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What Exactly Is It about Wooster's Voice? A Response to Lawrence Dugan*

SARAH SÄCKEL

1. Introduction

Lawrence Dugan argues that Wodehouse's Jeeves and Wooster novels differ from most of his other novels in their "baroque style" and differentiates between Wodehouse's "baroque" and "classic" works. I find this distinction well applicable, especially since Dugan clearly shows the difference between the two styles (230-32). With respect to the concept of the "baroque" in Wodehouse, however, a more thorough delineation of the characteristics that, in Dugan's view, render the novels "baroque" and an analysis of the textual evidence presented in the paper would have made the argument more convincing to me. Citing from *Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, Lawrence Dugan defines his use of the term "baroque" only briefly as "marked generally by use of complex forms, bold ornamentation, and the juxtaposition of contrasting elements often conveying a sense of drama" (228-29) as well as related to "grotesqueness" and "flamboyance" (229). As "baroque" he describes the narrator's "unique, vernacular, contorted, slangy idiom" (228). He also presents an example but does not analyse it and only states that "[s]entences like these do

*Reference: Lawrence Dugan, "Worcestershirewards: Wodehouse and the Baroque," *Connotations* 20.2-3 (2010/2011): 228-47. See also Laura Mooneyham White, "As I have heard Jeeves put it": A Response to Lawrence Dugan's "Worcestershirewards: Wodehouse and the Baroque," *Connotations* 21.2-3 (2011/2012): 327-33; William Vesterman, "The Two Bertie Woosters: A Response to Lawrence Dugan," *Connotations* 22.1 (2012/2013): 85-88. For the original article as well as all contributions to this debate, please check the *Connotations* website at <http://www.connotations.de/debdugan02023.htm>.

not occur in Wodehouse's books outside of the Jeeves and Wooster novels" (229). At the end of his paper, he lists seven characteristics of Wooster's "baroque voice" and presents examples of the different stylistic devices used but does not analyse and explain how they achieve their effects (241-43). Hence, one might venture to conclude that the terms "baroque" vs. "classic" are helpful for a general differentiation between Wodehouse's works, but not very productive for a deeper analysis of the Jeeves and Wooster novels. In my opinion, the phenomena that Dugan calls "baroque" can be more convincingly explained and more thoroughly examined with my approach of "comic dialogism."

What Dugan describes as "contorted" (228) is usually achieved through a dialogic, incongruous combination of different texts and/or images. In the example he presents for "Slang, Clichés and Misquotation," it is the combination of a quotation from *Hamlet* and a slangy and very visual description that the reader bisociates[1]: "if the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune want to crush his proud spirit, they have to pull their socks up and make a special effort" (qtd. in Dugan 242). Moreover, and as often, the "slings and arrows" are personified, which visualises the metaphor again and creates another incongruity.[2] The literally/culturally literate reader further bisociates the rewriting and Shakespeare's original.

Whereas Dugan only lists stylistic devices he names "baroque" without showing how exactly they are used, analysing the novels under the scope of "comic dialogism" explains the idiosyncrasies of Wooster's voice, as the very brief analysis above exemplifies and as will be shown in more detail below. After all, the stylistic devices listed by Dugan (e.g. first-person narrator, metaphors and similes, etc.) could be used by other authors in an entirely different way.

In order to show how exactly Wodehouse uses the characteristics Dugan calls "baroque," I shall analyse them under the scope of "comic dialogism." Before doing so, I will briefly delineate this approach and respond to Dugan's claim that "[t]he new baroque Wodehouse may also have been a response to the incipient modernism of the late 1910s" (229). As will be seen below, I find the novels'

intertextual/intermedial relationships to two popular genres of the time, namely detective fiction and musical comedy, even more fruitful for analysis than their relationship to modernism. In passing, I shall also comment on related points that Dugan makes and with which I (dis-)agree, namely Dugan's interpretation of the "gentleman ideal" and the role of women in the novels.

2. "Comic Dialogism"

In my study *Jokes Don't Jump from Nowhere: Comic Dialogism in P. G. Wodehouse's Jeeves and Wooster Novels*, I have applied a theoretical approach to the novels that links theories of the comic, intertextuality and intermediality in order to explain their popularity and longevity in Anglo-American cultural memory, which, of course, largely depend on their distinctive narrative voice.[3] The Jeeves and Wooster novels are dialogic intertextual and intermedial creations and hence, comic incongruities are created between different texts and between different images as well as between texts and images. As laughter is always a "*fait social*" (Pfister, *A History of English Laughter* vi), the contexts of production and perception need to be taken into account when analysing comic works. Further, intertextual and intermedial relationships are most intense when both consciously employed by the author and recognised by the reader (cf. Pfister, "Konzepte der Intertextualität" 27). Thus the dialogic relations between texts and/or images are embedded into the dialogue between author/narrator, text and reader.

I have used Arthur Koestler's term "bisociation" in order to explain the effects that the incongruities created between different texts and/or images may have on readers. In his bisociation theory, Arthur Koestler conceptualises the creation of the comic as "a thing […] seen in a dual light; a mental concept […] simultaneously perceived under two different angles […] which serves two masters at the same time; it is 'bisociated' with two independent and mutually exclusive mental fields" (36). For Koestler, there is "a quick oscillation of the bisociated

concept between its two contexts, these quick oscillations accounting for the presence of both […] in consciousness" (37). The most straightforward example would be the pun, which triggers two opposed association streams in readers, but Koestler's concept can also explain the effects that Wodehouse's rewritings or intertextual/intermedial combinations have. Here, readers bisociate the visual and the verbal or the "source text" and its comic rewriting or revisualisation.[4]

3. The Intertexts of the 1910s and 1920s

Dugan concedes that one can find similarities to Bertie Wooster's way of speech and expression in *Mulliner Nights* (Dugan 238). While having pointed out the distinctiveness of the "Wooster voice" in my work on the Jeeves and Wooster novels, I have also always argued that it is the mixture of "repetition with variation," the creation of something very idiosyncratic out of well-known phrases and images, that achieves the popularity and comicality of these novels and their narrative voice. As Lawrence Dugan puts it: "All of the key literary tropes appear scattered throughout the other books, although never with anything like Bertie's tangled combinations that break them up and reassemble them in his own peculiar manner, which I call baroque" (237). Wodehouse rewrote and adapted his own works, but the Jeeves and Wooster novels are also intricately linked to many other texts and images rooted in Anglo-American cultural memory.

Like Dugan, I am convinced that it is necessary to take the "textual surroundings" of the late 1910s and the 1920s into account when talking about the narrator's idiosyncratic voice and its "baroque," or in my analyses "dialogic," characteristics. When looking at his contemporaries, however, it is, in my opinion, more fruitful to analyse the novels' intertextual and intermedial connections to some of the popular genres of the time, most importantly the (classic) detective novel and musical comedy, because the intensity of intertextual/intermedial dialogism between the Jeeves and Wooster novels and some representatives of these genres is very strong.[5] Wodehouse

enjoyed reading detective fiction and wrote plentifully for the musical comedy stage in the 1920s. The narrator, Bertie Wooster, is likewise presented as an avid reader of detective fiction and a fan of musical comedy. Hence, intertextual and intermedial references to both genres abound in the Jeeves and Wooster novels. In Wooster's view, "reading for pleasure" equals "reading detective fiction"[6]:

> [Wooster]: "I am sorry to butt in when you are absorbed in your Spinoza and have probably just got to the part where the second corpse is discovered, but what I have to say is of great pith and moment, so listen attentively." (*Much Obliged, Jeeves* 131)

As the example shows, Wooster is certain that Jeeves must be reading a detective novel, because he is reading during his leisure time. However, the sophisticated valet either reads philosophers like Spinoza or the "classics." Interestingly, the following characteristics that Dugan allocates to the Jeeves and Wooster novels are definitely features of the classic detective novel, too:

> The plots have two consistent characteristics: a very *tight* farcical *construction*, and the style I have outlined" (Dugan 232; emphases mine)
>
> his plots adhere to a seamless logic (233)
>
> The story's farcical plot is wonderfully executed, with each chapter of about ten pages leading into the next, and *various loose-ends* that the reader had forgotten about *being snatched up* and handled by Wodehouse, *until the end of the book*. (234; emphases mine)

I am convinced that Jeeves and Wooster are a combination of two character pairs that were popular at the time, namely the clever servant and his stupid master as well as the classic detective and his "Watson."[7] The narrative situation in the Sherlock Holmes novels also resembles the Jeeves and Wooster novels. Both Watson and Wooster seem to know less than the reader. Whereas this creates the pleasure of being the cleverer sleuth for the reader of the detective novels,

readers of the Jeeves and Wooster novels delight in "getting a joke" first or in foreseeing (comic) events.

Furthermore, Wooster describes the fictional world in terms of musical comedy:

> He [Wooster's friend Bingo] always reminds me of the hero of a musical comedy who takes the centre of the stage, gathers the boys round him in a circle, and tells them all about his love at the top of his voice. ("The Pride of the Woosters is Wounded" 45)

There are not only specific references to musical comedy, but also system references.[8] They are responsible for the novels' strong visuality, which creates both affective and mnemonic effects. The intermedial reference used in the quotation above creates a very vivid comic image of Bingo in the readers' minds. Hence, readers are often invited to remember the comic visual scenes, which are sometimes used as "visual running gags," for instance, intratextual references to preceding slapstick scenes that use their visuality metaphorically and at the same time remind the reader of the slapstick scene and thus make him/her laugh about it again.[9]

Despite Dugan's claim that Wooster is a unique character (229), he also concedes that he is "not the first character of his kind" (230). He is a "knut" (230), and he is similar, for instance, to Algernon Moncrieff in *The Importance of Being Earnest* (see Dugan 230, referring to Usborne). I concur with Dugan/Usborne and with Robert McCrum, who says that Wodehouse pastoralises Wilde (cf. McCrum 101).[10] These rewritings are again "repetitions with variation," and their effects resemble those that Linda Hutcheon ascribes to the effects adaptations have on readers/audiences. In *A Theory of Adaptation,* Linda Hutcheon sees the audience's pleasure in adaptation as simply coming "from repetition with variation, from the comfort of ritual combined with the piquancy of surprise" (Hutcheon 4). In Jeeves and Wooster, this works both on the level of texts/phrases as shown above and images that are rooted in cultural memory.

4. Analysing Dugan's Seven Characteristics of the "Baroque" under the Scope of "Comic Dialogism"

The seven stylistic devices that Lawrence Dugan lists as features of the "baroque style" are: (1) the use of the first person, (2) outrageous metaphors and similes, (3) a mock-aesthete attitude, (4) slang, (5) clichés, (6) mis-quotation, and (7) the transferred epithet. I shall respond to (1) at some length, as "the use of the first person" can be linked with my comments on what Dugan says about Bertie Wooster as a character and narrator as well as with my critique of how Dugan interprets Wooster's "gentleman ideal" and, related to this, the role of women in the novels.

(1) The Use of the First Person

Dugan gives an example that shows how Wooster narrates, but does not explain what, in his view, is so special about this kind of first-person narrator. Of course, the following list of further characteristics can all be seen as illustrations of how the narrator uses language, but, in my opinion, there is more to Bertie Wooster's comic and, as I call it, "dialogic" voice. Wooster's incongruous split into the narrator and the focaliser and the reader's bisociation of both creates "dialogic humour." As Gerd Dose points out, narrator and character are not congruent because the latter's intellectual weakness is disclaimed by the former's ability to structure the narration, in which associations and digressions are all employed for a purpose (cf. Dose 29). This creates what critics have frequently called "Wooster's wonderful innocence" (cf. McCrum 149) and prompts a "recreative" reader reception in the manner described by Koestler and Hazlitt (cf. Koestler 33; Hazlitt 10).[11] Interestingly, the narrator and the focaliser both find their equivalent in the reader, whose bisociation process consists of an empathetic experience shared with the focaliser but who also experiences, sees and knows more through the way the narrator either tells him about or shows him the events, which makes them appear to him as if he was "the first to find it out" (Hazlitt 10).

Dugan points out that the first person "is the *sine qua non* of the Jeeves-Wooster books, yet, except for the Mulliner stories, they are the only that he wrote (that [he] know[s] of) out of over ninety books of fiction, in the first-person" (241). If one regards the novels' intertexts, *Ruggles of Red Gap* and *What Next?* (also "valet novels"), it becomes even more obvious that the choice of narrative perspective was a very conscious one. Wooster's "slangy and contorted" idiom could not have been used by Jeeves, and it would lack comicality if it was used by a non-descript heterodiegetic narrator. It is the reader's ability to "recreate the witticism," to see what really is at stake while reading Wooster's account of it, that often creates (visual/verbal) incongruities. Besides the incongruous focaliser-narrator relationship, the reader is also often shown more through Jeeves's words.

(1a) Staging Himself as a "Perfect Gentleman" and the Role of Women in this "Male World of Childhood Play"

According to Dugan, Wooster "is like a comic knight who is given a quest and performs it. The comedy lies in his unknightly voice describing himself" (236). Here, I disagree. In my opinion, it is rather the other way round. It is the "voice," Wooster, the narrator, who stages himself as a knight and a "perfect gentleman," but the character and focaliser is presented to the reader as rather a cowardly, though good-hearted, young man.[12] This is often shown through the disparity between Wooster's words and his deeds. In Dugan's view, "Bertie Wooster […] takes his marching orders from his female friends, enemies and relatives, making only the briefest of protests" (236). However, whereas it is true that Wooster never finds good arguments in order to protest, he usually only helps his friends/aunts once he has been blackmailed by them or is in danger of being married to one of his ex-fiancées. Although he repeatedly states that, as a "preux chevalier," he helps any friend in need, he is too scared and cowardly to do so unless even greater danger is looming.

Sometimes it is simply the narrator's employment of irony that shows Wooster to be the opposite of what he claims to be (hence, there

is not only an incongruous doubling through the narrator-focaliser combination, but also through the narrator's use of language):

> I made up my mind that I would pop back and do the strong manly thing by lying low in my flat and telling Jeeves to inform everybody who called that I wasn't there. ("All's Well" 222)

Obviously, it is not manly at all to hide from one's opponents. Dugan's description of Wooster as being "proud (or vainglorious) and humble (or a chump)" (236) is therefore suitable. However, it is not only this mixture, but the fact that in his "innocence" (cf. also Dugan's reference to Usborne 237), Wooster really seems to mean what he so proudly says and at the same time, he is shown to be a "chump." This creates the aforementioned incongruity between the focaliser and the narrator.

When one further regards Wooster and his code of being the perfect gentleman, this becomes even more obvious. Wooster's code not only demands from him that he helps old friends from school, but also that he never breaks an engagement and does not "bandy women's names" (cf., e.g., *Much Obliged, Jeeves* 28). Although Wooster never breaks an engagement, the plots are mainly about Jeeves directing events so that the women break the engagement. Further, both Wooster and Jeeves indirectly talk about women. Wooster, for instance, welcomes the fact that there is "a wealth of meaning in [Jeeves's] 'Indeed, sir?'" (*Much Obliged, Jeeves* 27) because this way they can discuss women without literally doing so, which is important because discussing a woman "would come under the head of bandying a woman's name, and the Woosters do not bandy women's names. Nor do the Jeeveses" (*Much Obliged, Jeeves* 28). With his exaggerated code of moral conduct, Wooster stages himself as a "perfect English gentleman," and thus the novels contain a certain stereotypical image of "Englishness." At the same time, as shown in the examples above, the character/focaliser comically fails adhering to "the code" and (indirectly) breaks it, and so "the code" with its image of Englishness is comically subverted.[13]

Hence, I do not agree with Lawrence Dugan's claim that "Bertie is a gentleman to the core—the unkind reference to a "ghastly girl" above is not typical and of course not heard by the object of it" (235). While Dugan is definitely right about the fact that Wooster never talks badly about women when they can hear it, there are quite a few references to women that are comic, but also quite harsh and not very gentlemanly at all:

> To me the girl was simply nothing more or less than a pot of poison. One of those dashed large, brainy, strenuous, dynamic girls you see so much of these days. She had been at Girton, where, in addition to enlarging her brain to the most frightful extent, she had gone in for every kind of sport and developed the physique of a middleweight catch-as-catch-can wrestler. ("The Pride of the Woosters is Wounded" 44)

> When I had finished, she made one of those foolish remarks which do so much to confirm a man in his conviction that women as a sex should be suppressed. (*Joy in the Morning* 96)

I agree with Dugan, however, that the "importuning female […] is as essential a plot device as the master-servant relationship itself" (235) and that the women are usually "of marrying age or mothers and aunts" (235). The female characters in Wodehouse are part of a conservative tradition in comedy, and they are described by Stott as having "repeatedly been given the role of joyless authority figures […], wives who are simultaneously mothers to their infantilized husbands" (81). Although Wooster never ends up being a husband (the romantic marriage plot is inverted in the novels), he is definitely infantilised. His problems and joys are those of school-boys. The novels present an Arcadian world of childhood play. The female characters are an essential "plot device" because they are "killjoy aunts," who always force Wooster to do something for them, or ex-fiancées, who are "always a lurking menace till [they] get[ ] engaged to someone else and so cannot decide at any moment to play a return date" (*Much Obliged, Jeeves* 27). Hence, the female characters' roles as "mother figures" help to create Wooster's image as the "eternal school-boy" and with that the novels' "public school-boyishness" and

the world of childhood play. The latter needs to be taken into account when talking about the novels' gentleman ideal. When Dugan says that Wooster is a "gentleman to the core" (235), he only regards one side of the coin. As shown above, Wooster stages himself as such a gentleman. According to Christine Berberich,

> the idea of the gentleman [itself] was developed into an "invented tradition" [in the nineteenth century]: based on the mediaeval cult of the knight, it was adapted and modified to fit contemporary needs. The public schools institutionalized this new ideal. The Victorian gentlemen-to-be consciously had to submit to and fashion himself according to a set of rules; without these, society would not be able to consider him a gentleman. (21)

The novels both participate in the creation of such an ideal and subvert it comically, for instance through exaggeration.[14] In my view, it is vital to always take the novels' "comic doubling" into account. There is no containment without subversion and vice versa. "Even when he tries to be aloof, the real Bertie comes through" (Dugan 240). Although Dugan formulates it differently, this description seems to come close to what I would term the "doubleness" and incongruity created between Wooster, the aloof narrator, and Wooster, the cowardly character.

(2) Metaphors and Similes

Metaphors and similes definitely play a vital role in the novels' creation of visual comicality. If one uses Max Black's interaction theory of metaphor, metaphors could be described as "dialogic" in their own way: the images associated with two semantic fields are in interaction. Extended similes in the Jeeves and Wooster novels break up the narratives and slow down narrative pace. Thereby they create suspense and heighten the comicality of the scene as in the example below, in which Wooster has just mentioned the "magic word" that Jeeves told him in order to enable him to blackmail Spode. Spode's miraculous turning from anger to obsequiousness is described as follows:

> If it hadn't been that my implicit faith in Jeeves had led me to expect solid results, I should have been astounded to the effect of this pronouncement on the man. You could see that it had got right in amongst him and churned him up like an egg whisk. He recoiled as if he had run into something hot, and a look of horror and alarm spread over his face.
>
> The whole situation recalled irresistibly to my mind something that had happened to me once up at Oxford, when the heart was young. It was during Eights Week, and I was sauntering on the river bank with a girl named something that has slipped my mind, when there was a sound of barking and a large, hefty dog came galloping up, full of beans and buck and obviously intent on mayhem. And I was just commending my soul to God, and feeling that this was where the old flannel trousers got about thirty bob's worth of value bitten out of them, when the girl, waiting till she saw the whites of its eyes, with extraordinary presence of mind suddenly opened a coloured Japanese umbrella in the animal's face. Upon which, it did three back somersaults and retired into private life.
>
> Except that he didn't do any back somersaults, Roderick Spode's reactions were almost identical with those of this nonplussed hound. For a moment, he just stood gaping. Then he said "Oh?" Then his lips twisted into what I took to be his idea of a conciliatory smile. After that, he swallowed six—or it may have been seven—times, as if he had taken aboard a fish bone. Finally, he spoke. And when he did so, it was the nearest thing to an exceptionally mild-mannered dove, at that. (*The Code of the Woosters* 393)

The extended simile, which compares the dictator character, Spode, to a dog, creates a very strong and incongruous image of Spode's sudden change in behaviour, breaks up the action and heightens suspense for the reader. Moreover, metaphors and similes are, as Dugan puts it, "outrageous" (241), but often at the same time very apt and comically in line with the character types. This can be shown in Dugan's example:

> She drove off, Gussie standing gaping after her transfixed, like a goldfish staring at an ant's egg. (qtd. in Dugan 241)

Gussie is known to the reader as a "spectacled newt-collecting freak" (*Much Obliged, Jeeves* 56) who is usually compared to a fish because of his big eyes and spectacles: "He looks like a fish and keeps newts in a glass tank in his bedroom, but one condones that sort of thing in an old schoolfellow" (*Stiff Upper Lip, Jeeves* 5). Hence, the simile is not only comic because of its "outrageousness, " but because it varies and

repeats an "old theme" for "faithful readers." It is an incongruity that is again achieved through a dialogic combination of the well-known and something new. The specific comicality of the Wooster voice is not solely achieved through the use of metaphors and similes in more general terms, but, as just shown, through a very distinct use of these stylistic devices. The last feature, the "repetition and variation" of certain metaphors/similes, is especially interesting as the novels not only repeat and vary their imagery, but also their references to other texts, as the following example shows:

> "Yes, sir. If it were done when 'twere done, then 'twere well it were done quickly," he [Jeeves] said, making for the door and I thought, as I had so often thought before, how neatly he put these things. (*Stiff Upper Lip* 171)

> Feeling, therefore, that if the thing was to be smacked into, 'twere well 'twere smacked into quickly, as Shakespeare says, I treacled the paper and attached it to the window. All that now remained to be done was to deliver the sharp. And it was at this point that I suddenly came over all cat-in-the-adage-y. (*Joy in the Morning* 110)

This repeated and varied rewriting of a well-known quotation creates a feeling of "being at home" in the "Wooster world" for faithful readers of the Jeeves and Wooster novels.

(3) Mock-Aesthete Attitude

Dugan's third point is a "mock-aesthete attitude" (241). The mocking and comically subversive presentation of a certain attitude again means dialogic doubleness and is, hence, related to the novels' treatment of intertexts/interimages. Further, it is part of Wooster's "self-fashioning" as a gentleman. However, whereas the Wildean dandies consciously fashion themselves, Wooster often does so innocently. As shown above, he seems to believe in the image he creates of himself. Moreover, his fashion-consciousness is used as another running gag in the novels. Most novels start with an argument between him and Jeeves about a certain piece of clothing, which Wooster likes and his truly fashion-conscious valet detests, for instance an Alpine hat, a

white dinner jacket, and purple socks. At the end of the novel, Wooster gives in as a sign of his gratitude towards Jeeves.

(4) Slang, (5) Clichés, and (6) Mis-Quotation

Dugan gives one example for his following three points, namely for (4) slang, (5) clichés, and (6) mis-quotation. This example shows that it is not only the use of these features, but also their "dialogic combination," which create what Dugan calls "baroqueness." In his example, a Shakespearean quotation is linked to a slangy and visual idiomatic expression: "and if the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune want to crush his proud spirit, they have to pull their socks up" (qtd. in Dugan 242).

Clichés are also dialogic in Jeeves and Wooster. They are always comically rewritten. This has been shown above with regard to Wooster's "gentlemanly ideal," but there are many other examples, especially concerning the novels' stereotypical presentation of "Englishness." Tea, for example, which is often metaphorically referred to as "the fragrant and steaming" ("The Metropolitan Touch" 182) or "the good old stand-by" ("The Aunt and the Sluggard" 103), is comically described as "life-saving":

> "Leave me," I said, "I would be alone. I can't see anybody till I've had my tea." "When Cynthia smiles," said young Bingo, "the skies are blue, the world takes on a roseate hue; birds in the garden sing, and Joy in the Morning is king of everything, when Cynthia smiles." He coughed, changing gears. "When Cynthia frowns—" "What the devil are you talking about?" "I'm reading you a poem. The one I wrote to Cynthia last night. I'll go on, shall I?" "No!" "No?" "No, I haven't had my tea." At this moment Jeeves came in with the good old beverage, and I sprang on it with a glad cry. After a couple of sips things looked a bit brighter. Even young Bingo didn't offend the eye to quite such an extent. By the time I'd finished the first cup I was a new man, so much so that I not only permitted but encouraged the poor fish to read the rest of the bally thing, and even went so far as to criticize the scansion of the fourth line of the fifth verse. ("The Great Sermon Handicap" 127)

Again, a mixture of subversion and containment characterises the presentation of tea. While comically making fun of this "very English need of a cup of tea," people sharing the same cultural background are included and immersed. Moreover, it is not simply the use of a cliché, but its comic exaggeration/subversion that turns it into such a distinct feature of Wodehouse's style. The cliché is always rewritten and/or revisualised and therefore another feature of the novels' comic doubleness and, as I call it, their "comic dialogism."

The same holds true for mis-quotation. As Dugan's term mis-quotation already indicates, it is not simply the use of intertextual references, but their "comic misuse" that turn them into a distinct part of the Wooster idiom. The ("knowing") reader thus bisociates the "mis-quotation" and its original. Examples are plenty, and Dugan has already presented one. Here is another one:

> It has been well said of Bertram Wooster that when he sets his hand to the plough he does not stop to pick daisies and let the grass grow under his feet. (*Much Obliged, Jeeves* 65)

This rewriting of Luke 9:62 ("[a]nd Jesus said to him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God") revisualises the biblical quotation because it both exaggerates the scene and visualises it differently. Although the original text employs metaphor as well, the image is already conventionalised for audiences who share the same religious/cultural/literary knowledge, and, therefore, the sentence is at once understood in its metaphorical sense. Through adding a more detailed imagery, a more vivid revisualisation is achieved. Moreover, the words "to pick daisies" connote a world of child-like play and trigger a further revisualisation of the idiom "let the grass grow under one's feet." After having imaged Wooster picking daisies, the reader will bizarrely be inclined to image the grass growing under Wooster's feet. Often mis-quotations are used for similar effects. They rewrite/revisualise texts/images rooted in Anglo-American memory, thereby creating comic effects and mak-

ing readers from the same cultural background "feel at home" in the fictional world.

(7) The Transferred Epithet

As a last feature, Dugan lists "the transferred epithet" and presents, among others, the following example: "I lit a rather pleased cigarette. Things were beginning to clarify" (*The Mating Season* 9; qtd. in Dugan 242). Again, an analysis of how this feature creates the "baroque" is missing in his paper. In my view, the transferred epithet is one of a number of devices that create estrangement, incongruity and, hence, a much stronger, incongruous visual image. The use of an "unsuitable adjective" (Dugan 242) serves to personify the cigarette and makes the reader picture it comically; it also shows us Wooster's childlike love of playing with language by using an adjective "wrongly." Moreover, the reader bisociates the grammatically correct sentence and its comic rewriting.

5. Conclusion

What exactly then is it about "Wooster's voice"? My approach of "comic dialogism" allows for a closer examination of the characteristics Dugan calls "baroque" and of his textual examples, thereby showing that the idiosyncratic narration is mainly achieved through dialogic combinations of the visual and/or the verbal, of different texts and/or images. These create comic incongruities that make readers laugh. After all, this is the response the novels aim to achieve. How exactly this is brought about, is both an intriguing as well as debatable subject.

Universität Stuttgart

NOTES

[1]For a definition of Koestler's term "bisociation" see below.

[2]The whole quotation is also an example of Wooster's "self-fashioning," which I shall comment on below when analysing Wooster as a character/focaliser and, especially, a "gentleman."

[3]A thorough delineation of my theoretical approach and some of the analyses presented in this paper have been published in *Jokes Don't Jump from Nowhere: Comic Dialogism in P. G. Wodehouse's Jeeves and Wooster Novels*.

[4]A further note on the concept of "comic dialogism": the Jeeves and Wooster novels are only partly dialogic in a Bakhtinian sense of the term. Whereas the insertion of different texts and images creates incongruities and thus comic scenes and dialogues, it neither creates layers of meaning, nor subverts socio-cultural, literary or historical authorities. The benevolence of Wodehousean comicality makes it hard to assess the novels' ideological standpoint and renders their comedy very light; its humour always includes rather than excludes readers. The texts and images that are rewritten in the novels have usually already been (or were, some are no longer today) part of Anglo-American cultural memory and hence ensure the novels' inclusion in Anglo-American cultural memory.

[5]I have presented evidence for the intensity of intertextual/intermedial dialogism with detective fiction (mainly the Sherlock Holmes, Miss Marple and Hercule Poirot novels as well as novels by Raymond Chandler and Rex Stout) and musical comedy (Wodehouse's own musical comedies) in Säckel 93-123 and 142-68. There I have also analysed the effects of these intertextual/intermedial relationships in more detail. For preceding studies on Wodehouse and detective fiction, see also Carlson, *An Analysis of P. G. Wodehouse's Team of Bertie Wooster and Jeeves*; MacGregor, "A Hatful and a Trace of Heredity," and "'Plumming' Sherlock Holmes," as well as her "Sherlockian Plums: A Study in Contrast," and Thompson, *Wooster Proposes, Jeeves Disposes or Le Mot Juste*.

[6]According to Irina O. Rajewsky, a narrator can be presented whose perception and way of thinking is shaped by a particular medium (cf. 89). This is the case with Wooster. He often perceives and describes the world in terms of detective fiction and musical comedy.

[7]I have shown the novels' intertextual links to two "valet novels" (Harry Leon Wilson's *Ruggles of Red Gap* and Denis Mackail's *What Next?*) and to classic detective fiction of the time (see Säckel 96-115).

[8]In *Intertextualität: Formen, Funktionen, anglistische Fallstudien*, Broich and Pfister have coined the terms "Einzeltextreferenzen," which I call "specific references" (cf. 48-52) and "Systemreferenzen", which I call "system references" (cf. 52-58). I use the terms very similarly to them and apply the term "specific references" when analysing references to single literary works (for example, quotations or allusions), whereas I use the term "system references" to the transference of a specific genre or discourse, or to the use of thematic or structural parallels, which are modelled on more than one work of the preceding author.

[9]On visual running gags in the Jeeves and Wooster novels, cf. Säckel 30-31 and 151-52.

[10]I have taken my cue from Robert McCrum, who says that "[i]n this way, Wodehouse silently borrows the aunts, butlers and young Mayfair lounge lizards of Wilde's plays, but pastoralizes them in his own lunatic Eden, cunningly placing them beyond the reach of serious analysis" (McCrum 101). Wodehouse, for instance, recreates farcical elements of Wilde's plots and comic features of his characters, but does not recreate the latter's satirical social criticism. (I have given a detailed analysis of the novels' intertextual links to Wilde's comedies and their "knuts" in Säckel 124-27).

[11]According to Hazlitt, "wit is often the more forcible and pointed for being dry and serious, for it then seems as if the speaker himself had no intention in it, and we were the first to find it out" (10). In Koestler's view the reader also "re-create[s] the witticism or humorous scene" (33).

[12] On Wodehouse's ongoing parodic concern with the subject of knight-errantry, see Inge Leimberg, "'Across the pale parabola of Joy': Wodehouse Parodist," and the ensuing *Connotations* debate at <http://www.connotations.uni-tuebingen.de/debleimberg01312.htm>.

[13]Moreover, "the code" is a very important plot device. If Wooster, for instance, was allowed to break his engagements (which are often the result of a misunderstanding), there would hardly be a problem for Jeeves to solve.

[14]Dugan also mentions Wodehouse's and Raymond Chandler's education at Dulwich College, which, of course, is a biographical evidence for the novels' presentation of "school-boyish masculinity." For an analysis of the parallels between Raymond Chandler's fiction and Wodehouse, see Säckel 120-23.

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