

The Code of the Jeeveses

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It is well-known that Jeeves's first appearance was in a story called 'Extricating Young Gussie' in which he had two modest lines.¹ Bertie is firmly, if crudely, established in it, although his name is fairly definitely Mannering-Phipps. Aunt Agatha makes her first appearance there. A little earlier in this, the second decade of the century, Wodehouse produced a scattered series of short stories for the *Strand* featuring an *Ur*-Bertie, Reggie Pepper. Some, though not all, of these were reprinted in the collection *My Man Jeeves*: the Pepper stories were still Pepper, although four Wooster stories set in America were added.² These latter were reprinted in *Carry On, Jeeves* six years later and, as noted above, one Pepper story was Woosterised. Decades later more of the Pepper stories were reworked: 'Doing Clarence a Bit of Good' became 'Jeeves Makes an Omelette',³ one of the only two Jeeves short stories to appear after 1930, and 'Rallying Round Old George' was refashioned, to its disadvantage, as a very late Mulliner, 'George and Alfred'.⁴ One point of interest in the latter reworking is that a Prince was changed to a movie mogul. What is not known is that an uncollected Reggie Pepper, 'Disentangling Old Percy', appeared in the *Strand* for August 1912 (Vol. XLIV, 219-29), bringing Florence Craye into the world. 'Percy' was not her father, but her brother. She also had an elder brother, Edwin, a timorous figure very different from the sanctimoniously destructive Boy Scout he grew down to be in 'Jeeves Takes Charge'⁵ and (with no allowance for the

¹See *The Man With Two Left Feet* (published 1917) and Wodehouse, preface to *World of Jeeves*, viii.

²And badly arranged with *World of Jeeves*, chs. 6, 8 and 9 beginning the book and ch. 10 ending it (i.e. chs. 2-5 in *Carry On, Jeeves*), leaving 'Absent Treatment', 'Helping Freddie', 'Rallying Round Old George' and 'Doing Clarence a Bit of Good' stuck in the middle for the reader to sort out.

³In *A Few Quick Ones*. Curiously enough, the other post-1930 Jeeves short story, 'Jeeves and the Greasy Bird', is also fairly clearly modelled on an uncollected Reggie Pepper story or draft. See *Performing Flea*, 107. Even as it stands now the story is more seedy in theme than one expects from a Jeeves piece, although not from Pepper-land. The revision has its problems: it is amusing to encounter Honoria Glossop mated up to Blair Eggleston of *Hot Water* (published 1932) but Jas. Waterbury, who skinned Freddie Widgeon, cannot be the same person as Jos. Waterbury, who habitually touched him ('The Masked Troubadour', *Young Men in Spats*). All in all Reggie Pepper made a good ancestor but proved in poor shape at resurrection-time. 'Jeeves and the Greasy Bird' first appeared in *Plum Pie*, and both stories conclude *World of Jeeves* as chs. 33 and 34.

⁴*Plum Pie*. *World of Mulliner*, ch. 40. Wodehouse, as shown by the novels, was still doing fine work, but his frequent cannibalisation of old short story plots in his later years testifies to the fact that infrequent use of the medium was giving him a sense of loss of mastery there.

⁵Written just after *The Inimitable Jeeves*. Ch. 1 of *Carry On, Jeeves* and *World of Jeeves*.

passage of years) *Joy in the Morning*. Their father was Lord Worplesdon, but with little binding him to the ferocious Uncle Percy, Lord Worplesdon, of the latter book. The one vestigial remnant of this story in the Jeeves cycle, apart from the character of Florence, is the mysterious reference to Lord Worplesdon in 'Jeeves Takes Charge':⁶

He couldn't tell me anything I didn't know about the old boy's eccentricity. This Lord Worplesdon was Florence's father. He was the old buster who, a few years later, came down to breakfast one morning, lifted the first cover he saw, said 'Eggs! Eggs! Eggs! Damn all eggs!' in an overwrought sort of voice, and instantly legged it for France, never to return to the bosom of his family. This, mind you, being a bit of luck for the bosom of the family, for old Worplesdon had the worst temper in the county.

The incident has little bearing on the plot of 'Jeeves Takes Charge' and is completely at variance with the capitalistic enterprises of Worplesdon of which we learn in *Joy in the Morning*, but it is recounted less snappily (and with 'Curse all Eggs' instead of the later 'Damn') in 'Disentangling Old Percy' (*Strand*, XLIV, 220). The similarity of title to that of the first Bertie story is suggestive, and so also is the provision of a stepmother for Florence who later draws Aunt Agatha in that capacity. In this story, however, the stepmother wins her status at the end, Florence having been authoritatively seeking to break off her brothers from the toils of a dangerous adventuress, a palmist by profession. The adventuress has the last word:

'I'm afraid Florence has taken the thing a little badly. But I hope to win her over in time. I want all my children to love me.'

'All your what?'

'I think of them as my children, you see, Mr Pepper. I adopted them as my own when I married their father. Did you think I had married Edwin? What a funny mistake! I am very fond of Edwin, but not in that way. No; I married Lord Worplesdon. We left him at our villa tonight, as he had some letters to get off. You must come and see us, Mr Pepper. I always feel that it was you who brought us together, you know. I wonder if you will be seeing Florence when you get back? Will you give her my very best love?' (229)

The Maupassant-like nature of this finale is evident when one remembers the lady's earlier remark on Florence's first effort to come between her and her first target, the brother Percy:

'Do I strike you as a vindictive woman, Mr Pepper?'

'I don't think you do,' I said.

'By nature I don't think I am. But I'm feeling a little vindictive just at present.' (223)

⁶*World of Jeeves*, 3, altering 'bosom of the family' (*Carry On, Jeeves*, J, 12) to 'bosom of the f.', a form in keeping with the matured Wooster style of the novels, and a further means of Wodehousian send-up of cliché. It supplies a good instance of the kind of minor revision he gave to old stories.

There is a more muted Maupassant touch in the first story in which Jeeves came into his own. 'The Artistic Career of Corky' (originally 'Leave it to Jeeves'),⁷ where the lady again marries the old moneybags instead of the youthful heir to whom she was initially attached: but this time there is no redeeming vindictiveness about her motives. It will be remembered that the rich uncle in that story was Worple.

Perhaps the most curious point about the Pepper antecedents is that Pepper in 'Rallying Round Old George' has a blackmailing valet, Voules. Wodehouse would return to this name: the Sergeant in *Thank You, Jeeves*, the chauffeur in the Blandings series.⁸ The character, too, is an early version of the few crooked butlers and valets in the later stories (Oakshott in 'The Come-Back of Battling Billson' (*Lord Emsworth and Others*, Ch. 8), Binstead in *Pigs Have Wings*, Chippendale in *The Girl in Blue*,⁹ Bingley in *Much Obligated, Jeeves* (but not really in his earlier, Brinkley, version)—as opposed to crooks pretending to be butlers, such as the splendid Horace Appleby of *Do Butlers Burgle Banks?*)¹⁰ He suggests nothing of Jeeves. But it is very remarkable that the *Ur*-Bertie found himself faced by a shrewd and hostile valet. From this would seem to come several points about Jeeves: his moments of conflict with Bertie, his immorality or un-morality as Orwell terms it,¹¹ his obvious superiority to Bertie and his friends. This is an important piece of evidence: it distances Jeeves from the system-worshipping Crichton, all too readily taken as his point of origin. It puts him much nearer the coolly neutral Lane and Phipps of Wilde's plays (the name of the latter may not be out of place as the basis of Bertie's cognomen in 'Extricating Young Gussie'), an association made by Lord Alfred Douglas among other critics.¹²

Jeeves took a little while to mature. The interested student unable to consult the files of the *Strand* can compare original and revised texts of *The Inimitable Jeeves* (1924, very shortly after magazine appearance) by looking at the final product alongside the stories as they are reprinted in the omnibus *The World of Jeeves*,¹³ where for some reason

⁷The first story of *My Man Jeeves*. Under the former name, ch. 2 of *Carry On, Jeeves*, ch. 6 of *World of Jeeves*.

⁸Save in *Something Fresh* where the chauffeur is Slingsby—again a much-used name, that of the butler in *If I Were You*, the author of *Strychnine in the Soup* (*World of Mulliner*, ch. 26) and the Superb Souper who sought to sue Bertie (*World of Jeeves*, ch. 26).

⁹Published 1970. A most unpleasant bounder, but his great performance wins him a curtain call and an encore song in partnership with the most attractive character in the book. The most pointed use of a curtain-call in all of the novels of the very theatre-minded Wodehouse.

¹⁰The most admirable crook in Wodehouse whose reversal of the conventions often produces agreeable crooks and unpleasant police but never quite to this degree of polarisation.

¹¹George Orwell, 'In Defence of P. G. Wodehouse', *Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters*, ed. Sonia Orwell, Vol. 3, P. 396 (Feb. 1945).

¹²In his *Oscar Wilde—a Summing-Up* (1941), whose critical insights are not contemptible when the author can forget about his own wrongs.

¹³The choice of the *Strand* texts may have been made with some notion that they provided a narrative more easily interwoven with the stories of *Carry On, Jeeves* which stretch over a longer period extending both before and after the time-span of the earlier book. The original *Jeeves Omnibus* (published 1931) also sought to allow for the difference in authorship by having the one Jeeves narrative 'Bertie Changes His Mind' originally ch. 10 of *Carry On, Jeeves*, placed at the end. But

the earlier *Strand* texts are followed for the most part. Aline Hemmingway is Bertie's own infatuation here (*World of Jeeves* 55); in *The Inimitable Jeeves* she is foisted on him by Aunt Agatha.¹⁴ It is only with these stories that this is the case, however. The omnibus fortunately does not use the *Strand* text of 'Bertie Changes his Mind', the one story narrated by Jeeves (though it does get it hopelessly out of chronological sequence) (see n. 13): the *Strand* text implies a less literate Jeeves who embarrassingly refers to Bertie as 'the guv'nor'. Jeeves's taste is in the first stories by no means on the high level it later reached. He successfully undercuts Bingo Little in a struggle for the affections of a young waitress whose ideas on ties as presents run to crimson satin decorated with horseshoes. He also shows a decided readiness to double-cross Bingo, despite having been enlisted in his cause by Bertie, both here and later in 'The Metropolitan Touch' (*Inimitable Jeeves*, P, 24-25, 181. *World of Jeeves* 31, 209). On any level his disqualification of the real winners of the girls' egg and spoon race at Twing in the sole interest of his own and his allies' profit is a heartless piece of chicanery.¹⁵ It is this which may have roused Orwell to charge him with lack of morality. But the greater Jeeves is very firmly on stage within a year or so of the publication of these stories:¹⁶

'And I have it from her ladyship's own maid, who happened to overhear a conversation between her ladyship and one of the gentlemen staying here—Mr Maxwell, who is employed in an editorial capacity by one of the reviews—that it was her intention to start you almost immediately upon Nietzsche. You would not enjoy Nietzsche, sir. He is fundamentally unsound.'

An admirably succinct summation. Jeeves's hostility to Nietzsche is in fact an interesting reassertion of Wodehouse's fear of excess. The aristocracy is acceptable only when it is harmless: hence the later Lord Emsworth is lovable, while Lady Constance is dangerous. Millionaires are dishonest and lawless people (J. Washburn Stoker in *Thank You, Jeeves*, Paterson Frisby in *Big Money*, J. B. Duff in *Quick Service* 1940, Jacob Z. Schnellenhamer in 'The Mulliners in Hollywood' stories [*Blandings Castle*, Chs. 8-12], Bradbury Fisher in 'High Stakes' [*The Heart of a Goof*, Ch. 2] and, slightly below these incomes, Sir

this jettisons the chronological method since Bertie's horror of girls' schools heightening the tension in 'Jeeves and the Kid Clementina' is dependent on the Jeeves-told narrative which appears after it. The whole thing is reduced to absolute confusion in *World of Jeeves* where the two late stories, with Bertie narrative, are placed after 'Bertie Changes His Mind': the result is that the stories are chronological save that ch. 32 is certainly before ch. 27.

¹⁴*Inimitable Jeeves*, P, 29-33. The Aunt Agatha addition is all to the story's advantage:

'You should be breeding children to . . .'

'No, really, I say, please!' I said, blushing richly. Aunt Agatha belongs to two or three of these women's clubs, and she keeps forgetting she isn't in the smoking-room.

¹⁵*Inimitable Jeeves*, P, 159. *World of Jeeves*, 193. Hugh Kingsmill's parody in *The Table of Truth* acknowledges this.

¹⁶'Jeeves Takes Charge', *Carry On Jeeves*, J, 33. *World of Jeeves*, 17.

Watkyn Bassett in *The Code of the Woosters*).¹⁷ Actual aspirants for dictatorship are utterly contemptible bullies treated with every form of ridicule (Roderick Spode in *The Code of the Woosters*). Authorities on mental illness with power of certification are objects of hostility (Sir Roderick Glossop in the early Jeeves short stories) until, at least, they divest themselves of their armour by becoming fugitives under blackface (*Thank You, Jeeves*) or butlers (*Jeeves in the Offing*).¹⁸

The role of the Nietzschean intellectual is more problematic. The Efficient Baxter is brilliant and frightening. Yet was he, with his dreams of managerial power, any more to be feared than Jeeves himself? The answer would seem to be that the two differed after *Carry On, Jeeves*. The Jeeves of *The Inimitable Jeeves* and the earlier (American) stories of *Carry On, Jeeves* is more out for himself than anyone else. His dramatic intervention to wreck Bertie's engagement to Honoria Glossop, for instance, is specifically because his own position is threatened by it.¹⁹ In later stories he intervenes time and again purely in the interest of Bertie and his friends, even being ready to accept an occasional criticism of one of his schemes by Bertie in the light of further evidence. (Thus, despite Bertie's offensive insistence that he has lost his intellectual powers in *Right Ho, Jeeves*, he revises his earlier hostility to doctoring Gussie Fink-Nottle's orange juice and comes to agree with Bertie's conclusions [P., 128-32, 157-58]; he also seems to adopt Bertie's view of the primacy of tea in female minds following their disagreement in 'Jeeves and the Old School Chum' although his strategy may have been consistent throughout [*World of Jeeves*, 457-59]). His loyalty, then, is his redeeming characteristic. It is in the first instance loyalty to Bertie as an institution; hence the permanent insistence that Bertie must not betray the standards of that institution by eccentricity in dress or hirsute adornment. But it becomes a personal loyalty of the kind that is proof against almost any challenge. The exception here is *Thank You, Jeeves*, but he was careful to remain in Bertie's circle and orbit after giving notice, and there is a good probability that he was biding his time to return after Bertie had been forced to recognise his superiority to any banjolele on the

¹⁷Published 1938. It will be remembered that there were two schools of thought as to the origins of the Bassett wealth—inheritance in the conventional view, and sticking like glue to the fines imposed in the Boshier Street Magistrate's Court according to Bertie (*ibid.*, 7).

¹⁸Published 1960. There are several subtleties in this narrative, including jokes for the constant reader, notably Sir Roderick Glossop's increasing similarity to Bertie. In *Thank You, Jeeves* this was merely a matter of bootpolish, but by now it is deeper than skin. On this point of the nastiness of the wealthy and powerful, Senator Opal, the fanatical Dry whose letter to his bootlegger is misdirected, is almost unique in his bullying hypocrisy and constitutes surely the vilest politician in *Wodehouse (Hot Water)*: even Mr Bickersdyke has merely turned his coat as opposed to wearing both sides at once. Mencken should have approved of *Hot Water*, save that Opal is not the hick he represented Dries as being, but rather an absolutely unscrupulous cosmopolitan. It is Wodehouse who has realism on his side.

¹⁹*Inimitable Jeeves*, P, 62-63, 77. *World of Jeeves*, 43, 53. The omnibus does clear up the confusions about Aunt Agatha's name: Gregson in *The Inimitable Jeeves*, Spenser in *Carry On, Jeeves*, Spenser Gregson in *Very Good, Jeeves* with a butler named Spenser in *The Inimitable Jeeves* and Purvis in *Very Good, Jeeves*. In *The World of Jeeves* she is definitely Spenser Gregson and the butler is safely Benson.

scale of priorities. Baxter, on the other hand, intervenes always in his own ultimate interest.

Jeeves, like his forebear Sherlock Holmes, retains independence alongside loyalty. He is very much the good Jeeves by the time of *Very Good, Jeeves*, but he follows his own beliefs and not Bertie's in reaching his solution to 'Indian Summer of an Uncle'. And his loyalty, while proof against a great deal of psychologically destructive carping on Bertie's part, is not proof against a human desire for minor revenge. When Wodehouse determined to put Jeeves in full-length novels he brought his character nearer to reality. It is well known that once Jeeves had been established, Wodehouse had the Holmes-Watson example very clearly in mind (Usborne, *Wodehouse at Work*, 152-53). But the dictates of employer-valet relationship meant that Watson's moments of irritation had to be greatly multiplied. Conan Doyle failed in some degree when he wrote his long Holmes stories, partly because the relationship between the two men was not subjected to the more intense scrutiny the larger length demanded. But he had given clues. It is in the long stories that the most vigorous Watsonian dissents are uttered: there are testy arguments in *A Study in Scarlet* and *The Sign of Four*; there are little tussles of wit, in which Holmes is not always the victor, in *The Valley of Fear*; there is one real flare-up when Watson accuses Holmes of lack of trust in *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (Ch. 12, 'Death on the Moor'). Wodehouse profited by these hints. His first two Jeeves novels, produced in quick succession to one another in 1934, subjected the relationship to two kinds of strain: one, the obvious, commencing with a quick, hard break, resulting in a natural chain of events; the other, more subtle, assuming the growth of a conviction on Bertie's part that Jeeves has lost his intellectual powers and that he, Bertie, is more qualified to handle problems. Once the break has been made in *Thank You, Jeeves* it is a simple matter to maintain a protective watch on Bertie by Jeeves. The conflict situation has been formalised from the outset and hence little more needs to be done with it. The much more difficult matter of *Right Ho, Jeeves* gives a special greatness to that novel, as human observation no less than as comedy. Wodehouse, having obtained much mileage by standing normal literary conventions on their heads (the Jeeves-Bertie relationship being one classic example of this) now stands one of his own conventions on its. An enormous number of the Jeeves stories up to this, including *Thank You, Jeeves*, depended on Jeeves forcing a solution by creating the impression to critical parties that Bertie was insane: now, in *Right Ho, Jeeves*, Bertie is implying the same thing about Jeeves and, more, clearly believes it.²⁰ (Another point of Conan Doyle antecedents here might be 'The Dying Detective' where Watson

²⁰P, 73-74 *et passim*. There is an analogy with Lord Emsworth's swift movement from awe revering genius to disgust at obvious insanity in relation to the Efficient Baxter in *Leave it to Psmith*. But Bertie at least refrains from Emsworth's later dithyrambs: 'The adjectives mad, crazy, insane, gibbering—and, worse, potty—had played in and out of his conversation like flashes of lightning. And from the look in his eye she gathered that he was still saying them all over again to himself'. (*Summer Lightning*, J, 293.)

forms an even more unfavourable view of Holmes's mental state—but it is Holmes's intention that he should.) In a way, the solution involved only a slight variation by Jeeves on his old method when he cast Bertie as a universal object of execration to be absolved by forcing him to make a painful and unnecessary midnight bicycle ride. But the realistic element in human conflict appears when Bertie has come back :

'Good evening, sir. I was informed that you had returned. I trust you had an enjoyable ride.'

And Bertie is under no illusions about this one :

At any other moment, a crack like that would have woken the fiend in Bertram Wooster. I barely noticed it. I was intent on getting to the bottom of this mystery (*Right Ho, Jeeves*, P., 244).

And the puzzling reconciliations are then explained to him. We have a further touch of the same human desire for a little of his own back when Jeeves is seeing Bertie off on his bicycle Odyssey :

'But I may come a fearful stinker without a lamp. Suppose I barge into something.'

I broke off and eyed him frigidly.

'You smile, Jeeves. The thought amuses you?'

'I beg your pardon, sir. I was thinking of a tale my Uncle Cyril used to tell me as a child. An absurd little story, sir, though I confess that I have always found it droll. According to my Uncle Cyril, two men named Nicholls and Jackson set out to ride to Brighton on a tandem bicycle, and were so unfortunate as to come into collision with a brewer's van. And when the rescue party arrived on the scene of the accident, it was discovered that they had been hurled together with such force that it was impossible to sort them out at all adequately. The keenest eye could not discern which portion of the fragments was Nicholls and which Jackson. So they collected as much as they could, and called it Nixon. I remember laughing very much at that story when I was a child, sir.'

I had to pause a moment to master my feelings. (232)

(The penultimate sentence of Jeeves's statement might be commended to future American historians as an epigraph to a chapter on investigations of government corruption in the early 1970s.)

Having resolved so ably the possibilities of two logical crises in the Bertie-Jeeves partnership, Wodehouse never returns to the theme. All future friction is minor and almost formal. Indeed in two cases, *Joy in the Morning* and *Much Obligated, Jeeves*, the cause of disagreement is resolved in Bertie's favour.²¹ Where the arguments are of the classi-

²¹Staying in Steeple Bumbleigh for Jeeves's fishing, and retaining Jeeves's narrative of Bertie's disasters in the archives of the Junior Ganymede.

cal kind destined to end in Jeeves's victory, even Gussie Fink-Nottle can foresee the outcome :

'I thought of Jeeves,' he repeated, 'and I took the train to London and placed my problem before him. I was fortunate to catch him in time.'

'How do you mean, in time?'

'Before he left England.'

'He isn't leaving England.'

'He told me that you and he were starting off almost immediately on one of those Round-the-World cruises.'

'Oh, no, that's all off. I didn't like the scheme.'

'Does Jeeves say it's all off?'

'No, but I do.'

'Oh?'

He looked at me rather oddly, and I thought he was going to say something more on the subject. But he only gave a rummy sort of short laugh, and resumed his narrative (*The Code of the Woosters*, P., 58).

One effect of taking Jeeves into novels was, curiously enough, a far greater tightening up of the plots and action. The dovetailing is now much superior. A dramatic illustration of this is possible by a comparison of time-spans. The action in 'The Artistic Career of Corky' must take at least two years, if not more, allowing for the writing and publication of Muriel Singer's book, her marriage to Alexander Worple after a decent interval from the first meeting following publication, her pregnancy and production of a son, and the interval between the child's birth and its advancement to an age sufficient to have its portrait painted. The action in *The Code of the Woosters* takes forty-eight hours, of which the last twelve are covered in the final seven-eighths of the book. In certain respects Wodehouse gave himself entertainer's licence on time questions. Gussie Fink-Nottle hardly has enough time between departure from and return to Bertie's bedroom to be reconciled with Madeline and have an almighty row with her father (180, 182). In the same way, there is an unexplained delay between Ronnie Fish's remorse-stricken discovery of Sue's presence at Blandings in *Summer Lightning* and his arrival at her room, during which period Pilbeam has enough time to consume four or five cocktails and eat his dinner :²² Beach, during the same interval, serves Pilbeam and brings dinner to Sue. However, this is but a pedant's work on my part.

One very interesting example of Wodehouse's artistry and application of lessons from his seniors lies in his use of villains. Holmes and Watson, of course, are but two of three immortal names in that cycle, the third being Moriarty. Similarly, the adversary of adversaries to Bertie and Jeeves, paling Washburn Stoker and Watkyn Bassett into

²²*Summer Lightning*, J, 254, 277; and 255-65, 284, 275-76.

insignificance, is Aunt Agatha. Now, Wodehouse made perhaps the most perceptive comment on Moriarty which we have had from any critic :

It is an error, I think, ever to have your villain manhandled by a minor character. Just imagine Moriarty socked by Doctor Watson. A villain ought to be a sort of scarcely human invulnerable figure. The reader ought to be in a constant state of panic, saying to himself : 'How the devil is this superman to be foiled?' The only person capable of hurting him should be the hero. . . .

Taking Moriarty as the pattern villain, don't you see how much stronger he is by being an inscrutable figure and how much he would have been weakened if Conan Doyle had switched off to a chapter showing his thoughts? A villain ought to be a sort of mal-evil force, not an intelligible person at all.²³

This was written to Bill Townend on 23rd July 1923, when Wodehouse had just published *The Inimitable Jeeves*. Although in theory a criticism of Townend's ideas, there is a measure of self-rebuke involved. For at one point in that book, Bertie, the Watson-figure, does perform the equivalent of 'socking' Aunt Agatha : indeed, the *Strand* version of that episode was entitled 'Aunt Agatha Takes the Count'. And both texts contain the line :

I dug out my entire stock of manly courage, breathed a short prayer, and let her have it right in the thorax (*Inimitable Jeeves*, P., 44, *World of Jeeves*, 65).

Very revealingly, when Bertie recalls this episode in 'The Inferiority Complex of Old Sippy' some years later, it is without his own contribution :

'At that moment, Jeeves, I could have told her precisely where she got off ; and only a too chivalrous regard for the sex kept me from doing so' (*World of Jeeves*, 341).

Wodehouse was beginning to consider the economics of his permanent figures in the cycle. He told Bill Townend in 1935 :

In 1916 I wrote the first *Jeeves* story. About a year later I wrote another. But it wasn't till I had done about six at long intervals that I realized I had got a series-character.²⁴

And Aunt Agatha had to evolve from being the authority-figure of 'Extricating Young Gussie' (who will be the pompous old party to collapse, *à la Punch*, at the end of the anti-climax) into the malignant and awesome figure of the later works. She had to assume a much

²³*Performing Flea*, P, 22-23. Of course, Aunt Agatha is a very liberal development of Moriarty. The leading conservative derivative work is that by T. S. Eliot.

²⁴Wodehouse to Townend, 12th September 1935, *Performing Flea*, P, 95.

more formidable character than the aunts of Blandings who being viewed three-dimensionally are inevitable targets for the deflationary powers of the Wodehouse third-person narrative. My colleague Dr N. T. Phillipson has tentatively ascribed Moriarty status to Baxter : but Baxter so clearly breaks Wodehouse's rule about not having his thoughts shown, that the theory, while ingenious, will hardly sustain itself. (That Baxter is always the centre of an utterly ludicrous catastrophe is less relevant : this would be consistent with an anti-Moriarty. Perhaps Baxter has some moments of Moriarty reputation, although he is more detective than master-villain.) Aunt Agatha, on the other hand, is only perceived through the lens of Bertie's overwhelming fear of her, much as Moriarty can only be seen through Watson's perception of Holmes's chilling account. And once he reached the novels, Wodehouse seems to have made a very remarkable decision in literary economics : to retain her power, Aunt Agatha must never appear at all.

The novels ran risks with many of the stock characters. A short story would permit suggestion by grace-note; a novel demands character-development by extended treatment. It may have been that Wodehouse felt Bingo Little would simply not stand up to a novel; at all events he was moved out of Wooster's world after the series of Jeeves short stories ended and became a standard figure in Drones Club short stories. In any case, while Wodehouse was prepared to touch on tensions within a marriage in a novel (Freddie Threepwood's putative problems are important in *Full Moon*, in theory rather than in practice), and while funny rich millionaires are always permitted to have divorces (from 'The Heel of Achilles' [*The Clicking of Cuthbert*, 1922] to *Pearls, Girls and Monty Bodkin*) it was out of his framework to question marital problems at any length. Bingo's were confined to brief limits.

But Aunt Agatha's fate was different. She did not vanish. She remained a very formidable character off stage. She was, in a sense, Godot. Her wishes, range of choice, state of knowledge and probable responses affect the action of *Joy in the Morning* and *The Mating Season* vitally, and several other novels marginally. Her symbolic pseudo-appearances are even more dramatic. Bertie's purgatorial bicycle ride involves many misadventures among which :

once I received a most unpleasant shock when, on alighting to consult a signpost, I saw sitting on top of it an owl that looked exactly like my Aunt Agatha. So agitated, indeed, had my frame of mind become by this time that I thought at first it was Aunt Agatha, and only when reason and reflexion told me how alien to her habits it would be to climb signposts and sit on them, could I pull myself together and overcome the weakness (P., 234-35).

This is very funny : but it also supplies a creepily werewolf-cum-Dracula motif. Wodehouse varied the prescription with Svengali in *Joy in the Morning* :

as I approached the door, I suddenly observed that there hung over it a striking portrait of Aunt Agatha, from the waist upwards. In making my entrance, I had, of course, missed this, but there it had been all the time, and now it caught my eye and halted me in my tracks as if I had run into a lamp-post.

It was the work of one of those artists who reveal the soul of the sitter, and it had revealed so much of Aunt Agatha's soul that for all practical purposes it might have been that danger to traffic in person. Indeed, I came within an ace of saying 'Oh, hullo!' at the same moment when I could have sworn it said 'Bertie!' in that compelling voice which had so often rung in my ears and caused me to curl up in a ball in the hope that a meek subservience would enable me to get off lightly (J., 177-78).

The horrific impact of Aunt Agatha is also admirably suggested in this novel by the terror of her evinced by her husband, Uncle Percy, otherwise the most formidable person of the novel (a little vulnerable to attack from his daughter Florence but her range of interests is limited). I recall seeing a similar effect in Mitchell Hedges's account of a vast sea-monster caught by him which bore on it the scars inflicted by some greater and almost unimaginable beast.²⁵

²⁵*Heroes of Modern Adventure: Mr Mitchell Hedges Among the Monsters of the Deep.*

Reviews

THEOLOGY IN RECONCILIATION. Essays towards Evangelical and Catholic Unity in East and West, by Thomas F. Torrance. *Geoffrey Chapman*, London, 1975. 302 pp. £5.50.

Any book by Professor Torrance is full of sound learning and responsible theological reflection, and the present collection of essays and lectures is on the same high level as his other writings. The theme is plainly stated in the title and subtitle. Throughout the Christian world today there is a remarkable convergence in theology, and differences that once seemed intractable are being overcome. This is happening not through compromise, but through a more comprehensive grasp of the tradition.

Professor Torrance draws upon many sources, but perhaps three may be mentioned as particularly significant in this book. The first is the classical theology of the Church, as formulated by such men as Athanasius and Cyril of Alexandria. Though it needs to be rethought and updated at many points, it continues to supply a foundation for our theology today. Next, one perceives the continuing importance for Professor Torrance of the Reformed tradition, from Calvin to Barth. Third, there are a number of references to the