertie with dread and who disapprove of Bertie's behaviour because he takes advantage of his upper-class position only to do what he pleases rather than carrying out any responsibilities associated with his position. In addition, his class consciousness is much more laid back than the older aristocratic characters would like.

We can also note a deviation from the norm in male and female social roles in the character of Aunt Dahlia who practices fox hunting — a leisure activity typical for upper-class men. Leisure time activities served as a way to strengthen the bonds between members of a particular class and an emphasis was put on the male and female roles. Wodehouse reverses these gender roles and presents a female character who exercises an activity typical for gentlemen. He also crosses class boundaries by creating a manservant character who is an avid annual visitor of the Ascot race, an activity almost exclusively attended by the upper class. To some extent, we could talk about a certain deconstruction of the social class system. In conclusion, P. G. Wodehouse in his novels treats the social class system in a very original way, he often deviates from its established rules and presents an atypical master-servant relationship.

Shrnutí

Tato bakalářská práce měla za cíl analyzovat roli britského třídního systému v románech P. G. Wodehouse. Dílčími cíli bylo zjistit, jakým způsobem Wodehouse zpracoval tento systém ve svých dílech, zda vybočuje z klasického vyobrazení sociálních tříd v literatuře, popřípadě jaké důvody jej k tomuto specifickému zpracování tématu mohly vést. Britský sociální systém byl analyzován zejména v jeho pozdějších románech *Dobrá, Jeevesi* z roku 1922 a *Krédo rodu Woosterů* z roku 1938. Důvodem pro výběr těchto děl bylo jejich obsazení hlavními postavami, a to Bertiem Woosterem a jeho sluhou Reginaldem Jeevesem, kteří umožňují studii vztahu mezi pánem a jeho podřízeným sluhou, který přímo vyplývá z třídního systému té doby.

V první části práce jsem vymezila pojem sociální třída. Zabývám se zejména historickým vývojem a současností britského systému sociálních tříd, jelikož Jeeves a Wooster jsou postavy britské. Jsou zasazeny do období viktoriánské a edwardiánské Anglie, kdy byl kladen velký důraz na udržování sociálních konvencí. Pro zjednodušení se uvádí, že v Británii v této době fungoval systém tří sociálních tříd: vyšší třída neboli aristokracie, střední třída a dělnická třída, která zahrnovala i sluhy v domácnosti. Charakterizovala jsem každou jednotlivou třídu podle různých kritérií, a to v oblasti vzdělání, oblečení, bydlení, jazyka a volnočasových aktivit. Definovala jsem konkrétní rozdíly mezi těmito třídami i s příklady. Dále jsem se soustředila na vztah pána a jeho sluhy, kdy jsem uvedla typická pravidla pro tento vztah, která platila v době viktoriánské Anglie. Vztah pána a jeho sluhy byl založený na myšlence, že vyšší sociální třídy jsou nadřazené těm nižším. Sluhové byli vedeni k tomu, aby toto uspořádání společnosti respektovali a chovali se tak, jak náleží lidem v podřadné třídě. Aristokracie se snažila, aby propast mezi těmito třídami byla co největší. Sluhové se museli chovat co nejtíšeji a přemísťovat se nepozorovaně, pokorně vykonávat rozkazy a v podstatě byli plně závislí na svých pánech. Bylo považováno za samozřejmé, že pánovo slovo mělo větší váhu, nezatěžoval se příliš pocity svého sluhy a byl mnohem inteligentnější a znalejší světa.

Ve druhé části bakalářské práce jsem aplikovala tyto poznatky na romány P. G. Wodehouse. Analýzou sociálních tříd jsem zjistila, že Wodehouse píše zejména o postavách aristokratů a jejich sluhů. Největší úlohu v analyzovaných

knihách pak mají Bertie a jeho sluha Jeeves. Na různých příkladech jsem zkoumala, zda je jejich vztah typický, co se týká vztahu pána a jeho sluhy a zda jsou dodržována pravidla typická pro jednotlivé sociální třídy. Zjistila jsem, že ačkoliv Wodehouse zachovává formu britského sociálního systému a sociální třídy postav jsou snadno definovatelné, detailní analýza jejich chování prozrazuje, že se v mnoha případech odchylojí od norem tohoto systému. Dále jsem zjistila, že hodnoty spjaté s vyšší třídou, jako váženost, důstojnost, hrdost, vyšší inteligence, erudovanost nebo důvtip můžeme najít spíše u Jeevese než u Bertieho. Pokud se Bertie dostane během vyprávění do úzkých, je to vždy jeho sluha Jeeves, ke kterému se Bertie obrací a žádá na něm radu. Jeeves se pyšní nevyčerpatelnými znalostmi, má lepší slovník a vyzná se v literatuře, ovládá psychologii osobnosti a vždy vyřeší jakýkoliv problém. Oproti jemu se zdá Bertie být neschopným, nesamostatným a chybujícím. Tímto dochází k převratu sociálních rolí, kdy postava z vyšší sociální třídy je závislá na postavě z nižší sociální třídy. Situace, kdy pán se obrací s prosbou o pomoc na sluhu, vytváří komický efekt a zesměšňuje aristokratické postavy. Tímto je také porušen klasický vztah pána a sluhy. Jeeves o své nadřazenosti ví, a přestože dodržuje pravidla určená pro sluhy a všechny své povinnosti vykonává nadmíru uspokojivě, nikdy nepůsobí pokorně. Naopak, vyzařuje dojem hrdosti, který vyvolává u aristokratů respekt. Bertie také vybočuje z pravidel formálního vztahu tím, že se k Jeevesovi chová téměř jako k příteli, svěřuje se mu s osobními problémy a propast mezi pánem a jeho sluhou spíše zmenšuje. Bere ohled na Jeevesovy pocity a chce znát jeho názory. Toto chování se setkává s nesouhlasem u starších postav z vyšší třídy, kteří zachovávají pravidla vztahu mezi pánem a jeho sluhou a snaží se udržovat sociální hierarchii. Jedná se zvláště o postavu Sira Watkyna Bassetta a jeho sluhy Butterfielda a Bertieho tety Dahlie, u jejíž postavy dochází také k převrácení mužských a ženských sociálních rolí, jelikož teta Dahlie provozovala v mládí hony na lišky, což je typickou volnočasovou aktivitou gentlemanů.

Analýzou Wodehousových knih jsem došla k závěru, že autor sice dodržuje formální pravidla britského sociálního systému, ale hodnoty typické pro tyto sociální třídy jsou pozměněny nebo převráceny. Co se týká profesionálního vztahu pána a jeho sluhy, u Wodehouse se objevují vztahy typické pro viktoriánskou Anglii, ale u hlavních postav se tento vztah často vymyká normě a vybočuje z pravidel typických pro tento vztah.

Tyto odchylky slouží jako prostředek k vytvoření komického efektu ve Wodehousových knihách, které jsou mnohými považovány za jedny z nevtipnějších v britské literatuře. Dalším vysvětlením použití těchto prostředků může být také vyjádření Wodehouseova postoje vůči často nespravedlivé a tvrdé sociální hierarchii jeho doby, kdy nejnižší třídy byly podřazené vládnoucí třídě. Jeho zbraní proti tomuto systému není litování slabších, ale naopak zesměšnění pánů a navrácení důstojnosti jejich sluhům skrze jemný humor, což činí z Wodehouse velice originálního a relevantního autora i dnes.

Annotation

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Keywords: social class, British social class, P. G. Wodehouse, Jeeves and Wooster, master-servant relationship, servants in Britain

Description: The aim of this thesis is to analyse the concept of social class in the novels of P. G. Wodehouse. It looks in detail at the way Wodehouse treats the British social class system of his time in his novels, especially in the novels within the Jeeves and Wooster canon. The first part defines the British social class system, its history and present and provides insight into the life of servants in Victorian England. The second part analyses the social classes in Wodehouse and explores the ways in which they deviate from the typical class rules and from the usual portrayal of the social class system, specifically in the context of the master-servant relationship, and proposes the possible reasons behind this unconventional treatment of the topic.

Anotace

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Klíčová slova: sociální třída, britská sociální třída, P. G. Wodehouse, Jeeves a Wooster, vztah pán-sluga

Popis: Cílem této bakalářské práce bylo analyzovat koncept sociálních tříd v románech P. G. Wodehouse. Detailně rozebírá způsob, jakým Wodehouse zobrazuje britský třídní systém své doby v románech, zvláště pak v těch, ve kterých se objevují postavy Jeevese a Woostera. První část práce vymezuje britský třídní systém, jeho historii a současnost a poskytuje náhled do života sluhů ve viktoriánské Anglii. Druhá část práce se zabývá analýzou sociálních tříd ve Wodehousovi a zkoumá to, jak autor vybočuje z pravidel typických pro tyto třídy a čím se odlišuje od klasického zobrazování třídního systému, především co se týká vztahu mezi pánem a jeho sluhou a nakonec předkládá možné důvody pro toto nekonvenční zpracování tématu.

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