

Gender and Humor in P. G. Wodehouse's *Pearls, Girls and Monty Bodkin* and *The Cat-Nappers*

P. G. Wodehouse'un *İnciler, Kızlar ve Monty Bodkin* ile *Kedi Hırsızları* adlı Romanlarında Toplumsal Cinsiyet ve Gülmece

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ABSTRACT

The scholars preoccupied with humor have tried to explain what makes a situation or a work of art humorous. Consequently, various theories of humor have come into being. Of these theories, "the incongruity theory" is widely accepted in humor studies. P.G. Wodehouse, one of the leading authors of Britain, is famous for his humorous novels. This study argues that in Wodehouse's *Pearls, Girls and Monty Bodkin* (1972) and *The Cat-Nappers*, first published in England under the title *Aunts Aren't Gentlemen* in 1974, humor stems from the incongruity between the personality traits of the characters and gender stereotypes dominant in society, and accordingly, in the gender schemas of the readers. This article displays that while the male characters do not exhibit socially accepted masculine traits, most of the female characters have masculine traits. Using allusions, Wodehouse emphasizes the masculine traits of his female characters in these novels. The study concludes that the incongruity between the personality traits of the characters in these novels and the stereotypes in the gender schema of the readers may cause laughter.

Keywords: Gender, Gender Schema, Humor, Incongruity Theory, Wodehouse

ÖZ

Gülmece ile ilgili çalışmalar yapan bilim insanları, bir durumu ya da bir yapıtı gülünç yapan şeyin ne olduğunu açıklamaya çalışmışlardır. Bu çalışmaların sonucunda, çeşitli gülmece kuramları ortaya çıkmıştır. Bu kuramlardan 'tutarsızlık kuramı', gülmece çalışmalarında yaygın olarak kabul görür. Britanya'nın önde gelen yazarlarından biri olan P. G. Wodehouse, gülmece romanlarıyla ünlüdür. Bu çalışmada yazarın *İnciler, Kızlar ve Monty Bodkin* (1972) ile İngiltere'de ilk kez *Teyzeler Centilmen Değildir* başlığı altında 1974 yılında yayımlanmış olan *Kedi Hırsızları* adlı romanlarında gülmece-nin, karakterlerin kişilik özellikleriyle toplumda egemen olan, dolayısıyla okurun cinsiyet şemasında bulunan, toplumsal cinsiyet kalıp yargıları arasındaki tutarsızlıktan kaynaklandığı tartışılır. Bu makale, incelenilen romanlarda erkek karakterlerin toplumsal olarak makbul erkeksi özellikler sergilemediklerini, kadın karakterlerin çoğunun ise erkeksi özellikler taşıdıklarını ortaya koyar. Wodehouse, göndermeler yaparak kadın karakterlerin erkeksi özelliklerini vurgular. Çalışmada romanlardaki karakterlerin özellikleriyle okurların cinsiyet şemalarında bulunan kalıp yargılar arasındaki tutarsızlığın gülmeye neden olabileceği sonucuna ulaşılmıştır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Toplumsal Cinsiyet, Toplumsal Cinsiyet Şeması, Gülmece, Tutarsızlık Kuramı, Wodehouse

Introduction

For centuries, humor and laughter have preoccupied many philosophers, scientists, and scholars (Parovel & Guidi, 2015, p. 22), and they have endeavored to answer such questions as why an individual laughs and what makes a situation or a sentence or a work of art humorous. Due to these attempts, various theories of humor have come into being. Main theories of humor are "The Superiority Theory," "The Relief from Restraint Theory," and "The Incongruity Theory" (Clark, 1970, pp. 20–21; Scheel, 2017, p. 12;

Watson, 2015, pp. 409–413). The superiority theory asserts that an individual laughs at the clumsiness, misfortunes, and mistakes of other people as s/he thinks that s/he will not do the same (Clark, 1970, p. 20; Scheel, 2017, pp. 14–15; Watson, 2015, pp. 409–410); for example, a person laughs at another person stumbling on a stone and falling down because s/he thinks that s/he will not fall down since s/he will notice the stone, consequently s/he feels that s/he is superior to the person falling down. As the discussion exhibits, the superiority theory tries to explain why an individual laughs rather than what makes a situation or joke funny. Similar to the superiority theory, the relief from restraint theory deals with the reason behind laughter. According to the relief from restraint theory, “... *we laugh to release emotional or psychic tension and this produces pleasure*” (Watson, 2015, p. 410). To clarify this theory, Scheel gives the following example: “..., *in a meeting with a tense atmosphere, a manager could say something funny and thus take the audience by surprise, resulting in an arousing outburst of laughter and a subsequently looser atmosphere*” (2017, p. 15). The explanations concerning the relief from restraint theory demonstrate that this theory endeavors to find out the psychological reasons behind the laughter as well.

In regard to the incongruity theory, John Morreall points out that “*it is now the dominant theory of humor in philosophy and psychology*” (2009, p. 10). The reason behind it may be the fact that without incongruity humor vanishes. Thus, Martin indicates that “*The research evidence to date generally supports the idea that the incongruity of some sort is an essential element of humor*” (2007, p. 72). The incongruity theory is based on schemas, and Morreall points out it as follows: “*The core concept in incongruity theories is based on the fact that human experience works with learned patterns. What we have experienced prepares us to deal with what we will experience. When we reach out to touch snow, we expect it to be cold*” (2009, p. 10). Beginning from early childhood, an individual has various experiences. Besides, s/he observes varied behaviors of people both around her/him and in society. Her/his experiences and observations constitute her/his schemas, namely schemas are learned cognitive structures.

A schema is a cognitive structure, a network of associations that organizes and guides an individual's perception. A schema functions as an anticipatory structure, a readiness to search for and assimilate incoming information in schema-relevant terms... Schema theory ... construes perception as a constructive process wherein what is perceived is a product of the interaction between the incoming information and the perceiver's pre-existing schema (Bem, 1981, p. 355).

An individual tries to understand the world and society in which s/he lives, interprets the events, and sets expectations through her/his schemas. Sometimes the incoming information may contradict with or be incongruent with the preexisting schema of the individual. In such a case, humor may stem from the incongruity or contradiction between the incoming information and the preexisting schema of the individual.

Sandra L. Bem asserts that one of the schemas in an individual is gender schema (Bem, 1981; Bem, 1983, pp. 602–610). “*The gender schema, as schemas in general are commonly characterized, is described in terms of “fuzzy sets” of information; in this case, organized around female and male prototypes*” (Hudak, 1993, p. 281). A child beginning to learn complicated relations in society in which s/he is born finds out what traits and roles are attributed to women and men. That is to say, s/he learns what traits or roles are considered to be desirable or appropriate for women and which ones are thought to be appropriate for men by the culture of society in which s/he lives. In other words, s/he learns gender stereotypes. Gender stereotypes or sex stereotypes are “*structured sets of beliefs about the personal attributes of women and men*” (Ashmore & Del Boca, 1979, p. 222). Susan A. Basow points out that “*Gender stereotypes exist both on the cultural level...and on a personal level... We acquire gender stereotypes as we acquire information about the world and our roles in it*” (1992, p. 3). Accordingly, it may be deduced that an individual constitutes her/his gender schema by learning gender stereotypes and roles and then uses them to construe the incoming information concerning men and women; for example, it is generally assumed that women are affectionate and submissive. An individual having such a stereotype in her/his schema may suppose all women to be submissive and affectionate. Given the discussions about the functions of schemas in the incongruity theory above, it may be suggested that any incongruity or contradiction between the incoming information concerning the traits and/or the roles of women and men in a work of fiction or in a joke and the preexisting gender schema of the reader may cause laughter and humor.

Although the incongruity theory is widely accepted in humor studies, it is difficult to assert that an incongruity between the incoming information and the preexisting schema of the reader or listener always causes laughter; on the contrary, some incongruities may cause anger. To avoid negative feelings, the writers of humorous works use some techniques. The two of these techniques are exaggeration and caricature (Berger, 1993, pp. 26–33). If the writer of a humorous work of fiction exaggerates his or her characters' traits contradicting with prevailing gender stereotypes, such a contradiction may cause laughter. Therefore, this paper will discuss what traits of the female and male characters are exaggerated by P. G. Wodehouse as well.

P. G. Wodehouse, who is described as “*England's grand old master of literature*” by David A. Jasen (1975, p. 252), is famous for his humorous novels. His novels appeal to a wide range of readers. Herbert Warren Wind states that

... his hard-core fans have ranged from Bertrand Russell to Bix Beiderbecke, the great jazz cornetist, who would quote page after page from his stories. Herbert Asquith, during the difficult weeks that followed his defeat in 1918, found solace in reading Wodehouse, and two other British Prime Ministers, Arthur Balfour, and Stanley Baldwin, were ardent Wodehousians (1972, p. 13).

His talent is praised by such writers as Hilaire Belloc, George Orwell, Evelyn Waugh, and W. H. Auden (Mooneyham, 1994, p. 115). He is honored with a knighthood and becomes a Knight of The British Empire.

Although Wodehouse becomes famous in a period when modernism prevails on the literary scene, he rejects the technical innovations initiated by the modernist writers at the beginning of the twentieth century in favor of conventional narrative techniques. Mooneyham explains Wodehouse's attitude to the modernist innovations as follows:

First, Wodehouse places little value on the modernist dictum articulated by Ezra Pound, "Make it new." Wodehouse was in fact so little troubled by the problem of originality... More important than this casual dismissal of originality as presiding aesthetic value is his rejection of the modernist retreat from plot, the emphasis on the disorganized, particular, and fragmented flow of experience. Where a modernist expects to discompose and baffle the realist expectations of his readers, Wodehouse always apologizes with a courtly spirit if the demands of exposition have left a given part of the narration unattended to; ... Wodehouse's attention to the reader's need for intelligibility extends to a dismissal of modernism's proclivity for doing without the rigors of causal consequence prominent in realist presentations of events... Wodehouse expected each of his narrative structures to be a unity, a seamless artifact of cause and effect (1994, pp. 119–120).

As pointed out by Mooneyham, different from the modernist writers renouncing plot to follow and reflect the order of mind in their novels, Wodehouse presents his readers with well-knitted plot structures. His neatly organized novels full of coincidences, comic scenes, and intrigues are blended with verbal humor. Concerning Wodehouse's art, Richard Osborne comments that "He was a humourist, not a wit, not a satirist. He was a craftsman manufacturer of the ludicrous-words, phrases, characters, situations in intricate and tightly controlled plots" (1988, p. 4). Wodehouse concentrating on writing well-organized comic novels is hailed as the master of humor.

This study argues that as well as inventing the ludicrous phrases, coincidences, and situations, P. G. Wodehouse creates the characters whose traits are incongruent with gender stereotypes dominant in society, and humor stems from the incongruity between the traits of the characters and gender stereotypes dominant in society, accordingly, in the gender schemas of the readers in *Pearls, Girls and Monty Bodkin* and *The Cat-Nappers*. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to display the incongruity between the traits of the characters depicted in these novels first published in the 1970s and gender stereotypes dominant in society, in the 1970s in particular.

Discussion and Conclusion

Pearls, Girls and Monty Bodkin is about the adventures of Monty. At the very first pages of the novel, Monty works as an adviser for the productions at the Superba-Llewellyn motion picture studio in Hollywood; but he does not like working at all. He works there, as his fiancée's father, Mr Butterwick, does not consent to their marriage. The reason behind his refusal is that Monty has inherited a large amount of money from his aunt and does not earn a proper living. If he proves himself by earning his life for a year, the father will consent to their marriage. Thence, as soon as one year is over, he resigns from his job and goes back to London. Monty, who does not like working, enjoys spending time at the Drones Club, eating, drinking, and chatting. Furthermore, he has obtained the job in Hollywood by blackmailing Mr Llewellyn. After learning how Monty obtained his position in Hollywood from his daughter, Mr Butterwick says that Monty has reneged the agreement. To Mr Butterwick's surprise, Monty finds another job soon with the help of his former secretary Sandy Miller. The Llewellyns come to England to spend their summer holiday and Sandy enables Monty to work as Mr Llewellyn's secretary. While working for Mr Llewellyn, Monty faces some misfortunes and he overcomes these misfortunes either by the help of Sandy Miller or by coincidences. Therefore, Monty comes out as a passive, lazy young man; for Mr Butterwick, Monty is "a rich young waster" (Wodehouse, 1974, p. 16). Using such a descriptive phrase, Wodehouse may have wanted to emphasize Monty's passivity.

Similar to Monty Bodkin, Bertie (Bertram) Wooster, the main character of *The Cat-Nappers*, is a rich idle young man. In the novel, there is no slightest evidence indicating that Bertie has a job. While he is planning to go to New York, the doctor recommends him a peaceful life in country, because, for the doctor, Bertie Wooster is a "typical young man about town" (Wodehouse, 1985, p. 25), smoking and drinking too much (Wodehouse, 1985, p. 25). So, Bertie decides to go to a small village where his Aunt Dahlia pays a visit to a friend of hers. There he faces the problems created by two women, Aunt Dahlia and Vanessa Cook. Nevertheless, he does not strive to solve these problems, and they are resolved either by his valet Jeeves or by coincidences.

The discussion above exhibit that both Monty and Bertie are depicted as passive young men. Yet Hélène Cixous in her famous article titled "Sorties" first published in 1975 asks where woman is (1990, p. 287), listing such binary oppositions as "Activity/passivity, Sun/Moon, Culture/Nature, Day/Night, Father/Mother, Head/heart, Intelligible/sensitive, Logos/Pathos" (1990, p. 287), and then answers her own question as follows: "Traditionally, the question of sexual difference is coupled with the same opposition: activity/passivity... In philosophy, woman is always on the side of passivity" (1990, p. 288). As displayed in the quotation above, Cixous emphasizes that activity is always associated with masculinity in patriarchy. Therefore, the fact that the two male major characters, Monty and Bertie, are presented as passive, idle young men in these novels contradicts with patriarchal assumptions.

In *The Cat-Nappers*, Wodehouse introduces another young man, Orlo Porter. Orlo is in love with Vanessa Cook whose father is the trustee of a large amount of money which Orlo's uncle left Orlo. However, Mr Cook neither consents to their marriage nor gives Orlo the money because he disapproves of Orlo's political views. Nevertheless, Vanessa urges Orlo to ask Mr Cook again "to thump the table" (Wodehouse, 1985, p. 141). In other words, Vanessa wants Orlo to be an assertive man. To compel him to talk with her father, she breaks off their engagement, and says that she will marry Bertie. Bertie advises Orlo to speak with Mr Cook if he really wants her back. To win her love back, Orlo speaks with Mr Cook. Although Mr Cook refuses him again, that Orlo has spoken with Mr Cook is enough for Vanessa. They decide to elope, as he proves himself. These incidents show that in the relationship between Vanessa and Orlo, Vanessa acts as a leader. However, in patriarchal societies, acting as a leader is assumed to be a masculine characteristic (Bem, 1974, p. 156; Prentice & Carranza, 2002, p. 274).

What Vanessa desires is to be in a relationship with a man with stereotypically masculine way of behaving. Beginning in the 1970s, various studies have been conducted to determine gender stereotypes. The best known of these studies is the Bem Sex Role Inventory. On this inventory, there are twenty most desirable feminine traits and twenty most desirable masculine traits. Concerning the most desirable feminine and masculine traits on the Bem Sex Role Inventory, Prentice and Carranza point out that "These characteristics provide

a good representation of prescriptive gender stereotypes, at least as they existed in the early 1970s" (2002, p. 270). The most desirable masculine characteristics on the Bem Sex Role Inventory are as follows: "acts as a leader, aggressive, ambitious, analytical, assertive, athletic, competitive, defends own beliefs, dominant, forceful, has leadership abilities, independent, individualistic, makes decisions easily, masculine, self-reliant, self-sufficient, strong-personality, willing to take a stand, and willing to take risks" (Bem, 1974, p. 156). The young men's traits discussed above are incongruous with desirable masculine characteristics. As the discussion illustrates, they do not act as leaders, they are not aggressive, assertive, and dominant.

As well as the young men who do not have socially desirable masculine traits, in *Pearls, Girls and Monty Bodkin* Mr Llewellyn is portrayed as a henpecked husband. He has married five times, and all his wives are bossy. Although his four bossy former wives do not appear in person in the novel, Mr Llewellyn often mentions them and narrates anecdotes concerning their shrewishness as exemplified in the following quotation:

Gloria isn't an easy woman to get along with. Temperamental. It doesn't take much to bring her to the boil... The merest suggestion that you didn't like a hat was enough to set her off. I remember one night we'd had some people in for Bridge, and when they'd left I happened to mention – quite casually, simply making conversation – that if she had bid me a club instead of a diamond in the last game, I'd have made my contract and won the rubber instead of going down three and losing the rubber. She went straight out to the kitchen, came back with a pail of water, and poured it all over me and the cat, who happened to be there. (Wodehouse, 1974, p. 87).

As the quotation displays, Gloria is not only a bossy but also an aggressive woman. Besides aggressive women to be discussed below, such a scene included in the novel reinforces the images of aggressive women and thus contributes to humor since the images of aggressive women contradict with desirable feminine traits. Moreover, that Mr Llewellyn has married bossy women gives the impression that bossy women prevail society.

As for his relationship with his fifth wife Grayce, he is afraid of her so much so that even though he is a rich man he cannot spend even a penny without her permission. Sandy Miller describes the relationship between Mr and Mrs Llewellyn as follows: "She's the boss. At her command he jumps through hoops and snaps lumps of sugar off his nose" (Wodehouse, 1974, p. 12). While delineating their relationship, Sandy Miller compares Ivor Llewellyn to a dog as dogs are trained to jump through hoops, and dogs do it to win their trainers' affection. Therefore, it may be deduced that similar to dogs, Ivor Llewellyn does whatever his wife wants to ingratiate himself with her. While reporting the relationship between Mr and Mrs Llewellyn to Monty, Sandy refers to a poem titled "Ben Bolt" (1843) to illustrate Grayce's authority over Mr Llewellyn, and she recites the following lines: "He weeps with delight when she gives him a smile and trembles with fear of her frown" (Wodehouse, 1974, p. 12). Although these two lines are from "Ben Bolt," a comparison of these lines with the original ones will display the fact that some adjectives in the lines recited by Sandy are different from the ones in the poem. The original wording of the poem is as follows:

*Don't you remember sweet Alice, Ben Bolt –
Sweet Alice whose hair was so brown,
Who wept with delight when you gave her a smile,
And trembled with fear at your frown?*
(English, 1993, p. 718).

"Ben Bolt" is a poem by Thomas Dunn English, a major American poet of the late nineteenth century. Referring to "Ben Bolt," changing "when you gave her a smile" into "when she gives him a smile," Wodehouse may have implied that times have changed; the sensitive, submissive women of the nineteenth century have been superseded by the authoritative bossy women of the twentieth century, and authoritative men of the past have been supplanted by henpecked men in contemporary society.

Throughout the novel, Wodehouse emphasizes that Mr Llewellyn is a henpecked husband. The reason behind it may be the fact that a henpecked husband and his bossy wife have always been comic elements due to the fact that such a couple is the inversion of marital and social hierarchy in patriarchal societies. In patriarchal societies, males are regarded as the head of family, breadwinner, therefore, as the figure of authority. In other words, in the gender schema of an individual reared in a patriarchal society, "authoritative" will always be a masculine trait; so, any incoming information concerning a henpecked husband will contradict with it, and thus may cause humor. Furthermore, choosing the name "Ivor Llewellyn" for the henpecked husband, Wodehouse creates another incongruity as Ivor means "archer, bow warrior" (babynames.co.uk, 2020) and Llewellyn is a name meaning "lion like" (Guralnik, 1985, p. 828). A henpecked husband named "lion like warrior" is among the important details making the novel humorous.

The names and nicknames of his characters contribute to the humor in *Pearls, Girls and Monty Bodkin*. Bossy Grayce's nicknames are "Führer" (Wodehouse, 1974, p. 146), and "panther woman" (Wodehouse, 1974, pp. 30, 37, 42, 65, 95, 100). For Monty, Grayce Llewellyn is "the Führer of the Llewellyn home" (Wodehouse, 1974, p. 146). Führer is a German word which means leader and is the title associated with Adolf Hitler. As pointed out previously, "Act[ing] as a leader" is assumed to be a masculine trait in society (Bem, 1974, p. 156; Prentice & Carranza, 2002, p. 274). Similar to Vanessa in *The Cat-Nappers*, Wodehouse in *Pearls, Girls and Monty Bodkin* depicts a female character acting as a leader; furthermore, choosing such a title, the writer indicates that she is the dictator of the Llewellyn home. Besides Führer, Grayce is also called "panther woman" (Wodehouse, 1974, pp. 30, 37, 42, 65, 95, 100) behind her back. Those calling her "panther woman" both refer to the film in which she starred as the panther woman and allude to her character traits as exemplified in the following quotation:

"He's on a diet," said Grayce...And I'm going to see that he sticks to it. No alcohol, no starchy foods. So search his room from time to time, and if you find he's hiding cakes and candy and all that, tell me immediately and I'll attend to it."

She spoke with so much of the old panther woman spirit in her voice that Chimp, though not a sensitive man, gave an involuntary shudder. He could picture her attending to it (Wodehouse, 1974, p. 42).

Concerning panthers, Hans Biedermann points out that “...the big cat’s savagery and cunning, as well as the superior fighting courage of the female, are frequently mentioned in ancient texts” (1996, p. 253). Given the explanation by Biedermann, it may be assumed that her voice reflects the savage, bellicose aspect of her nature. Thus, it is possible to deduce that the phrase “panther woman” implies her authoritative, domineering nature. Naming her “*The Führer*” and “panther woman,” Wodehouse accentuates such typical male traits of Grayce as “act[ing] as a leader” (Bem, 1974, p. 156), “domineering,” “authoritative,” “aggressive” (Lueptow et al., 1995, p. 519). By doing so, Wodehouse draws the attention of his readers to the incongruity between Grayce’s traits and gender stereotypes dominant in society.

The only person whom Grayce cannot dominate is her daughter Mavis. The narrator introduces her, referring to Greek mythology: “She had eyes like those of the Medusa of Greek mythology, one glance from whom was sufficient to convert those she met into blocks of stone ...” (Wodehouse, 1974, p. 60). Medusa is one of the three Gorgons in Greek mythology. Elizabeth Webber and Mike Feinsilber point out that “Her name, like that of the gorgons, describes someone who is ugly or frightening—either physically or spiritually” (1999, p. 354). Referring to Medusa, Wodehouse may have implied how spiritually frightening Mavis is. By doing so, he emphasizes her shrewishness. Thus, her stepfather, Mr Llewellyn, complains of her ill temper in the following way: “She treats me like a peon. These modern girls!” (Wodehouse, 1974, p. 36). The quotation points at both Mr Llewellyn’s grievance about Mavis’s bossiness and his complaint about all young modern girls. Furthermore, Mr Llewellyn thinks that college education has made Mavis bossy (Wodehouse, 1974, pp. 36, 64, 128). Given Mr Llewellyn’s remarks on the college education and modern girls, it may be deduced that Mr Llewellyn is the mouthpiece for Wodehouse on the well-educated young women.

Besides the traits discussed above, Mavis and Dolly Molloy have guns. Gun is associated with men so much so that it becomes the symbol of masculinity (Stroud, 2012, pp. 216–217). Depicting these women with guns, Wodehouse may have aimed at emphasizing their masculine traits. Different from the other shrewish women depicted in the novel, Dolly, who is described as “rather the Lady Macbeth type” (Wodehouse, 1974, p. 43) by the narrator, does not boss her husband. She is an avaricious woman and a skilled thief. When someone is rival to her in business, she does her best to defeat him. Thus, in the novel, she is presented as follows: “...anyone who was a business opponent of Dolly Molloy did well to watch his step. Opposition when money was at stake always brought to the fore the Lady Macbeth side of her character” (Wodehouse, 1974, p. 130). The fact that Wodehouse alludes to Lady Macbeth implies that he desires his readers to remember Lady Macbeth’s ambition for power. In *Macbeth* (1623), in the Act 1 scene 5, after reading her husband’s letter mentioning the prophecies of the weird sisters, Lady Macbeth thinks that her husband cannot kill King Duncan because of his nature “... is too full o’ th’ milk of human kindness” (Shakespeare, 1994, p. 980). Meanwhile a servant informs her that King Duncan of Scotland will be arriving that night. The fact that the king will be in their castle that night is a chance for her to fulfill her ambition of becoming the Queen of Scotland. Therefore, she begs the spirits as follows:

*Come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full
Of direst cruelty.* (Shakespeare, 1994, p. 980).

In patriarchal societies, men are assumed to be aggressive and ambitious while women to be sensitive. Adjuring the spirits to “unsex” her, she wants to be stripped of such qualities as affectionate and sensitive that are assumed to be feminine as she believes that her feminine qualities prevent her from acting cruelly. Emphasizing that Dolly is “the Lady Macbeth type” (Wodehouse, 1974, p. 43), Wodehouse suggests that Dolly becomes easily cruel and acts like a man when money is concerned.

As the discussion thus far exhibits, Wodehouse depicts aggressive, authoritative, bossy female characters in *Pearls, Girls and Monty Bodkin*. Similarly, in *The Cat-Nappers*, he portrays two shrewish, bossy women: Vanessa Cook and Aunt Dahlia. Along with Vanessa and Aunt Dahlia, he presents another female character, Aunt Agatha, whose terrifying features are often mentioned by Bertie, though she does not actually appear in the novel.

In his novels, Wodehouse often represents aunts. Concerning the aunts in Wodehouse’s novels, Richard Osborne points out that “Wodehouse in his novels has ten aunts to every mother, and of the middle-aged females who are both mothers and aunts, all are more important as aunts than mothers” (1988, p. 103). The aunts in his novels are the figures representing authority and interference as pointed out by Osborne:

Wodehouse has so confidently established by repetition his own picture of the state of aunthood that he can use the word “aunt” to mean “a bossy, pernickety woman.” Somewhere he describes a bossy and pernickety young girl as “growing up to be an aunt,” and somewhere else he strains the language more boldly. He is describing a certain type of garden and house as seen over a fence, he says: It was a sort of house of which you could say “someone’s aunt lives here” (1988, p. 104).

The aunts Wodehouse depicts in *The Cat-Nappers* do not differentiate from his everlasting picture of aunthood. Both Agatha and Dahlia are presented as authoritative women. Besides, for Bertie, Aunt Agatha is more terrifying than Aunt Dahlia. She is terrifying so much so that “... before whose glare, ..., strong men curl up like rabbits” (Wodehouse, 1985, p. 65). Her idiosyncrasy described in the preceding quotation contradicts with social realities and gender stereotypes because in society women on a large scale suffer from male violence; moreover, “affectionate” and “eager to soothe hurt feelings” are the characteristics attributed to women (Bem, 1974, p. 156). Portraying Aunt Agatha as a terrifying woman, Wodehouse creates the incongruity between Aunt Agatha’s traits and desirable female traits, and such an incongruity may result in the laughter of the reader.

As for Aunt Dahlia, she is portrayed as a woman who enjoys interfering in Bertie's behavior and clothes as exemplified in the scene in which she calls Bertie to tell the Briscoes' invitation. When she calls Bertie, she is not satisfied with informing about the invitation, but also tells him what to wear there (Wodehouse, 1985, p. 37). In the novel, not only Aunt Dahlia but also Vanessa intrudes into Bertie's privacy. Just after breaking off her engagement to Orlo Vanessa decides to marry Bertie. She goes to Bertie's cottage to tell her intention, though Bertie has not proposed her and there is no intimacy between them. When she comes to the cottage, she declares both her intention to marry him, and her decision to change Bertie's habits and name. Since she does not like his name, she will call him Harold (Wodehouse, 1985, p. 88). As well as changing his name, she wants him to stop drinking, smoking, and going to the Drones; gives him a list of books that he must read so that he can educate himself. By doing so, Vanessa tries to train and mold him. These details potentially imply the idea that Vanessa is an authoritative woman. Furthermore, depicting these two women, Aunt Dahlia and Vanessa, determined to mold a young man, Wodehouse may have suggested that these women feel themselves superior to the young man. However, in patriarchy, men are regarded superior to women while women are thought to be subordinate and submissive.

As well as being authoritative, Wodehouse depicts Vanessa as a woman willing to take a stand. At the beginning of the novel, there is a scene in which Vanessa leads a protest march and beats the police trying to bar her (Wodehouse, 1985, pp. 13–14). Wodehouse does not mention what she protests probably because he wants to depict her as a woman not only struggling for her own ideals but also willing to take a stand against all injustices. Depicting such a scene, Wodehouse illustrates her aggressiveness as well. "Aggressiveness" and "willing to take a stand" are accepted as masculine characteristics in society, particularly in the 1970s (Bem, 1974, p. 156). Similar to the female characters discussed previously, Wodehouse assigns masculine traits to Vanessa.

The discussion so far reveals that most of the female characters in both novels are aggressive, authoritative, and domineering. However, the researches carried out to determine gender stereotypes display that these attributes are considered to be typical masculine traits in society (Lueptow et al., 1995, p. 519). The results of the study carried out by Lueptow et al in 1995 exhibit that "... *sympathetic, ..., talkative, affectionate, romantic, obedience, creative, timid and friendly*" are the traits "representing femininity" (p. 519). Similarly, the research conducted by Sandra Bem in 1974 shows that "*Affectionate, Cheerful, Child-like, Compassionate, Does not use harsh language, Eager to soothe hurt feelings, Feminine, Flatterable, Gentle, Gullible, Loves children, Loyal, Sensitive to the needs of others, Shy, Soft-spoken, Sympathetic, Tender, Understanding, Warm and Yielding*" (p. 156) are the socially desirable characteristics for women. The female characters discussed thus far do not have any of the socially accepted feminine traits determined in these studies. On the contrary, Wodehouse assigns typical masculine traits to the female characters. By doing so, he creates incongruity between the attributes of the female characters and the gender schemas of the readers, and such an incongruity may result in humor. Furthermore, the results of such studies as Prentice and Carranza (2002), Haines et al. (2016) carried out to find out the changes in gender stereotypes in the twenty-first century demonstrate the durability of socially accepted gender stereotypes. Different from the above-mentioned studies, Nazli Bhatia and Sudeep Bhatia in their recent study notice some "changes in gender biases for stereotypically feminine traits" (2021, p. 106), and put it as follows: "In terms of practice, these findings may, albeit cautiously, suggest that women and men can be less constrained by prescriptions of feminine traits" (2021, p. 106). Given the cautious suggestion of Bhatia and Bhatia (2021), and the studies conducted by Prentice and Carranza (2002) and Haines et al. (2007), it may be propounded that even if the assumptions concerning feminine traits change slowly, traditional gender stereotypes are still prevalent in society. Therefore, it may be deduced that humor in these novels may appeal to modern readers.

Wodehouse may have depicted bossy, authoritative women one after the other to arise humor from the discrepancy between the gender schema of the reader and the traits of these women. Besides, it may be assumed that the abundance of female characters having typical masculine traits may be an indication of the writer's attitude toward the liberated women as well. The fight for the emancipation of women beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century continued in the twentieth century. Women were admitted to universities at different times during the twentieth century. Furthermore, in the 1960s, the Second Wave of Feminism started, and it peaked in the 1970s. All these struggles and the rights obtained through these struggles have gradually changed the position of women, and well-educated, working, freethinking women come to the fore. Given that the novels discussed in this article were written in the 1970s when women's rights were topical issues due to the Second Wave of Feminism, it may be deduced that the plentitude of bossy and shrewish women in these novels may reflect the attitude of Wodehouse toward the women who are able to stand on her own feet. In other words, while, on the one hand, the bossy, shrewish women, among other things, constitute the comic elements in the novels, on the other hand, they may imply Wodehouse's attitude toward emancipated women.

Besides the bossy and aggressive women, there are two more female characters in *Pearls, Girls and Monty Bodkin* worth discussing: Gertrude and Sandy Miller. At the beginning of the novel, Gertrude seems to be an ideal young Victorian girl since she does not want to marry Monty without her father's consent. Her attitude surprises the men gossiping at the Drones Club as follows:

But surely you don't have to have father's consent in these enlightened days?

You do if you're Gertrude Butterwick. She's a throwback to the Victorian age. She does what Daddy tells her (Wodehouse, 1974, p. 16).

Creating such a scene, Wodehouse prepares the ground for his forthcoming surprises and incongruities. The first incongruity is that different from an ideal Victorian girl, hers is not an implicit obedience to her father because she does not break off the engagement although her father wishes her to do it. When she changes her mind and breaks off the engagement, she just informs her father that she will not marry Monty; she will marry Wilfred Chisholm (Wodehouse, 1974, p. 149). In other words, she does not ask her father's opinion or consent, but she only relates her decision. The last but not the least, Gertrude is determined to change Monty's habits and corrects even the spelling mistakes in his letters since she wants "*a husband revised and edited to meet her specifications*" (Wodehouse, 1974, p. 69). As these examples illustrate Gertrude comes out as a bossy woman when the novel progresses. Presenting Gertrude as an ideal

Victorian woman at the very beginning of the novel, Wodehouse triggers the readers' schema concerning the ideal of Victorian womanhood. However, what the readers witness in the following pages contradicts with the characteristics of an ideal Victorian woman, and this contradiction may cause laughter.

In *Pearls, Girls and Monty Bodkin*, Wodehouse presents only one woman having most of the characteristics considered to be typically feminine in the 1970s in particular: Sandy Miller. Different from the women discussed so far, Sandy is neither bossy nor shrewish. On the contrary, she is depicted as a young woman sensitive and good-hearted enough "to raid ...employer's Frigidaire for Bavarian cream after dark, ..., she had done it, not for self, not for advancement, but simply from sheer womanly goodness of heart in order to oblige an unfortunate fellow creature who needed Bavarian cream to ward off night starvation" (Wodehouse, 1974, pp. 56–57). This quotation illustrates that she is sensitive to the needs of the others, which is determined as a socially desirable trait for women by Bem (1974, p. 156). It displays as well that the narrator labels "goodness of heart" (Wodehouse, 1974, p. 56) as "sheer womanly" (Wodehouse, 1974, p. 56); by doing so, Wodehouse may have wanted to remind his readers of feminine and masculine traits.

Sandy is a clever and courageous woman who does not hesitate to take the initiative when Monty or Mr Llewelyn is in a difficult position, as in the case of the raid on the nightclub. When the police officer wants to arrest Monty, she does not waver in tipping the bottles in a dustbin over the police officer's head. By doing so, Sandy saves Monty from a difficult position. However, in fairy tales, a young and courageous knight or prince saves the lady from a difficult position. Therefore, such a scene may contradict with the gender schema of the sex-typed reader growing up reading fairy tales, and thus that a young woman, Sandy, saves a young man from difficult position may make the reader smile.

Furthermore, concerning the attitude of Sandy in this scene, the narrator comments that "A situation like the present one brings out all the Joan of Arc and Boadicea in a girl of spirit" (Wodehouse, 1974, p. 94). Here there is a reference to the two mythical female warriors: Joan of Arc and Boadicea. Joan of Arc, the national heroine of France, is the daughter of an ordinary farmer family in northeast France, leads a series of battles against the English Army and saves France. Boadicea (also spelt Boudicca) is the British woman warrior. She is the queen of the Icenii tribe. After the death of her husband, Prasutagus, she leads a revolt against occupying Romans. In other words, these two women are the symbols of liberty and independence. Referring to these women warriors, the writer implies that fairy tales are fallacious in terms of the images of women they present; women are not so submissive and passive as they are represented in fairy tales; throughout history, there have always been women warriors; furthermore, each woman, including the sensitive ones, has a warrior aspect to her personality. Using these allusions, the writer must have aimed at appealing to the mind of his readers to make them think while smiling or laughing.

P.G Wodehouse is a celebrated writer of humorous novels. This article based on the incongruity theory of humor has argued that the personality traits of the characters depicted by Wodehouse are incongruent with gender stereotypes dominant in society. For the purpose of the study, two novels, *Pearls, Girls and Monty Bodkin* and *The Cat-Nappers*, published in the 1970s have been scrutinized to display the incongruity between the personality traits of the characters presented in these novels and gender stereotypes dominant in society in the 1970s in particular.

The study shows that Wodehouse assigns masculine traits to most of the female characters while his male characters do not have socially accepted masculine attributes. In other words, the traits of the characters depicted in these novels are not congruent with gender stereotypes prevalent in society. The incongruity between the traits of the characters and gender stereotypes in the schema of the readers may cause humor. His novels still appeal to the readers as gender stereotypes change slowly and most of the feminine and masculine traits of the 1970s are still socially desirable.

Furthermore, except for Sandy Miller, all the other female characters are authoritative, shrewish women. The abundance of shrewish bossy women in these novels may imply Wodehouse's attitude toward emancipated women.

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