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## Representation of Women in the Works of P.G.Wodehouse

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Popular literature is studied for the reason of its close relationship with society. The popular writer is in more immediate contact with his readers – he has the pulse of the people and develops certain kinds of specialized skills to accomplish the task of entertaining/instructing which his audience expects from him. And this is what P.G.Wodehouse, a prolific writer of over ninety books and worldwide acclaim, hailed by The Times as ‘A comic genius recognized in his lifetime as a classic and an old master of farce’, has been doing for nearly 70 years.

All comedy is born out of a sense of incongruity. Incongruity is the recognition of the wide discrepancy between what is and what ought to be. Incongruity can arise out of reversal of roles. But this is definitely based on construction of roles at a given time. For example, gender roles being reversed leads to comedy. In most of the Shakespearean Romantic Comedies, for example the Twelfth Night, where we find a woman courting the man, in fact, the very disguise is incongruous and results in humour. During the Victorian Period gender roles were strictly demarcated. The woman’s role was strictly domestic: she was the angel in the house, angelic in patience and self-effacement. But in most of Wodehouse’s work this is comically reversed. It is the women who are the dominant sex. All the strong men and heroes are house-tamed sooner or later, willingly or unwillingly, by wives or sisters.

This research article then attempts to establish that Wodehouse through his delineation of women characters subverts existing social structure and gender stereotyping and portrays women as progressive and equal in every level of existence.

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Lady Ickenham, wife of Lord Ickenham, only occasionally lets the Fifth Earl go to London, and that too for the most reasons like the opening of the Parliament session or the Eton and Harrow match, though threatening to skin him with a blunt knife if he didn't return on the dot. She also believes in strong centralized government and handles the Ickenham finances and gives her husband just enough for golf balls, tobacco and self-esteem.

Lord Emsworth, the Ninth Earl of Blandings Castle is the head of the family, but it is his sister Lady Constance who is 'a forceful and imperious woman modeled on the lines of the late Cleopatra. Nominally he was the master of the house and as such entitled to exercise the Presidential Veto, but in practice Connie's word was always law.'

(Sticky Wicket at Blandings)

Lady Adela Topping ensures that she has a joint bank account with her husband and any money that needs to be released from the account has to have her consent.

In Wodehouse's novels one finds physical incongruity contributing to humour. Lady Constance is the 'handsome and imperious-looking woman' whereas Lord Emsworth looks like a 'tramp'. Desborough Topping, the husband of Lady Adela Topping is a 'small, slight, pince-nezed man in the middle forties, who looked like the second vice-president of something..' whereas his wife Adela Topping is herself 'tall and handsome built rather on the lines of Catherine of Russia, whom she resembled also in force of character and that imperiousness of outlook which makes a woman disinclined to stand any nonsense.' Lord Tilbury of Mammoth Publishing Company 'being short and square and stumpy and about twenty five pound overweight, he looked like a Napoleon takes his morning walk at St. Helen,' whereas Lady Julia Fish who comes to meet him is 'a handsome middle-aged woman of the large blonde type, of a personality both breezy and commanding... her resolute chin and her china-blue eyes proclaiming a supreme confidence in her ability to get anything she wanted out of anyone.'

Wodehouse's young ladies are portrayed as sensible modern women to whom marriage involves financial independence of their own.

Gladys who loves Lancelot, an artist with fortune, tells him 'No. I need the money (her won to which her Uncle Francis is the trustee) and I won't get married without it. I'm not going to be one of those pauper wives who have to come and plead brokenly with their husbands every time they want the price of a new hat. Some of my married friends tell me it sometimes takes fully half a pint of tears before their mate can be induced to disgorge the most trifling sum. I couldn't do it. My pride forbids it.'

-(A Good Cigar Is a Smoke)

Lord Shortlands, the Fifth Earl of Shortlands wants to marry his cook Mrs. Punter who lays down the condition to the impoverished lord that she'll only marry a man who can set her up in a pub in London or which he needs to raise two hundred pounds.

-(Spring Fever)

Women in Wodehouse's works are athletic, aggressive, non-apologetic on the sports field, be it a diverse manly sport like hunting in which Bertie Wooster's Aunt Dahlia engages in and excels at.

'Aunt Dahlia is a large, genial soul, the sort you see in dozens on the hunting field. As a matter of fact, until she married Uncle Thomas, she put in most of her time on the horseback.'

Gloria Salt in 'Pigs Have Wing', passes her time 'Playing a bit of tennis. Playing a bit of golf. Ridin' a bit, swimmin' a bit.'

The women being good at sports will not suffer patronizing attitude of men silently. Gloria Salt cancels her engagement to Lord Vosper as :

" We were playing in the mixed doubles, and I admit that I may have been slightly off my game, but that was no reason why, after we had dropped the first set, he should have started barging into my half of the court, take my shots for me as if I were some elderly aunt with arthritis in both legs who had learned tennis the previous week at a correspondence school. "Mine!" he kept yelling. "Mine, mine!", and where was Gloria? Crouching in a corner looking at him with wide, admiring eyes and saying "My hero!"? No sir. I told him that if he didn't stop his damned poaching, I would brain him, if he had a brain. That held him for awhile. After that, he kept himself to himself, as it were. But every time I missed a shot, and a girl with an emotional nature couldn't be expected not to miss a few after an ordeal like that, he raised his eyebrows in a superior kind of way and gave a sort of nasty dry snigger and kept saying "Too bad, too bad." And when it was over and we had lost – two six, three six – he said what a pity it all was and if only I had left it to him... Well, that was when we parted bass rags..' (Pigs Have Wings)

In contrast, men like Lord Ickenham use a Brazil nut and Catapult to take a pop at someone's hat and Lord Emsworth is forever engaged in winning races relating to Pigs and Pumpkins. Bertram Wooster's sporting aspiration is to be in Lodon for the Drones Club Darts Tournament which takes place in February and to win it, whereas, his manservant Jeeves' is fishing in Florida and yearns some day to catch a tarpon.

Certain other heroines of P.G. Wodehouse are women of mettle, who abominate weakness and meekness, and urge men to be men.

In 'Uncle Dynamite', the American Sally Painter, a not very successful sculptor in Chelsea breaks off her engagement to Pongo when he refuses to smuggle jewellery into America for a friend of hers. In 'Aunt Aren't Gentlemen,' Vanessa Cook, the daughter of Colonel Cook, quarrels with Orlo because he doesn't have the guts to go and thump the table of her fierce-horse-whipping father who is Orlo's sole trustee and who won't unbelt Orlo's money to let him marry his daughter and so she threatens to marry Bertram Wooster instead. Stephanie Byng instructs her beloved, the sainted Rev. Harold to steal the local Constable of Police, Oates' helmet to teach him a lesson for a feud involving her Dog Bartholemew which had tipped the constable into a ditch.

A large proportion of Wodehouse's women are writers – professional and successful. The female best-sellers are Rosie. M. Banks, Leila Pinckney, Lady Wickham, Leila Yorke. Rosie M Banks, the best selling novelist is ruthlessly professional and goes on lecture tours and such. Lady Florence Craye, the only daughter of the Earl of Worplesden, 'steeped to the gills in serious purpose', is the author of the novel *Spindrifft* which her fiancé Percy Gorringer, dramatizes and which closes after three nights at the Duke of York's – so Percy is dismissed as a loser and 'England is strewn with ex-fiances whom she bounced because they did not come up to her specification.'

Thus in Wodehouse's work Victorian gender stereotyping of gentlemen being a law unto themselves, born to rule and take an active part in the worldly affairs, expected to be feared at home and admired as the final authority and the fount of wisdom and having absolute control over his wife's property, so that, if he wanted to, he could insist on her subservience, is comically reversed and gender justice is established.

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