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THE VOICE OF AUTHORITY : EVELYN WAUGH'S FICTION

Peter Nigel Kirk

A thesis submitted for the degree of  
Ph.D. to the University of Warwick.  
Research conducted in the Department  
of English and Comparative Literary  
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## SUMMARY

### The Voice of Authority : Evelyn Waugh's Fiction

A thesis by Peter Nigel Kirk submitted in December 1983 for the degree of Ph.D. to the University of Warwick, Department of English and Comparative Literary Studies.

A large part of the extant criticism of Evelyn Waugh's fiction is orientated towards either a biographical or a literary-historical interest: there are comparatively few detailed surveys of the novels themselves. This study attempts such a survey, and in particular examines the tension which inheres in the relationship of Waugh's poised, urbane narrators to the social and moral chaos they depict. I have been interested in the source and management of that poise, the testing, as it were to destruction, of a series of narrative positions. There is a very modern equation to be observed in Waugh's fiction, between the potentially anarchic mode of fiction and what Waugh felt to be the actual anarchy of contemporary civilisation. His novels can with interest be read in terms of a comic exploitation of this equation, and subsequently, as the writer aged, of his attempts to evade its logic, to discover a 'voice of authority'. Apparently secure narrative stances are repeatedly undermined, and a succession of 'realities' compromised - Tony Last's, William Boot's, John Plant's, Guy Crouchback's. It is this awareness and exploitation of the reflexive quality of fiction, and its use in disclosing the nature of his age which lends Waugh's writing its real and enduring interest.

I seek to draw out this awareness through detailed examination of the different novels' precise narrative stance, the source of their 'voice', and have been largely content to let stand other commentators' descriptions of Waugh's broader thesis. My method involves close attention to Waugh's language, from the conviction that nuances of tone and the development of marginal allusions and metaphors are the keys to many of his characteristic effects.



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#### DECLARATION

This thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Ph.D., and is the result of my independent investigation. The extent of my indebtedness to other sources is fully indicated in the text, footnotes and bibliography. The sections dealing with Vile Bodies, A Handful of Dust and Work Suspended were submitted in 1979 to Cardiff University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of M.A.. They appear here slightly revised.

**INTRODUCTION**

Waugh, Evelyn, born X/28/03, brother of Alec, began literary activity in 1928. In the 1930s he advanced and supported Italian facism. In the novel Brideshead Revisited, 1945, his mystical views are reflected. During the Second World War he published the novel Put Out More Flags, (1942) about the adventures of a high-society blackmailer. The Loved One (1948) bears/carries/wears/displays a pathological character. In the novels Men at Arms, 1952, and Officers and Gentlemen, 1955, devoted to the events of the Second World War, E. Waugh's reactionary position is laid bare. In the novel The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold, 1957, he continues the antidemocratic tendency of modernism.

Kratkaja literaturnaja enciklopedija, I, Moscow, 1962, 999.<sup>1</sup>

All would agree that the above is an absurdly inadequate account of Evelyn Waugh and his writing - would contend that the English literary establishment has arrived at a much more developed, sophisticated estimate of the writer and his work. And yet . . . the gross figure of Waugh the reactionary, the mystical Catholic, the anti-democrat, nihilist and snob does haunt much literary discussion of his work. This is probably inevitable, given the lurid persona which, despite his pleas for privacy, Waugh contrived to project. Surveys of his novels free of preoccupation, sympathetic or otherwise, with the author's personal eccentricity are, nearly twenty years after his death, still rare. The present study attempts such a survey.

Evelyn Waugh studies have long been unsatisfactorily dominated by three kinds of discussion. The first of these is by nature largely biographical:

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1 Quoted by David Wykes in his interesting paper on the military trilogy, 'Evelyn Waugh's Sword of Volgograd', Dutch Quarterly Review, VII (2, 1977), 82-97.

it finds Waugh himself absorbingly interesting, and moves swiftly from his characters and situations to their supposed historical models. The second considers his fictions less personally, but is still primarily concerned with their social-historical aspect. This kind of investigation discovers in Waugh a journalist of the wasteland, and subsequently of post-war, Welfare State Britain. This is the Waugh of the literary histories. A third and more recent branch of discussion, and much the most genuinely 'literary' of the three, involves detailed scrutiny of Waugh's various, invariably imperfect texts. The bulk of Waugh's manuscripts are collected, rather grotesquely one has to feel, at the Humanities Research Centre Library at the University of Texas in Austin. Much of this bibliographical analysis has consequently been done by American scholars.

Useful and interesting things have been said about Waugh's work in at least the second and third of these areas of discussion, and yet it remains the case that the novels themselves have only rarely been the subject of extended, detailed investigation. Bibliographical studies seek to provide a firm context in which this can be attempted, although a certain amount even of this kind of work, with its account of the author's working practices and evolving opinions, constitutes only a particularly well-researched type of biography.

Book-length studies of Waugh's work have been remarkably slow in appearing, and for a long time the student had to be content with Frederick J. Stopp's Evelyn Waugh: Portrait of an Artist (1958). Despite having been written prior to the appearance of Unconditional Surrender, Stopp's book still contains the best extant discussion of Waugh's writing. Waugh himself found Stopp's criticism 'attractive', and his book interesting ('at any

rate to me').<sup>1</sup> In the last few years there have been published further substantial volumes of criticism, the weakest of them probably W. S. Cook Junior's Masks, Modes, and Morals: The Art of Evelyn Waugh (New Jersey, 1971). This is an exhaustive but repetitive work, and seeks to analyse the relation between Waugh's narrators and protagonists. Much better are Ian Littlewood's The Writings of Evelyn Waugh (1983) and Robert Murray Davies' Evelyn Waugh, writer (Oklahoma, 1981). Davies is amongst the most considerable and productive of Waugh scholars, and has done much work on the manuscripts and variant editions of the novels. More conventionally 'literary critical' is Jeffrey Heath's The Picturesque Prison: Evelyn Waugh and his Writing (1982), which deals with each of the novels in turn and will probably prove the true successor to Stopp's study. Heath takes a lot of space to summarise Waugh's plots - a complaint Waugh made of Stopp, whose book was subsequently trimmed by 15,000 words - but his analyses are clear and persuasive, and I find myself in agreement with much of his argument.

Both Heath and Davies have been regular contributors to the Evelyn Waugh Newsletter, a U.S. periodical which first appeared in 1967. It has printed a number of excellent papers on individual novels, among, inevitably, a good deal of peripheral material.<sup>2</sup> It is in discussions of this kind, detailed considerations of particular works, that Waugh criticism is poor: there is only a handful of papers towards which one can direct the student interested in a specific novel. A Handful of Dust has elicited valuable comment from Richard Wasson, Peter Firchow and Ann

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1 Letter to John MacDougall of 29 October 1957, The Letters of Evelyn Waugh, ed. Mark Amory, 1980, p. 499.

2 The only public collection of the Evelyn Waugh Newsletter in the U.K. is kept at the National Library of Scotland in Edinburgh.

Pasternak Slater, and Brideshead Revisited from Marston LaFrance, Thomas Churchill, John Hardy and Susan G. Auty.<sup>1</sup> As my bibliography suggests, much of the rest of this kind of comment takes the form of reviews, many ephemeral but several, such as those by Kingsley Amis of the military novels, well worth the trouble of locating. Articles on Waugh's fiction generally are more numerous, and of a higher quality. Rose Macaulay's 1946 piece for Horizon, 'Evelyn Waugh', was a fine early paper, and other valuable contributions have been made by Frank Kermode, A. E. Dyson, Nigel Dennis, Bernard Bergonzi and Herbert Howarth.<sup>2</sup>

My intention in this thesis has been to consider Waugh's novels as novels, as crafted productions accessible to detailed investigation, rather than as broad socio-historical, or even psychological, documents. Clearly, an England does lie within them, but if that were all that mattered one could more usefully turn to a work such as Patrick Balfour's Society Racket: A Critical Account of Modern Social Life (1933). Even the most panoramic of the works, Brideshead Revisited, is much more than merely a 'Condition of England' novel - is arguably not one of those at all. What is most interesting and provocative in Waugh's novels is, I believe, the tension which inheres in the relationship of Waugh's poised, urbane narrators to the social and moral chaos they depict. In considering in detail Waugh's writing I have repeatedly been drawn to examine the source and management of that poise, the testing, as it were to destruction, of a series of narrative positions. It is striking how very modern Waugh's fiction is in this respect, striking because the Augustan rectitude of his prose does not

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1 See bibliography.

2 See bibliography.

of itself suggest modernism.<sup>1</sup> There is a clear equation in his work between the potentially anarchic mode of fiction and what is felt to be the actual anarchy of contemporary civilisation. Waugh is able to use the first to suggest the second: apparently secure narrative stances are again and again undermined, and with them a succession of compromised, partial 'realities' - Tony Last's, William Boot's, John Plant's, Guy Crouchback's. The novels can be understood in terms of a search for the ultimate voice of authority, a source of reliable interpretation. As Waugh grew older the parallel anarchies came to seem less amusing, the locating of that voice a more urgent task, but the equation underpins the military trilogy as firmly as it does Vile Bodies. It is this awareness and exploitation of the reflexive, rootless quality of fiction, and its use in disclosing the nature of his age which lends Waugh's writing its real and enduring interest, and which puts him, I believe, amongst the century's foremost English writers. I have sought to draw out this awareness through detailed examination of the different novels' precise narrative stance, the source of their 'voice', and have been content to let stand other commentators' descriptions of Waugh's broader thesis. My method has involved close attention to Waugh's language: nuances of tone, and the development of marginal allusions and metaphors are the keys to many of his characteristic effects.

My discussion begins with Vile Bodies, out of the conviction that this

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1 Asked to contribute to an article in the Times Literary Supplement on the changing English language, Waugh declared that 'A few new words are needed for new scientific gadgets. Otherwise there is no honourable reason for departing from the diction of Arnold and Newman'. Times Literary Supplement, issue of 17 December 1964.



is Waugh's first 'serious' novel, the first considerable work - indeed I believe it crucial to any understanding of the subsequent fiction. Decline and Fall is an amusing but surely an overpraised piece, too fully achieved to be dismissed as a five-finger exercise but essentially that kind of flexing of authorial muscle. With hindsight one can of course find prefigured the archetypal Waugh concerns - the great house, the ingénu, the life-force - but taken in itself the novel is little more than a stylized collection of satirical pen-portraits, of keen thrusts against a series of establishment targets. Lacking in any unifying theme the resulting novel, though finely comic, is brittle and unsubstantial. Its circular 'plot' deposits the hero Paul Pennyfeather back at Oxford, a traditionally benevolent conclusion which one can contrast with the evocative, problematic endings of all Waugh's novels of the thirties. It is as if Waugh himself were not yet alert to the implications of his kind of comic writing.

I deal firstly then with Vile Bodies, and then with the thirties novels in sequence, affording perhaps less attention to Black Mischief than might seem called for, and more to Scoop. Both novels emerged from Waugh's experiences in Abyssinia; the latter appears to me much the more interesting. Work Suspended is an interesting and innovative novel, its composition interrupted by the Second World War, which had a decisive effect on Waugh as both a writer and an individual. Completed, Work Suspended may well have proved a superior novel to Brideshead Revisited, in which Waugh curiously misjudges the effect of his narrator's complex loyalties. In the shorter works published after the war there are recurrent signs of Waugh attempting to evade the logic of that reflexive quality which he had delighted to exploit in his pre-war fiction. The Loved One is nevertheless deservedly much read, Scott-King's Modern

Europe and, to a lesser extent, Love Among the Ruins as deservedly neglected. Helena I believe to be a much better work than is often allowed, and certainly of great interest in any consideration of Waugh's artistic development.

Critical estimates of the military trilogy remain widely varied, although it has probably always been better received by its readers than by its reviewers. I will argue that here Waugh discovers the voice of authority, finally solves the problem of making an affirmative statement in a compromised medium. As in Brideshead Revisited it is a Catholic solution, but one reached much more persuasively, and satisfyingly, through Guy Crouchback than through Charles Ryder. The trilogy constitutes, I believe, Waugh's best work, emerging logically from the superficially very different novels of the nineteen thirties.

My discussion of Waugh's fiction excludes The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold. It is a work of consuming interest to the biographer, and contains, especially in its first chapter, writing of a very high quality. It is clearly not a work of fiction however. In 1979 there was published in the sociology department of the University of Leeds a study by Kevin J. Dobson entitled Persons and People: Conceptualizing Individuality and Collectivity through Evelyn Waugh's 'The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold'. For Dobson's purposes Pinfold is a patient, upon whom something like psychoanalysis can be practised. This unliterary approach is easily forgiven: the novel clearly calls for this kind of attention.

I have also omitted from my discussion Waugh's short stories, which I believe on the whole to be negligible.

R. M. Davies has appropriately likened Waugh's texts to the cars in Vile Bodies, 'in perpetual flux', coming together to 'mingle and separate

again'.<sup>1</sup> It is this fluidity, unsatisfactory in itself, which provides scope for flourishing bibliographical scholarship. I have throughout used as my texts those most easily accessible, with the justification that it is in this form that the vast majority of readers encounter Waugh's writing. Jeffrey Heath has remarked that, with the exception of Brideshead Revisited, the Penguin editions are in fact closer to the British first editions than to the revised and prefaced Uniform Edition published towards the end of Waugh's life. His revisions were incomplete at the time of his death, although the edition has nevertheless since been extended. It still does not include Helena or Work Suspended. Waugh's revisions were fairly ruthless, and regrettable in the case of all but Brideshead Revisited.

Waugh's recension of the military trilogy into Sword of Honour involved especially extensive deletions, very largely to the detriment of the finished work. Formal unity was achieved only through the sacrifice of much excellent material, and I think no apology is necessary for preferring to discuss the trilogy in terms of its constituent novels. The Penguin edition of Unconditional Surrender retains the original reading in giving Guy and Domenica 'two boys of their own'; the single volume Sword of Honour incorporates Waugh's second thoughts, and deletes these to leave only Trimmer's son. The effect of this deletion has been debated in several papers (see bibliography) but its importance is probably over-estimated. The heir is clearly always not a Crouchback, which is the

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1 Vile Bodies (1930), 1978, p. 161; R. M. Davies, 'Guy Crouchback's Children', English Language Notes, VII (1969), 127-129.

main point. It has also led to some textual confusion, and to editions which, nonsensically, refer to the 'children' and then include Box-Bender's comment on his brother-in-law's failure to have offspring of his own.

The Chapman and Hall edition of Unconditional Surrender currently on sale in the U.K. is faulty in this way.

PART ONE

VILE BODIES

BLACK MISCHIEF

A HANDFUL OF DUST

SCOOP

WORK SUSPENDED

PUT OUT MORE FLAGS

- I -

VILE BODIES

The standard critical approach to Evelyn Waugh's novel Vile Bodies is one which, at least implicitly, takes its cue from the novel's prefatory extract from Carroll's Through the Looking Glass. Here the Red Queen urges the need to run very quickly in order simply to stay in the same place. The criticism, rather sociological than literary, then discusses Waugh's depiction of the frenetic and aimless energies of the post-war period in Western Society. Certainly the vision of a desperate hedonism is to be drawn from Waugh's tale of trivial young people misapplying their expensive minds in a society unable to inspire them. A criticism more interested in the actual texture of Waugh's writing, however, whilst accepting this account, will be drawn to the second part of the extract.

'If I wasn't real,' Alice said - half laughing through her tears, it all seemed so ridiculous - 'I shouldn't be able to cry.'  
'I hope you don't suppose those are real tears?'  
Tweedledum interrupted in a tone of great contempt.<sup>1</sup>

This extract indicates a more subtle and - characteristically - unsettling interest in the novel. It suggests a concern in Vile Bodies for the exploration of different levels of reality as they exist and impinge upon one another in the realm of a literary text. This is a novel which consistently attacks its own standing as text, its own assumptions as a novel, and in a wider reference draws attention to the whole concept of a narratable reality. Vile Bodies was published just eight years after The Waste Land and demonstrates a parallel concern for the word's relation to the world. In its opening pages the nominal hero has his autobiography destroyed by the over-zealous Customs, a neat prefiguration

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<sup>1</sup> Evelyn Waugh, Vile Bodies (1930), Penguin Edition, 1978, p.7. Page references will henceforth be placed immediately after the quotation. This practice will be followed throughout - after, in each case, an initial note of the edition in use.

of this novel's retreat from its own realization. The usual grouping of Waugh with writers of the anti-modernist tradition of the thirties and forties is not one justified by his earliest novels, and least of all by Vile Bodies

At the centre of the novel stands a discussion by some of the elder characters of the attitudes of the younger. Father Rothschild, a character who is strikingly familiar with the interest and movements of the novel in which he is a part,<sup>1</sup> posits the idea of 'a radical instability in our whole world-order' (133). One of his company, Lord Metroland, returns home and enters his study -

A radical instability, Rothschild had said, radical instability . . . He looked round his study and saw shelves of books - the Dictionary of National Biography, the Encyclopedia Britannica in an early and very bulky edition, Who's Who, Debrett, Burke, Whitaker, several volumes of Hansard, some Blue Books and Atlases - (134)

The values urged against such an instability are all around him in books which impose order upon knowledge and social position, which specify location in time and space, and which chronicle the operations of organised government. The novel has by this point already jeopardized all these orderings. Society embraces the doubtful virtue of Metroland's own wife, who runs a chain of overseas brothels. Government is alternatively in the hands of the ill-informed Walter Outrage, and of Sir James Brown, who cannot communicate even with his own family. The newspapers substitute a log cabin in Canada for Edward Throbbing's Washington position, and Metroland's books of facts are, of course, out of date.

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<sup>1</sup> Neil Isaacs considers Father Rothschild to be Waugh's spokesman in Vile Bodies, and the 'fatal hunger' passage to be Waugh's own diagnosis. 'Evelyn Waugh's Restoration Jesuit', Satire Newsletter, II (1964-65), 91-94.



Moreover, these sources of authority around Metroland are all books. It is the printed word which is particularly out of step with the modern world, as Waugh demonstrates in the continuation of this passage, describing the rest of the study.

- a safe in the corner painted green with a brass handle, his writing table, his secretary's table, some very comfortable chairs and some very business-like chairs, a tray with decanters and a plate of sandwiches, his evening mail laid out on the table . . . radical instability, indeed.

Again we have the order and balance, but in addition the stability offered here is that of a literary tradition, the tradition dismissed famously by Virginia Woolf -

Here is the British public sitting by the writer's side and saying in its vast and unanimous way : 'Old women have houses. They have fathers. They have incomes. They have servants. They have hot-water bottles. That is how we know they are old women.' Mr. Wells and Mr. Galsworthy and Mr. Bennett have always taught us that this is the way to recognize them.

The description of material surroundings, given exactly with details of colour, place and particular purpose, attempts to fix, to stabilise another type of order, the relation between the world and an account of that world. It is typical technique in this novel. Waugh repeatedly offers long, detailed lists of a room's contents, in parody of the nineteenth-century novelist's belief in a reality that can be established by mere insistence upon materials. Virginia Woolf again -

. . . he is trying to hypnotize us into the belief that, because he has made a house, there must be a person living there.<sup>2</sup>

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1 'Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown' (1924) Collected Essays, 1966 , p. 330.

2 Ibid., p. 333.

The furniture of Metroland's study, like his Debrett and Atlases, is offered as proof of a stability. The comedy of Metroland only being in his study at all in order to avoid meeting his wife's lover on the staircase is a beautiful irony, but this failure of the written word to establish an order in either matter or manner is the particularly interesting feature. It is one of the novel's more deliberate references to its central concern.

Vile Bodies is a novel which demonstrates the overthrow of many kinds of order, moving ultimately to the overthrow of its own thin pretensions to be an ordered narrative. David Lodge had indicated the most immediate disorder, in the novel's parody of the cause-and-effect structure of a conventional novel.<sup>1</sup> In Vile Bodies the plot is forwarded by an arbitrary logic, with crucial decisions taken whimsically and much greater concern expressed over irrelevancies. Nina's response to Adam's reluctance to marry without an income is typical of this logic.

' . . . we'll be terribly economical. Miles says he's discovered a place near Tottenham Court Road where you can get oysters for three and six a dozen.'  
'Wouldn't they be rather ill-making?'  
'Well, Miles said the only odd thing about them is that they all taste a little different . . . I had lunch with Miles today . . .'

 (151)

The conversation side-tracks into the matter of cheap oysters, the marriage issue forgotten. That Nina should think oysters part of the staff of life, and that Adam should be willing to discuss them, is consistent with the novel's wayward priorities. More importantly, when this type of lateral narrative movement has occurred often enough, the effect is to suggest a narrator only barely in command of his own story.

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1 The Modes of Modern Writing, 1977, pp. 210-211.

This is an effect to which several other aspects of Vile Bodies narrative method contribute. The speed of the story's telling varies erratically, minute detailing alternating with sweeping advances -

Adam had a glass of champagne, hoping it would make him feel a little better. It made him feel much worse.

Then he went to Marylebone. It was Armistice Day, and they were selling artificial poppies in the streets. As he reached the station it struck eleven and for two minutes all over the country everyone was quiet and serious. Then he went to Aylesbury . . . (65-66)

The contracted intrusions of 'Then he went . . .' leap out of the otherwise slow and expansive passage. The word 'then', together with 'so' and 'there were', is worked very hard in Vile Bodies. It is as if Waugh is struggling with his material, seeking the most rapid and straightforward way of despatching it.

The young man said he was fed up with racing, and Adam said he was too; so the young man said why didn't they come back to London in his bus, so Adam and Nina said they would . . . he said wouldn't it be a good idea if they had another bottle of fizz, and Nina and Adam said yes, it would, so they had a magnum and got very friendly.

In passages such as this Waugh surrenders the novelist's usual prowess, and reverts to a child-like, breathless reportage, struggling to differentiate his characters and seeming to lack the confidence to attempt a fuller or more shapely account. Again the overall impression is of a narrator strangely ill at ease with his material. The classic example of this occurs in chapter six, during the short passage describing Nina and Adam's ill-tempered visit to the cinema. In little more than a page the narrator refers to Adam by name ten times, to Nina by name nine times, and to other characters on five occasions. In contrast, 'he' is

used only twice, 'she' six times. The passage moves with a painful deliberation, mechanically alternating the references to each speaker, and performing exaggerated balances of expression -

She said, 'You're much later than you said. It's so boring to be late for a talkie.'  
He said, 'Talkies are boring, anyhow.'  
Adam was inclined to be egotistical and despondant:  
Nina was rather grown-up and disillusioned and distinctly cross. (90)

In the passage as a whole the use of 'then' stands out particularly, indicating an obsessive wish to place, in time and order, exactly each utterance. Above all there is the use of the prefatory 'said', completely dominant here and used strategically throughout the novel. The effect is quite consciously to stress the written, fictional nature of the text. The more usual construction "-----", said Smith, ensures that attention and emphasis fall on what is uttered, and only secondly on who is saying it, usually obvious in a two-part exchange, and semantically redundant. The Waugh construction, Smith said, "-----", has an interruptive, staccato effect on the text, and brackets the utterance very firmly with its associated 'said'. We are not allowed to overlook the narrated quality of the dialogue; we have to 'read' it, rather than imaginatively 'hear' it. The insistence upon 'said' in place of a possible 'replied' or 'declared' further stiffens the formal construction of the passage, and renders it something very like the script for a play.<sup>1</sup>

In part this treatment is in artistic harmony with a pair of distant, quarrelling lovers, but more interestingly it is another erosion of a principle or order. Here it is the ordering of an author (his author-ity) upon his text that is failing. The echoes of Tristram Shandy sound very

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1 Vile Bodies was adapted for the stage by Herbert Dennis Bradley in 1931.

clearly through Vile Bodies, but Waugh is speaking in particular reference to his modern world. The incoherent experience of twentieth-century man is not to be rendered by an orderly nineteenth-century art. To depict a vista of fast living and few enduring values, Waugh makes his artistic choices according to a principle of incoherence. At any given moment his text is demonstrating the erosion or insufficiency of a number of orderings.

Chapter Seven opens with the sentence, 'Then Adam became Mr. Chatterbox.'. The formality of 'Then' has been indicated, and in a novel which grants its characters an ambiguous status, the word 'became' has resonance in this prominent position. Fluidity of characterisation is another principle of disorder, and is examined in more detail below. As this chapter opens, Adam and Nina are lunching at Espinosa's, a restaurant one has encountered as the favourite haunt of Simon Balcairn, the previous Mr. Chatterbox. It is the focus for another of Waugh's evasions of acceptable logic. We first hear of it as frequented by people who like its decor and say how awful it is - Balcairn considers it awful himself, but argues its convenience. However, his own flat has the same decor. There is a sort of circular self-referentiality here; Espinosa's is liked by people who like that sort of thing; Balcairn dislikes it and lives with it by choice. The only logic operating is an imposed and arbitrary one, and so naturally Adam is dining at Espinosa's when he is offered Balcairn's job. The text never aspires to a sufficient realism for us to call this coincidence. This kind of hollow, internal logic occurs elsewhere in the novel. Waugh gives the prime-minister a ludicrous name - Outrage - and then allows himself the further liberty of making jokes about it. The detectives, we understand, call him 'Rape', and Lottie Crump cries 'Outrage your name and Outrage your nature' (47).

Another play on names allows Waugh to call his homosexual 'Malpractice'. Jeering at a convention of characterisation, he tells us that Mrs. Ape 'was nothing if not 'magnetic'' (10), and later proceeds to entertain this same convention.

'Double rum' she said and smiled magnetically. (19)

Then she paused and allowed her eyes, renowned throughout three continents for their magnetism, to travel amongst the gilded chairs. (100)

It becomes impossible to read the word without recalling the original framing commas. Waugh's use of such self-referring internal logic and private textual jokes wrenches the text into a realization of its own enclosed and artificial nature. Chapter seven proceeds with details of the 'orgy of litigation' (109) provoked by Balcairn's last story. Agatha Runcible continues to appear in court as plaintiff, witness, audience and prisoner. Hers is a particularly fluid character; she is consistently changing into or being mistaken for other people.

From the next room came the shrieks and yells of poor Miss Runcible, who had been mistaken for a well-known jewel smuggler . . . (24)

'Who's that tart?' asked Lottie.  
'That's not a tart, Lottie, that's Agatha Runcible.'  
'Looks like a tart.' (44)

'I was in my study just now going over that speech for this afternoon, when suddenly the door opened and in came a sort of dancing Hottentot woman half-naked. It just said, 'Oh, how shy-making', and then disappeared . . .' (58-59)

The climax of this series occurs as Agatha steps into the racing-car with no very clear idea herself of who she is

'Agatha. I'm the spare driver. It's on my arm.'  
'I can see it is - all right, start off as soon as  
you like.'  
'Agatha,' repeated Miss Runcible firmly as she  
climbed into the car, 'It's on my arm.'  
'I say, Agatha,' said Adam, 'Are you sure you're  
all right?'  
'It's on my arm,' said Miss Runcible severely. (174)

Again the logic followed is arbitrary, as identity under the influence  
of alcohol becomes translucent. Another convention of novel writing,  
this a very basic one, is sliding out of the novel. Vile Bodies is  
riddled with outrageous failures to identify. Fanny Throbbing fails  
to recognize her own son; Lottie knows none of her guests' names;  
scarcely anyone knows who the current prime-minister is. Colonel Blount  
consistently mistakes Adam for a variety of people, and Simon Balcairn  
is mistaken for a spy, and for another minor character, also and quite  
needlessly called Simon. Identity becomes a vague and mingling thing  
at the surrealist fringes of the idea -

Mr. Benfleet was there talking to two poets. They  
said '. . . and I wrote to tell William . . .'

 (99)

' 'Ere, who are you pushing?' asked the spectators. (117)

Clearly this is narrative opting out of its traditional responsibility  
to present us with, if not the detailed individual, at least the  
individually distinct. A refinement of this idea allows Waugh to  
introduce a bizarre ambiguity. In chapter six he worries at a simple  
metonymy -

The ballroom was filled with little gilt chairs and  
the chairs with people . . . (96)

A hush fell in the ballroom beginning at the back and  
spreading among the gilt chairs . . . (100)

She paused and allowed her eyes . . . to travel  
amongst the gilded chairs. (100)

Having thus substituted the chairs for the people in the reader's mind,  
the narrative then continues -

(Once in Kansas City Mrs. Ape had got no further than  
these opening words; there had been a tornado of  
emotion and all the seats in the hall had been broken  
to splinters . . .) (100)

The reversion to a literal meaning for 'seats' is unsignalled and cannot prevent the release of a violent image, which suggests people physically 'broken to splinters' by the tornado experience of Mrs. Ape's harangue. Waugh endeavours, by such careful handling of a blurred ambivalence, to break his own characterisation into splinters. Even Adam Symes, the most coherent 'written' character, is presented on a single page in four different persons. At Doubting Hall for Christmas, he is himself to Nina, but to Colonel Blount he is Ginger Littlejohn; the Colonel tells him of a journalist who called, similarly in request of his daughter's hand, and of a man selling vacuum cleaners who wanted a thousand pounds. Adam has been all of these people in the course of his career in Vile Bodies, and Waugh's sureness of comic touch leads him to the perfect terseness of Blount's comment, 'But you're different, Littlejohn . . .'. To label this irony and pass on is to fail to appreciate the miraculously deft manipulation of persons that Waugh achieves here and elsewhere. He unrolls layer upon layer of infinitely qualified 'reality', until the reader must struggle to grasp which level of invention, Waugh's or the narrator's, or Adam's, he is currently caught in.

Certainly the climax of this obscurity comes in chapter seven, with Adam's work for the Daily Express as Mr. Chatterbox, and the resonant phrase 'Adam began to invent people'. The following pages, telling how he fills his gossip-column with imaginary personages, very clearly bear upon the art of the novelist and upon his 'sultanesque caprice' (116).



Adam assumes an absolute creative control, fabricating the whole of these people's lives and interests, and at times, bereft of invention, "that black misanthropy settled on him which awaits alike on gossip writer and novelist" (117). This direct yoking of the two pursuits is scarcely necessary, for it is always clear that the passage is commenting overtly on the sheer arbitrariness of an artist's choices, his total command of invented material. This, as far as it goes, is simple enough, and a simple stress on the fictionality of all we might read under the illusion of realism. The first complexity here is the irony of Adam having so much better control of his creations than does our own novelist of his. Adam's invented figures are detailed with a completeness and confidence we never equally feel about characters existing on what, in difficulty, we might call the first level of invention. Of his Imogen Quest we know the height, her grace, build and colouring, her interests, her taste in clothes.

Her character was a lovely harmony of contending virtues - she was witty and tender-hearted; passionate and serene, sensual and temperate, impulsive and discreet. (115)

This description is all that Vile Bodies is never equal to when telling us of Adam or Nina, Agatha or Margot Metroland. Its confident distinctions are matched by its harmonious balance of sound; 'passion-ate and serene, sensual and temper-ate'. Waugh's position seems to insist that this kind of knowledge, in its degree of wholeness, and this kind of writing, as its euphonic equivalent, is permissible only in the openly-admitted realms of fiction, of the fabricated and non-real. Reality is a concept from which the novel retreats, rather than one it simply abandons. Our first encounter with Adam, at the novel's very beginning, is worded with a kind of helplessness - 'There was nothing

particularly remarkable about his appearance. He looked exactly as young men like him do look . . .' (13). The sentence enacts a double failure; refusing to describe Adam as he himself is later to describe Mrs. Quest, it falls back instead upon the supposition of a shared reality, out of which the reader can then construct Adam for himself. When we realize, as readers, that we still do not know what Adam looks like, the second failure is complete. We are left with the bald insufficiency of 'His name was Adam Fenwick-Symes'. It is a failure which precipitates Waugh into the novel's essential narrative technique. Denied - denying himself - this common ground, he shifts between two polarized positions, of refusing to account conventionally or of accounting in a super-conventional way - the Bennett-like descriptions of Doubting Hall, for example. The effect is to shed a disturbing light on our assumptions of the 'real', but to justify the novel's seeming inability to describe it; "Not only inconvenient, but impossible," said Adam in no particular manner' (32). Adam's publisher, Sam Benfleet, displays a beautiful anxiety over how he is to make the real seem plausible -

Adam explained the circumstances of the destruction of his autobiography. There was a longish pause while Sam Benfleet thought.  
'What worries me is how are we going to make that sound convincing . . .' (31)

and later, typically, he is one of those who take Adam's invented night-clubs seriously, turning up at a railway buffet for an evening's entertainment.

The reality-illusion distinction becomes further blurred as Adam's column is elaborated. He had already written of the country's insane peers, all of whom assume alternative identities. The confusion goes a step further as Adam's own friends become mixed with his inventions.

Johnny Hoop is being sculpted by Provna; Vanbrugh notices Count Cincinnati at Covent Garden and hints at an American mistress; Angus Stuart-Kerr attends provincial point-to-point meetings and Imogen Quest 'from the first exhibited a marked personality' (114). Adam's inventions infiltrate his own fictional world and escape from his control. Now, at the peak of this ambivalence, the confusion enters the text itself. This was always risked, in the text's failure to distinguish, through style or grammar, between the two fictional spheres.

There was a popular young attache at the Italian Embassy called Count Cincinnati . . . (113)

There was a Captain Angus Stuart-Kerr . . . (113)

Her set . . . achieved a superb mean between those two poles of savagery Lady Circumference and Lady Metroland. (115)

The 'there was' construction we have already noted as one of the novel's typical constructions, and 'Imogen Quest' is a name certainly no more unlikely - possibly less? - than those of the two grand dames. It now becomes impossible for the reader to distinguish and apportion statements of either sphere -

a steady output of early Provnas began to travel from Warsaw to Bond Street and from Bond Street to California . . . (112)

. . . one day, having referred to the engagement of the third and youngest daughter of a Welsh baronet, he received six postcards, eighteen telephone calls, a telegram and a personal visit of protest . . . (114)

Did anything move to California? Is the third daughter invented? The reader can scarcely say, and Waugh contributes an expansive footnote on Highland legends, outrageously distinguishing between living and dead traditions, to add yet another level of credence to the episode. Truth is demonstrated as a worthless concept in the context of fiction, both

Adam's fiction and Waugh's own. The printed word - here particularly the newspaper - is seen to be irresponsible, relating only to itself. Balcairn's libellous and imaginative account of Margot's party is confirmed by Mrs. Ape herself, and disseminated to the world's Press as fact.

The nature and security of reality is perhaps the ultimate type of 'order' at which Vile Bodies tilts, but upon that base the novel discredits many other varieties. Some of the disordering of novel-writing has already been discussed - plot coherence, cause-and-effect, identity. Critical accounts of Vile Bodies, taking their cue as I have suggested from the first Carroll quotation, have often seen Agatha Runcible's experience in the racing car as the metaphorical focus of the novel's meaning, with her cries of "Faster, faster!" and her nightmare vision of a frenetic and competitive society. The chapter is also one which illustrates very clearly our present concern for Vile Bodies' enactment of incoherence.

The very first words of the chapter present grammatical ordering under some pressure.

Adam and Miss Runcible and Miles and Archie Schwert  
went up to the motor races in Archie Schwert's car. (153)

The repetition of 'and' and 'Archie Schwert' seem necessitated by some intractability in the text, as was noted earlier. The same headlong and strictly chronological manner continues throughout the passage, making much use of 'then' and 'so'; typically, they lose their way and 'travelled miles in the wrong direction down a limitless bypass road (153). This is a novel forever moving in the wrong direction and by-passing moments of dramatic potential. The whole of the fictional world is in the conspiracy of illogic - Miss Runcible's supposed friends fail her because they have

'a completely full house and practically no servants', and only add in conclusion that 'as far as they knew they had never heard of Lord Chasm' (154). The narrative wanders off course again - another by-pass as we are presented at some length with the landlady of the Royal George despatching a drunk. This irrelevancy is spiced with this miscreant's disgust at Agatha's risqué dress. Adam's bedroom is then rendered through a simple list of its contents, as the library at Houbting Hall had been, and provokes a neat deflation by the narrator of modern psychological analysis. Adam's stabbing of a dress-maker's dummy is seen merely as youthful abandon; 'he was made to sweep up all the stuffing himself' (157). The ordered science of psychology is thus debunked. With the description of the Imperial Hotel's clientele the sentence construction again retreats into an automatic simplicity. A very typical paragraph organization can be identified here; it starts with a single, simple statement, here 'The dining room was very full indeed' (158). The rest of the paragraph then proceeds in repeated advances from this point, never progressing into a further complexity. In this case the 'root' sentence spawns six expansions, each beginning 'There were', 'They were' or 'There was', and regressing quickly into descriptive lists. The sentence is modified twice by intruded parentheses yielding further information, offered by a most omniscient author-comic -

There was one disconsolate family who had come to the town for the christening of a niece. (No one had warned them that there was a motor race on; their hotel bill was a shock.) (158)

This paragraph organization occurs throughout Vile Bodies. It is an anti-sophisticated technique, once again denoting a curious lack of narrative confidence, as though the simple recording of facts and circumstances is as much as the artist feels capable of. These lists

exhibit no sense of priority of selection; from his bedroom window at the Royal George, Adam

looked out and saw a grey sky, some kind of factory and the canal from whose shallow waters rose little islands of scrap-iron and bottles; a derelict perambulator lay partially submerged under the opposite bank. In his room . . . (156)

When he finds a handkerchief underneath his pillow, the same lack of narrative priority provokes the intruded comment '(presumably Mr. Titchcock's)' (157). The unsureness and lack of confidence is a further part of the novel's deliberate assault upon the conventional novel's coherent account of life. The extended pastiche of racing jargon becomes less comprehensible, more esoteric, ending significantly with '. . . crash . . .' (159). Before long Waugh is offering a tongue-in-cheek theory of cars, on lines which recall his recent debunking of over-ingenious analysis. As simple comedy this works well, but the length at which it is given suggests a larger relevance. We have seen that Vile Bodies posits an opposition between the organized and purposive novel, finished and single, and the fluid, self-defining and relatively unstructured novel which it is itself, and for which it claims a greater truthfulness. The first half of the distinction is here, the cars 'bought all screwed up and numbered and painted', 'maintaining their essential identity' and having 'a definite "being"'. The second half ('the real cars') presents

vital creations . . . who exist solely for their own propulsion through space . . . in perpetual flux; a vortex of combining and disintegrating units; like the confluence of traffic at some spot where many roads meet . . . (161)

The theory of cars stands out from the surrounding narrative as an intruded

authorial comment, not unique in this in Vile Bodies, but exceptional in its bulk. It is of a piece with the novel's general resistance to doctrine that the passage should be undercut by its own ingeniousness, but it nevertheless stands at the centre of the novel's concern.

The theory is followed by the handing out of brassards, and with the confusions of identity already examined. The description of the race-track and its surroundings begins with the richly comic account of the Chief Constable and his excess of zeal in organizing the traffic. Here again we see a principle of order and organization become wayward and ineffective, with the mention of traffic recalling the reference to that which streams together in the theory of cars, to 'mingle and separate again'. Under the Chief Constable's plan the traffic comes together for good, and chaos results. The Chief Constable is one of several figures of would-be authority whose command goes awry in Vile Bodies. The prime-minister is one, and Mrs. Ape another. Various parents lose authority, notably the Throbbings, and the King of Ruritania is left longing for even a golden fountain-pen. Margot's servants struggle to place the 'angels' in a social hierarchy, and even John Wesley's stature is compromised. At the novel's very beginning the Ship's Captain and Chief-Officer are confounded by a crossword, oblivious of the extreme discomfort of their passengers.

'Well, we can't always have it quiet like this',  
said the Chief Officer. 'Word of eighteen letters  
meaning carnivorous mammal. Search me if I know  
how they do think of these things.' (16)

Even the authority of sober fact is challenged by Vile Bodies -

It was too wet to walk, so he took a very crowded tube train to Dover Street and hurried across in the rain to Shepherd's Hotel (which, for the purposes of the narrative, may be assumed to stand at the corner of Hay Hill). (35)

The innovation here of course is that the challenge is an open, confessed one. All novels make such assumptions.

The traffic the Chief Constable directs is detailed in the paragraph form already noted, the attendant clauses here beginning 'some' and varied by 'most' and 'a few'. The narrative is betrayed into irrelevancy in telling of the victor's trophy - its appearance, location, who had stolen it, where it was subsequently pawned - before taking new direction with Adam's sighting of his elusive drunken major. The incident is narrated in a form which enacts the novel's characteristic inability to prevent secondary matters burgeoning over frail plot lines -

Adam turned and saw not three yards away, separated from him by a young woman riding a push-cycle in khaki shorts, her companion, who bore a knapsack on his shoulders, and a small boy selling programmes, the long-sought figure of the drunk Major. (164)

The pointlessly detailed list interposes itself and prevents their meeting, just as intrusive narrative conventions have consistently balked the true story-telling. Even when Adam shouts his name, the same irrelevant trio combine with the police master-plan to baffle him.

A policeman stood at the crossing directing the cars left and right, some to the parking place behind the Grand Stand, others to the mound above the pits. Archie turned off to the left. The drunk Major's car accelerated and swept away to the right. (164)

'I must know your name,' he cried. All the drivers seemed to choose this moment to sound their horns; the woman cyclist at Adam's elbow rang her bell; the male cyclist tooted a little horn like a Paris taxi, and the programme boy yelled in his ear, 'Official programme - map of the course - all the drivers.' (164-165)



The boy is full of information, but not that which Adam needs - he never does know the major's name, for instance. When he finally catches up with him the transfer of winnings is forestalled on a matter of lost identity - Adam cannot prove who he is, for, being fictional, he has no identity. He simply is. As often in Vile Bodies, drunkenness is the cue for a wry glance at convention. The chapter concludes with Agatha's disastrous entry in the race, and her accident. She has already escaped death in the pits, as she tosses lighted cigarettes amongst the pails of petrol, an incident which allows Waugh once again to demonstrate the shameless arbitrariness of a writer's control.

The ending of a novel is notoriously the point at which its art is under the most pressure to expose itself, and the final chapter of Vile Bodies rewards attention. However, immediately before it comes the Christmas celebration at Doubting Hall, and a nostalgic gesture towards an old and passing order. We see the united family of the Florins, and soon note the symbol of bell-ringing as an ordered pursuit, achieving harmony through understood relationships. The giving of presents is described in a correspondingly balanced style -

Adam gave (Colonel Blount) a box of cigars; Nina gave him a large illustrated book about modern cinema production; he gave Nina a seed pearl brooch which had belonged to her mother, and he gave Adam a calendar . . . (213)

The carol-singer's visit is narrated with the warmth and charm of the corresponding episode in The Wind in the Willows,<sup>1</sup> and old Florin becomes an almost Shakespearean embodiment of the ideals of order and measure -

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1 Kenneth Grahame, The Wind in the willows (1908), 1977, pp. 101-105.

Florin opened a bottle of sherry . . . and poured out the glasses, handing one first to Nina, then to Mrs. Florin, then to the Colonel, then to Adam, and, finally, taking one for himself. (215)

Then Florin ladled out the punch, seeing that the younger ones did not get the glasses intended for their elders, but that each, according to his capacity, got a little more, but not much more, than was good for him. (217)

But this is a fugitive order; young Ada Florin is already becoming wilful, and the colonel hopes to spend next Christmas in one of the 'nice little red houses . . . near the cinematographs' outside Aylesbury.

The last chapter sweeps away this moment of stability and tenderness, and we meet Adam on 'the biggest battlefield in the history of the world'. All around him is a splintered desolation and in his hand a leprosy-gun. The scene is detailed in a flat and drained monotone, with a fervourless exactitude. Adam shows no reaction to Nina's singular letter but merely 'put it back in its envelope and buttoned it into his breast-pocket' (221). A lassitude descends on the narrative as it seems to have on Adam, showing itself in this blank detailing and in the tired, reducing rhythms of the prose.

Sounds of firing thundered from beyond the horizon, and somewhere above the grey clouds there were aeroplanes. He had had no sleep for thirty-six hours. It was growing dark. (221)

The almost monosyllabic Adam can only sit on the tree stump, and smoke, and tighten his finger about his weapon. The letter from Nina is like a letter from the historic past of the spent novel. Back in England Vanbrugh is inventing stories about the war, and Benfleet is reducing it to print and profit in his series of war poets. Again, we have word versus world. Nina's vocabulary is as inadequate as ever - 'odd . . . divine . . .

lovely . . . grand . . . amusing . . . too awful . . . adore . . .  
terrific'. The Bright Young Things never develop an articulate  
language to describe their world; the moments of near understanding  
achieved by the two lovers have never quite struggled into real  
expression. Ginger, as ever, is trapped in comical cliché - "Ginger  
. . . says anyway you're doing your bit now, and in war time one lets  
bygones be bygones" (220). A defeated blindness begins to settle on  
story and characters. The Major has broken his monocle and 'can't see  
a thing' in the falling dusk. He has lost his division, his car and his  
driver, as Adam his platoon. The novel has already commented twice on  
its own collapse; 'How people are disappearing, Adam' (187); 'You  
know there seems to be none of us left now except you and me.' (206).  
The plot line disappears with them, for the thirty-five thousand pounds  
now means 'nothing'. One can only recall the theory of cars in reading  
of the major's Daimler limousine, sunk to the axles in mud. As the novel  
slows to a similar halt the parting shot at narrative vigour is delivered  
ironically in the wonderful odyssey of Chastity. Her doings have the  
material for a dozen novels, with her mutations from Chastity to Bunny,  
to insults, to Emily and finally 'numero mille soixante dix-huit'. The  
tale is delivered in the novel's own 'then/so' format, a final parody of  
the organized narrative. In the end, a name is no more of an identity  
than a random number.

Our own narrative closes with a tiredness to match Adam's exhaustion. He  
sleeps, and the general pulls down the blinds, 'shutting out that sad  
scene . . .' (224). Chastity begins another narrative, asking about the  
general's decorations, but beyond the words and stories, the fight is  
going on, and 'presently, like a circling typhoon, the sounds of battle  
began to return' (224).

Vile Bodies springs from the conviction that the twentieth-century experience was not one that could be adequately accounted for by artistic techniques and conventions of a previous period. In its brief scope it demonstrates this inadequacy through parody, and also enacts an incoherence in both matter and manner fired by Waugh's own feelings of revulsion and regret. Critics are right to place Agatha Runcible's nightmare experiences as central to the novel's meaning, but equally central and in some ways more ambitious is the concern with form. Vile Bodies breaks the bones of various artistic orderings on the rack of what it insists is the incoherence of modern experience, and essentially of all experience. It is chiefly this breaking that constitutes the 'comic anarchy' often observed but rarely examined by criticism concerned with Waugh's 'vision' of his society. The aspect of Vile Bodies that disturbed so many contemporary readers was at heart not pessimism, immorality or cruelty, but rather an anarchy broached through form. Peter Burra identified the same concern in the work of E. M. Forster -

It is probable that most people take the impressions afforded by art - especially the novel - so much for granted that they sincerely believe life itself to be quite a neat and tidy event and suffer from shock or melancholy if something occurs to disturb their belief. Paradoxically, the more actually 'like' life a work of art is, the more nonsensical it appears to them.

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1 Peter Burra, 'The Novels of E. M. Forster', The Nineteenth Century and After, CXVI (1934), 581-594.

- II -

BLACK MISCHIEF

A HANDFUL OF DUST

## BLACK MISCHIEF

'No, the truth about Basil is just that he's a bore . . .'  
'He's done all kinds of odd things.'  
'Well, yes, and I think that's so boring too. Always in  
revolutions and murders and things, I mean, what is one  
to say . . .?'

Black Mischief is among the most admired of Waugh's novels, sometimes held, with Decline and Fall, Vile Bodies and A Handful of Dust, to represent the best of his writing.<sup>2</sup> It is however very largely undiscussed, certainly less so than any other of the pre-war novels.<sup>3</sup> Expressions of admiration go unsupported by analysis, which is expended rather upon the novels published immediately prior to and after Black Mischief. This neglect is itself interesting, and the quotation at the head of these remarks might suggest an explanation of the novel's paradoxical esteem. Black Mischief taken as a whole is considerably less than the sum of its parts; those parts - surprising, evocative, appalling - are rightly admired, but they do not come together in any very persuasive or coherent way. Black Mischief is a traveller's tale, astonishing and exotic, but like others of its genre liable, through surfeit, to bore. It is as rich as Vile Bodies was lacking in colour and incident; the very density of the narrative texture presents the critic with difficulties: 'I mean, what is one to say . . .?'. The indeterminate quality which has been noted in both the novel's tone and argument seems too to stem from the bulk of vivid

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1 Black Mischief (1932), 1978, pp. 70-71.

2 Thus R. M. Davies, 'Evelyn Waugh's Early Work; The Formation of a Method', Texas Studies in Literature and Language, VII (1965), 97-108 and Martin Green, 'British Comedy and the British Sense of Humour: Shaw, Waugh, and Amis', Texas Quarterly, IV (1961), 217-227.

3 Outside the major book-length studies of Waugh's work the present writer is aware of only one critical paper on this novel: William Myers' 'Potential Recruits: Evelyn Waugh and the reader of Black Mischief', in The 1930s: A Challenge to Orthodoxy, ed. John Lucas, 1978, pp. 103-116.

material - there is critical disagreement about even the novel's subject. It is probably significant that alone amongst Waugh's novels Black Mischief is not extolled by its paperback publisher for qualities of satire, irony, astringency. Black Mischief, one is promised, is 'ebullient and inventive'. One frequently reads that Black Mischief represents a technical advance on Waugh's part, a confident manipulation of a newly complex narrative. This needs careful weighing. The novel is structurally more complex insofar as it embraces more, and more varied, situations and characters, but there is no equivalent to the subtle transpositions of Vile Bodies, that slippage from one level of invention to another, and no anticipation of the juxtaposed jungles, real and metaphoric, of A Handful of Dust. The London and Azanian settings of Black Mischief are primarily realistic, and for all its humour and acute, sardonic observation the novel remains essentially inert. Mere, as it were 'reported' realism did not provide a way forward for Waugh after Black Mischief, and it is never a mode dominant in his best writing. The army sections of Put Out More Flags offer another example of his fiction being jeopardized by an over-excitement with circumstances. The Ethiopian scene, the evident basis of Black Mischief, clearly struck Waugh as itself an outrageous caricature, scarcely needing the artist's intervention.

The quality of inertness in the novel informs both character and plot. Jeffrey Heath believes that it 'becomes apparent that Basil Seal is Waugh's personification of an historical force', but this is surely an overstatement.<sup>1</sup> Seal remains relatively undeveloped in Black Mischief, less interesting, socially less significant than he is to become in Put Out More Flags. Waugh takes pains in the novel's third chapter with

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1 The Picturesque Prison : Evelyn Waugh and his Writing, 1982, p. 98.

his portrait of Seal, but having transferred him to Azania and to the Ministry of Modernization seems at a loss for what might be done with him. Heath argues that Basil tires in the face of Seth's absurdities, but the plot too is flagging by this point. Neither Basil nor Seth have come to convincingly occupy a central role in the novel; Malcolm Bradbury has remarked that it is hard to find the centre of the action, that the approach to all the issues is tangential.<sup>1</sup> The plan to instate Achon as emperor in Seth's place ought on the face of it to impose a framework for the novel's action, yet it remains oddly peripheral, and even uninteresting. The technical innovation of Chapter Six, whereby the deteriorating political situation, coup and fire are presented through the medium of Dame Mildred Porch, only sacrifices the little narrative momentum this conspiracy has engendered. The two crusading ladies are finely comic, and indeed ebulliently inventive, but their very incomprehension diminishes the novel's ostensible crisis. It also effectively dismisses Seth as a figure of importance; his ambitions for and mismanagement of the country made up much of the early part of the novel, and the incidental nature of his eclipse here further unbalances Black Mischief.

The novel has other fully achieved characters which once posited are not thereafter worked into the narrative. Lady Seal is one such, Rex Monomark another; in Azania there are General Connolly, the Earl of Ngumo, Viscount Boaz, Monsieur Bertrand. Each is generously described, but then taken no further - indeed, there would scarcely have been room for all of Waugh's characters to figure as largely in the narrative as their initial emphasis suggests. Monsieur Bertrand, for example, is awarded a substantial descriptive paragraph (p. 124) and a full page interview with Basil, but

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1 Evelyn Waugh, 1964.



one hears nothing thereafter of the editor or of the Courier d'Azanie. The reader of a novel has a finite amount of attention to invest, and Waugh takes risks in drawing so heavily upon it in Black Mischief for detailed but purely incidental portraits.

Rex Monomark is another leisurely composition, an anticipation of Scoop's Lord Copper, impervious to all outside influences. Waugh describes him at length but still without bringing to the portrait those implications of a subversive, invented reality which inform the figure of the later press baron, and which contribute crucially to Scoop's success. The absence of a final 'turning' of the portrait, the failure at the last to signify, is characteristic of Black Mischief. Sir Samson Courteney's 'Great Pyramid' ('it's all a "cosmic allegory"' (103)), Prudence's 'Panorama of Life', the game of 'Consequences' which fuels French suspicion and leads directly to the coup - all are examples of the suggestive, potentially radical manouveres in which Waugh's narratives are rich, but which in Black Mischief are pushed into corners by vigorous description:

Mahmud el Khali bin Sai-ud, frail descendant of the oldest family in Matodi, sat among his kinsmen, moodily browsing over his lapful of khat. The sunlight streamed in through the lattice shutters, throwing a diaper of light over the worn carpets and divan; two of the amber mouthpieces of the hubble-bubble were missing; the rocking-chair in the corner was no longer safe, the veneer was splitting and peeling off the rosewood table . . . (94)

It is as if the narrator were hypnotized by the extraordinary physical presence of the scene, by colour and texture and sound. The above passage continues for almost a full page, one more contribution to the novel's very full cultural, historical and geographical account of Azania. It is perfectly composed - this is the technical maturity of Black Mischief - but indulgent. The dominance of the adjective is stifling,

and determines that the novel resolves into a series of tableaux which, like the redundant characters, are individually very distinct but not satisfactorily organized in support of a coherent theme. The Trumpington milieu, Lady Seal's dinner party, Seth's Victory Ball and the Earl of Ngumo's negotiation with the Abbot of the Monastery of St Mark the Evangelist remain vivid but unintegrated. The last is a particularly gratuitous episode, extending to nearly six pages -

A visit to the shrine of the Barren Fig Tree; the Earl kissed the lintel of the door three times, laid his forehead against the steps of the sanctuary and made a present of a small bag of silver. Dinner in the Abbot's lodging; it was one of the numerous fast days of the Nestorian Church; vegetable mashes in wooden bowls, one of bananas, one of beans; earthenware jugs and brown vessels of rough beer. Ponderous leave-takings for the night . . . (175)

The disappearance of the verb in passages such as this is a mark of their impressionism; the novel inculcates a state of feeling, works for an 'atmosphere'. Between two asterisks in Chapter Six Waugh inserts something very like an extract from a documentary film-maker's shooting script - 'Strips of sunlight through the shutters; below in the yard a native boy hammering at the engine of a broken motor-car' (180). The failed sophistication of the internal combustion engine contributes to the novel's argument, but the diffuse quality of Black Mischief is a product of the accumulation of these 'location shots', and of their displacement of a more immediate plot.

The horrific events which close the penultimate chapter represent the last, climactic addition to the novel's unsorted ingredients. The eating of Prudence is only the most obviously unassimilated of Black Mischief's events; it remains disproportionately grim, in spite of one's efforts to read metaphorically. Seth, with his 'inherited terror of the jungle' (26)

was never merely, or even primarily, comic, and his cremation and funeral feast are among Waugh's most powerful episodes. Prudence's fate is too embedded in this horror to be safely symbolic, in the way, for example, that Agatha Runcible's motor smash was symbolic.

Round and round circled the dancers, ochre and blood  
and sweat glistening in the firelight; the wisemen's  
headgear swayed high above them, leopards' feet and  
snake skins, amulets and necklaces, lions' teeth and  
the shrivelled bodies of bats and toads, jiggling and  
spinning. Tireless hands drumming out the rhythm;  
glistening backs heaving and shivering in the shadows.  
(230)

One does not 'care' about Prudence, but there is an undeniably compelling, overwrought quality in Waugh's writing in these passages, achieved largely through rhythm, repetition and balance, through the foregrounding of noun at the expense of verb. This hypnotic, narcotic effect is echoed only in the equally powerful delirium scenes of A Handful of Dust. The trailing, bathetic line which closes this chapter, 'Later, a little after midnight, it began to rain' (230), is the muted, dazed emergence from intoxication. The novel's anticlimactic last chapter underlines this aspect; the Trumpingtons are dismissive of Basil's adventure, uninterested as in another's dream - 'Keep a stopper on the far-flung stuff . . .' (232). There is something like embarrassment with the extravagance of the Azanian tale, but no full repentance: as a mandated protectorate the country has clearly lost all real interest. Waugh's biographer Christopher Sykes believes that the final thrust of the narrative puts the white League of Nations into a positive light, but the writer and journalist William Deedes has disagreed. He travelled with Waugh in Ethiopia as a fellow correspondent, and was persuaded that Waugh felt western civilisation to be grotesquely inapplicable in Africa, and was itself being satirised in

Black Mischief.<sup>1</sup>

Black Mischief is at once the most complicated, most eventful of Waugh's novels of the thirties, and the simplest of them. To use Roland Barthes' term it is a 'lisible' work, inviting of its reader mere, rapt, consumption.<sup>2</sup> If the novel's attitude to Africa is not finally clear - it has been thought racist<sup>3</sup> - this does not condition or delay that consumption. It is apprehended in an impressionist way, the element of plot only ever peripheral. Critical accounts of the novel have dwelt on the persistence of Waugh's concern to dissect sham western culture, and to trace the common barbarism of Europe and Africa. The good but single legation joke bears much of the weight of this discussion, which is generally persuasive. Large claims are made for the technical maturity of the novel, and Black Mischief is certainly an energetic and copiously inventive work. In its larger effect however the novel is flat and unreverberative, its tone uncertain. There is an extravagance in the scale and variety of composition which is locally remarkable but cumulatively self-defeating, and somehow stifling. Despite its relative elaboration, Black Mischief is probably the least reflective or truly innovative of Waugh's pre-war novels. Its critical reception, combining respect for an uniquely sensitive response to Africa with a disinclination to discuss the mechanics of that response, precisely registers the nature of the work.

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1 'With Waugh in Abyssinia', Sunday Telegraph, 4 January 1981, pp. 8-9.

2 Barthes distinguishes between the 'readable' ('lisible') text, which is logical, contiguous, readily consumed; and the 'writable' ('scriptible') text, which will be the opposite of these, demanding the reader's imaginative participation in the generation of meaning. S/Z, Paris, 1970; discussed by David Lodge in The Modes of Modern Writing, 1977, pp. 66-70.

3 Thus A. A. DeVitis, Roman Holiday : The Catholic Novels of Evelyn Waugh, 1958, p. 29.

## A HANDFUL OF DUST

Vile Bodies, a novel without a story, contains in embryo form the stuff of several stories. As many critics have been happy to recognise, A Handful of Dust does very definitely contain a story, though perhaps in its basic outline not a very original one. In a different sense this novel too contains several stories, and if, once again, one wishes to look further than criticism which confines itself to Waugh's satirical 'vision' of a modern society, one can find in A Handful of Dust a careful exploration of fictional techniques and assumptions.

The novel can be seen as presenting a selection of lives, being lived not always knowingly within artificial and often specifically fictional references - these are the constituent 'stories' of this novel. The most obvious example is Tony Last's absorption in his country squire existence at Hetton. His obsessive love for Hetton, for the obsolete myth of its mock-Gothic beauty and order, is the usual starting point for criticism concerned with Waugh's dissection of an abrasive modern society. It is at least as interesting, however, to take this cue to look for other 'fictional' myths within the novel, and having identified them to relate them to Waugh's own fictional methods within the larger reference of the novel itself. A reader of novels is presumably someone willing to accept a fictional re-ordering of experience; A Handful of Dust deals with precisely such re-orderings, and the depth and method of its criticism of these imposes a strain upon its own fictional structure.

The reservations held by several readers over the later parts of the novel can be understood as baffled attempts to persist in a reading made inappropriate by developments in the method of A Handful of Dust as it progresses.

The central myth, of Hetton as a focus of mock-Gothic beauty and an enduring value, is established in Chapter Two. The short preceding chapter has dealt with the terrible Beavers, largely in rapid dialogue and elsewhere in terse ironical narrative -

His total income varied around six pounds a week, so this was an important saving. He was twenty-five years old. From leaving Oxford until the beginning of the slump he had worked in an advertising agency. Since then no one had been able to find anything for him to do. So he got up late and . . .

The staccato, fractured narrative, hinging mechanically upon 'He was . . .', 'Since then . . .', 'So he . . .', is the perfect medium for presenting the fast, shallow Beavers. The chapter is divided by parenthetical asides and brief snatches of telephone conversations, by the swift movements of Mrs. Beaver - 'Mrs. Beaver smoked a cigarette and then drove back to her shop' (10) - and by her abrupt, business-like conversation - "I know who you mean. American. She hasn't paid for the toile-de-jouy chair covers we made her last April. I had a dull time too; didn't hold a card all the evening . . ." (8). The description of Hetton proceeds in a deliberate contrast to this frenetic and brittle style. Here we are to appreciate 'the general aspect and atmosphere of the place' (14), and are given the house in a long, leisurely and adjectival sentence that is the exact equivalent of the rambling, eclectic charm of the place. The air of urgency surrounding Mrs. Beaver is countered here by soporific and muted imagery - 'the heaviest sleepers', 'the ecclesiastical gloom', 'half-lit by day', 'the cavernous chill of the more remote corridors',

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1 Evelyn Waugh, A Handful of Dust (1934), Penguin Edition, 1978, p.8.

'pipes shut off', 'the fireplace was like a tomb' (14-15). The slow sentence resists any condensing, giving in full the list of Arthurian bedrooms, whilst through repeated hyphens dispersion is similarly resisted, the terms pulled together in pairs - 'vine-wreathed', 'half-lit', 'cast-iron', 'dining-hall', 'hammer-beam', 'pitch-pine', 'half-timber'. Irrespective of any worth, the house is set apart in this way from the modern world besieging it, and only when describing Hetton does the narrative assume this expansive and relaxed tone -

Outside, it was soft English weather; mist in the hollows and pale sunshine on the hills; the coverts had ceased dripping, for there were no leaves to hold the recent rain, but the undergrowth was wet . . . (18)

This is a mythical Hetton to which Tony is committed, an ideal expressed in balanced prose rarely found elsewhere in the novel. The early scene in which Brenda reads to Tony from the morning paper illustrates his absorption - the items he misses involve matters ironically close to his own fate; a woman with two husbands, suicide, the death of a child, the ending of a play 'about a farm'. Above all he fails to follow the romantic serial, a story about 'trust' presumably as hackneyed as his own will be. The incident establishes within specifically fictional references the degree to which Tony's world is enclosed, set apart (17-18).

Brenda herself is the focus of the novel's other major fiction or myth, anticipated in the use of the Arthurian legend. She sleeps - tellingly - in the room labelled 'Guinevere', and is associated generally with a princess image. She is introduced in a phrase the briefness of which has a kind of awe - 'Brenda lay on the dais' (16) - and the description proceeds to lend her a more than human presence -

Her head was propped against a very small blue pillow; clean of make-up, her face was almost colourless, rose-pearl, scarcely deeper in tone than her arms and neck. (16)

Her first word has the peremptory tone of a royal command -

'Well?' said Tony.  
'Kiss.'

and the text explicitly transforms her into a mythical figure - 'she leant forward to him (a nereid emerging from fathomless depths of clear water)'. The narrative does not proceed further with the suggestion at this point, but inserts reminders at regular intervals;

'I feel rather guilty about Beaver - going off and leaving you like that. You were heavenly to him.' (28)

'Darling, you're being heroic with Beaver.' (35)

'You are an angel to be so sweet about last night.' (75)

These are all comments by Tony, whom one would expect to fall in with any mythical account of Brenda, but the idea is also pursued elsewhere in the text. An early encounter with Beaver presents her in a regal image, with Beaver himself the lowly admirer, far beneath and hoping to be of service.

Shafts of November sunshine streamed down from lancet and oriel, tintured in green and gold, gules and azure by the emblazoned coats . . . Brenda descended the great staircase step by step through alternations of dusk and rainbow . . . Beaver emerged from the shadows below and stood at the foot of the stairs looking up at her. 'I say, can't I carry something?' (34)

The colours, the heraldry and the processional 'step by step' make it difficult not to recall the medieval traditions of courtly love, the



cult of 'the lady'. However, the direction of such imagery is made explicit in the passage describing Brenda's position in the eyes of her friends.

For them her circumstances shed peculiar glamour; for five years she had been a legendary, almost ghostly name, the imprisoned princess of fairy story, and now that she had emerged there was more enchantment in the occurrence than in the mere change of habit of any other circumspect wife. (57)

The passage is longer than here quoted, and in its course there emerge numerous terms belonging primarily to the realm of discourse, of experience transmuted into fictional or literary models - 'adventure', 'romance', 'fantasy', 'joke', 'thrilling', 'drawing-room comedy', 'escapade', 'poetry'. In the passage above one detects the reference to Penelope, Odysseus' 'circumspect wife'. Brenda's situation is one that people want to talk about, and there are terms and phrases underlining this - 'opinion was greatly in favour . . .', 'the morning telephone buzzed with news of her . . .', 'people . . . were delighted to relate . . .', 'those whose simple pleasure it was to discuss the subject . . .', 'the affair', 'the gang of gossips . . .'. It is stressed in this way that the interest of the situation is essentially independent of its details; the novel supports this, declining to offer rational motives or explanations.<sup>1</sup> The affair is made accessible to our understanding only in these terms, as a romantic, fairy-princess fiction. Its manufactured nature is additionally suggested by the use of a particular phrase. The novel makes architecture a potent metaphor

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1 In his paper "The Function of Gossip, Rumor, and Public Opinion in Evelyn Waugh's A Handful of Dust", Roger Burbridge has argued that these constitute 'a make-believe world where appearances form a closed system of their own and words have no connection with real things'. Evelyn Waugh Newsletter, IV (2, 1970), 3-5.

of worth - we are made to associate flats with a cheap shallowness, with modern hypocrisy and illicit love. Mrs. Beaver, inevitably, rents them - 'Mrs. Beaver knew her job. What people wanted, she said, was somewhere to dress . . .' (42). The phrase now re-occurs in the context of Brenda's affair, undercutting its romantic aura; 'Brenda was filling a want long felt . . .'. Within a page Mrs. Beaver's happiness for her son is similarly expressed - "I've felt for a long time a Lack of Something in him . . ." (58) - and later the phrase reverts to its architectural sense, in reference to the Hetton morning-room redecoration. Mrs. Beaver again; "I know exactly what Brenda wants . . ." (79). Mrs. Beaver's flats and decor, and Brenda's romantic affair are alike in being engineered for the enjoyment and convenience of a society which will invest an affair with 'the luminous clouds of deity' (57) and meanwhile pursue shabby relationships in shabby apartments. The recurrent phrase alerts the reader to the analogy.

Each of the two main characters, then, are seen in the context of fictional types - Tony as country squire, Brenda as languishing princess. Beyond these there are others. Dr. Messinger is clearly a parody of the Colonel Fawcett model, an eccentric explorer with boyish enthusiasms for base-camps and the perils of exploration; 'From now onwards the map is valueless to us' said Dr. Messinger with relish' (177). Messinger is equipped with the wrong native language and with trunks full of 'trade-goods', including the mechanical mice which will doom the expedition. He is slightly drawn, but the fictional antecedents are clear. The Princess Jenny Abdul Akbar is presented at greater length, and has even more obviously stepped out of romantic fiction. Her 'constructed' nature is signalled very early -

The resolute little figure huddled herself in the rugs until she reached the gates. Then she opened her bag, tucked up her veil, shook out her powder puff and put her face to rights. (84)

Jenny speaks throughout in a selection of clichés and formalised expressions that are the verbal equivalent of the inflexible role in which she is cast.

'Ah, but its atmosphere. I always think that's what counts . . .' (84)

'It has an uncanny fascination for me . . .' (85)

'Life teaches one to be tolerant . . .' (87)

'Englishmen are so gentle and considerate . . .' (85)

Jenny is happy to seize on Tony's Englishness, as above and in 'How English you are, Teddy - so shy . . .' (85). This too is another convention, another myth, whilst that of the legendary 'princess and the pea' is encompassed in her remark to John Andrew, "Even the softest beds are too hard for me now" (90). Her tales of the Moulay exploit a type of Arabian Night romance, and she responds irritably to the small boy's pragmatic interruptions.

'The Moulay used to sit on a throne under a great crimson canopy.'

'What's a canopy?'

'Like a tent,' she said more sharply, and then, resuming her soft voice, 'and all the horsemen used to . . .' (86)

This is clearly a performance, but not really one we understand as a deceit; Waugh presents Jenny as precisely a performance, a mythical figure who will illustrate aspects of Tony's own fictions. Her fatuous comment 'Muffins stand for so much' is only sillier in degree than Tony's 'I think muffins one of the few things that make the English winter endurable' (85). Her exaggerated sensibility, in all its

hollowness and inappropriateness, is only a parody of his own role-playing; she too has nightmares, can understand 'this beautiful place and all it means to you' (92). The points at which their romances seem to touch force one to see Tony as implicated in the more obviously fictional extremes of her legend, of her 'great tragedy', the Moulay and the 'Other Side of his Nature' (87, 88).

Elsewhere in the novel, minor characters are seen to approximate to fictional archetypes. These include Colonel Inch, Master of the Pigstanton Hunt and

a timid, inconspicuous man . . . seldom in sight of hounds (who) could often be found in another part of the country morosely nibbling ginger-nut biscuits in a lane or towards the end of the day cantering heavily across country, quite lost, a lonely scarlet figure . . . The only pleasure he gained from his position, but that a substantial one, was in referring to it casually at Board Meetings . . . (99-100)

Like Tony, Colonel Inch pursues the country squire ideal. His failure to convince in this role is comically presented, but the parallel is there, reinforced in the details of his mildness, his loneliness and even in his eating alone - Tony's isolation is repeatedly imaged in his small and solitary meals. Hetton employs the traditional sententious nanny - "Those that ask no questions hear no lies . . . It would be a dull world if we all thought alike" (21, 87) - and an equally traditional groom in Ben Hackett, sporting a foxhead pin and colourful vocabulary.

This deliberate appeal to fictional 'type' does not apply only to the novel's characters. The 'courtly love' motif has been mentioned; still more obvious is the seventeenth century comedy framework, noted by Greenblatt, featuring Tony as naive provincial husband, Brenda as

deceiving wife and Beaver as cynical man-about-town.<sup>1</sup> The model does not, ultimately, fit, but the parallel is clear. Similarly, names such as Beaver, Cockpurse, Mrs. Shutter and Reverend Tendril belong to the comedies of Middleton and Jonson, while Last is almost as purposive a name as Christian or Everyman. In a more serious sense, the novel's jungle scenes recall the Conrad of Heart of Darkness, and the Eliot reference is not merely confined to the title - here is another 'unreal City'. A Handful of Dust is a novel acutely aware of other literary forms, and when put alongside Vile Bodies is remarkable for a 'literariness' of its own which was precisely that avoided by the earlier work. There is a single, strong storyline, pursued for three quarters of the novel in a straightforward manner. The chapters may still be subdivided into smaller sections, but these now progress with a plain storytelling logic, hardly ever juxtaposing contrasted ideas or groups of characters. Chapter Two begins with the description of Hetton. The second section presents morning, both within and outside the house; in the third Tony reprimands John Andrew, an interview recounted to Brenda in the fourth, by which point luncheon has been reached. Beaver's arrival is anticipated; the following section describes this. Then comes evening, the night and Sunday morning.

Each of the novel's first five chapters proceeds in this linear fashion. The chapters, moreover, now have titles, including the progressing 'English Gothic I . . . II . . . III', and the Proustian formula 'Du Côté de Chez . . .'. There is clearly a more deliberate order to this novel than was ever attempted in Vile Bodies. The story is obsessively structured by reference to time; almost every narrative

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1 Paul Greenblatt, Three Modern Satirists, New Haven, 1965, p.26.

section begins with a note of the hour, day, or interval that has  
lapsed -

Three-eighteen was far from being the most convenient  
time for arrival . . . (26)

Tony invariably wore a dark suit on Sundays . . . (29)

Brenda's stay at Hetton lasted only for three nights. (56)

That was Wednesday; on Thursday Tony felt well again  
. . . (77)

'Can I go and say good morning to the Princess,  
mummy?' (90)

Another five days; then Brenda . . . (93)

All the above occur within the first hundred pages of the novel, and many more can be found. Tony in particular is repeatedly asking the time, but it is an obsession of the text's own as well. There is something over-deliberate in it which serves to stress the highly organized, totally constructed nature of the narrative. The same effect is achieved by the numerous train journeys and telephone calls, letters and telegrams that are scattered throughout; movements are plotted, with exhaustive reference to the 3.18 train, arrivals anticipated, decisions recorded. This is an extremely located story, in time and place; this high degree of management in the narrative is related to the expressly fictional 'types' already noted - the reader is made very aware of the formal constituents of the whole performance.

Alerted to this, one can then discover a parallel tendency in the line by line detail of Waugh's technique in the novel. The reader's flow of sympathy is manipulated through complex systems of linked motifs or metaphors that in themselves do not carry any 'meaning' or significance. Entering the novel almost at random one can pick up such a system and follow it through.

Marjorie and Allan were hard up and popular; they could not afford a baby; they lived in a little house in the neighbourhood of Portman Square, very convenient for Paddington Station. They had a Pekinese dog name Djinn. (38)

This introduction to Brenda's sister draws upon several already established factors of the Hetton situation - house size, convenience for rail travel, the place of the child - but the emphasis falls upon the closing detail, which escapes from the semicolons of the preceding list. That the gender of the Pekinese is concealed becomes important on the following page, when the girls are talking of Beaver.

'He wasn't . . . What's he like?'  
'I hardly know him. I see him at Margot's sometimes. He's a great one for going everywhere.'  
'I thought he was rather pathetic.'  
'Oh, he's pathetic all right. D'you fancy him?'  
Heavens, no.  
They took Djinn for a walk in the park. He was a very unrepaying dog . . . (39)

The insistently repeated 'he/him' carried through into the account of Djinn, and what might have been a momentary confusion of subject is reinforced by the details of the dog's manner.

when loosed he stood perfectly still, gazing moodily at the asphalt until they turned towards home; only once did he show any sign of emotion, when he snapped at a small child . . . (39)

This blank inactivity coincides neatly with the passivity of Beaver, as described in the opening chapter - 'he got up late and sat near his telephone most of the day, hoping to be rung up . . . Beaver sat on beside his telephone' (8-10). The verb 'snap' moreover is one that gathers significance in the novel, stemming from its early use by Mrs. Beaver - 'I must get on to them this morning before that ghoul Mrs. Shutter snaps them up' (7). It works from within the animal reference,

signalling an inhuman avarice, but extends to Cruttwell, under whose fingers Brenda's vertebrae 'snapped like patent fasteners' (41). Later it modulates into 'Animal Snap' (111). Returning to the Pekinese motif, however, one can now relate the dog 'sitting under a chair and staring at a shred of waste paper' (39) to Beaver as seen immobilised in Bratt's - 'settled in one of the armchairs in the outer room (turning) over the pages of the New Yorker, waiting until someone he knew should turn up' (11).

The connection is daring, in being so arbitrary, but quite irresistible, and effective because Waugh has established the continuing analogy. The description of Djinn continues -

He was quite colourless, with pink nose and lips  
and pink circles of bald flesh round his eyes.  
'I don't believe he has a spark of human feeling,'  
said Marjorie. (39-40)

Marjorie's comment closes the parallel at its climax, but Beaver's colourless and coldly efficient social competence is neatly implied, and neither he nor his mother ever show such a spark.

This is by no means the end of the narrative's exploitation of the Pekinese motif, as a means of arranging relative values and disturbing our sympathies. Returning from her meeting with Beaver, Brenda confesses to having done 'one awful thing'. Tony's immediate guess is "You've bought a Pekinese" (54-55). This is of course exactly what she has done; she may talk of having found a flat, but by this point, as already noted, another line of metaphor has implicated Beaver in that motif too - he is as much a fashionable convenience as a lapdog. The Pekinese analogy reappears in one of Brenda's letters to Tony.



Gin. No, Djin - - how? - has rheumatism and Marjorie is v. put out about it. She thinks his pelvis is out of place and Cruttwell won't do him which is pretty mean considering all the people she has brought there. (83)

The animal/human distinction has clearly been altogether lost by this point. Even Marjorie is being dragged over the boundary, in the verbal equivalence of her being 'v. put out' and Djinn's pelvis being 'out of place'. This is an equivalence that is pursued still further in this chapter; Jenny, who is always described in strongly animalistic terms, complains that 'my womb is out of place' (88).

The Pekinese metaphor offers only one medium for this routing of reader reaction; there are many more, several working within this same animal reference. Brian Wicker has written that this reference 'almost becomes a totemic myth' and more generally that Waugh's is 'an art which is self-enclosed within its own comic frame of reference . . . autotelic'.<sup>1</sup> There is clearly a close relationship between this self-sustaining enclosure, and the overtly fictional quality noted earlier in the novel's larger structure, its parallels and mythical ingredients. The narrative's highly reflexive system of linked metaphors constitute a similarly internal, a similarly artificial way of organizing meaning. The Pekinese - for example - has been made to stand for something; its terms are then applied to other areas of the story in a very precise way. The reader, alerted to this code soon learns to accept the directions - in Barthes' terms, this is a very 'lisible' or readerly

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<sup>1</sup> The Story Shaped World, 1975, pp. 151-168.

text.<sup>1</sup> The animal and architectural systems have been noted. Further examples include meals, train journeys, madness, and a clothing metaphor; the act of dressing becomes a symbol of taking on disguise and defence. Early in the novel Brenda is innocent of any such care;

'Darling . . . you look like a thousand pounds.  
Where did you get that suit?'  
'I don't know. Some shop.' (39)

but as the intrigue develops so does the metaphor; the ghastly Polly Cockpurse has no true friends, only people who admire and buy her clothes; Mrs. Beaver knows that what people want of a flat is 'somewhere to dress and telephone' (42) (the telephone emerges as another metaphor for contrived relations); soon Brenda is admitting that her dress is 'fairly' new (44). At Hetton she balks Tony's questions as she dresses for dinner, associating the two actions is evasiveness -

'D'you mind moving a second, sweet? I can't see properly.'

'Brenda . . .'  
'Now run and put on your coat. They'll all be downstairs waiting for us . . .' (80)

The same combination, of dishonesty with dressing, re-occurs later in the chapter, and is later reversed when Brenda and Polly wish to swap confidences - 'Soon after dinner Polly said she was tired and asked Brenda to come with her while she undressed. 'Leave the young couple to it' she whispered outside the door' (89). The metaphor becomes entangled with the animal system late in the novel, when Tony has to wear elaborate protective clothing to combat the jungle animals - which include, eloquently, vampire bats. The systems repeatedly link

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1 See p. 32 above, footnote 2.

in this manner. The grim animality of Mrs. Beaver is associated with her redecorating activities from the novel's first page, where she warms herself by the fire and gobbles her food in an ugly fashion.

'two housemaids . . . lost their heads and jumped through a glass roof into the paved court. They were in no danger. The fire never reached the bedrooms, I am afraid. Still, they are bound to need doing up, everything black with smoke and drenched in water. . .' (7)

The second 'they' is the fulcrum about which the novel's first irony is turned, as the maids are subordinated to the rooms as the object of concern. Similarly, Mrs. Beaver speaks of 'the people' as of 'the rooms' - no distinction seems necessary. These inhuman reversals of priority become the expression of the de-humanising tendency she institutes in the novel; it is neatly encapsulated in her own housemaid being named 'Chambers'.

It is difficult without exhaustive quotation to demonstrate in detail the complexity of these confident systems of developing metaphor. They are probably the reason for Christopher Sykes' placing of the novel amongst 'only five or six English novels of this century' for its 'masterly structure'.<sup>1</sup> If one pauses to compare this control with the hesitant and splintered narrative techniques of Vile Bodies, the very fictional nature of this later novel, in the sense of its order and management, becomes clear. The constituent myths framing Tony's life

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<sup>1</sup> Evelyn Waugh: a biography, 1975, p.200. Nicholas Joost attributes the success of this novel, and of Black Mischief, to their achieving of the effects 'through the words, the geometry, and, dramatically, the metaphors of art functioning as deliberately as those of The Golden Bowl'. 'A Handful of Dust: Evelyn Waugh and the Novel of Manners', Papers on Language and Literature, XII (Spring 1976), 177-196.

at Hetton, Brenda's place in society, together with the numerous literary models discernible in the larger structure, are being presented through an internalized complex of developing symbols. This complex can itself be termed mythical, in the sense of being an independent, self-sustaining construct which the artist interposes between the reader and potential experience in order to assert some kind of order. All narrative fiction, even the most realistic, is elaborating a myth in this sense, but here it is difficult not to see a deliberate exaggeration of the system's orderliness. Brian Wicker has called Waugh's totemic technique 'deliberately archaic', reflecting a regressiveness in modern society, a tendency to 'revert . . . from fiction to myth'.<sup>1</sup> However, not every reader has had the same reaction to A Handful of Dust -

The first part of the book is convincing, a real picture of people one has met and may at any moment meet again. Then comes the perfectly possible, very moving, and beautifully written death of that horrible little boy after which the family breaks up. Then the father goes abroad with that very well-drawn horror Messinger. That too is splendid and I've no complaints. But then to let Tony be detained by some madman introduced an entirely fresh note and we are with phantasy with a ph at once.<sup>2</sup>

This is an extract from a letter to Waugh from the novelist Henry Yorke (Henry Green). Elsewhere in the same letter he complains that the final section of the novel 'seemed manufactured and not real'. Yorke's reading of the earlier part seems naive, although Peter Green also manages to find an 'exploration of character and motive in detail'.<sup>3</sup> Both he and Yorke seem to have brought to the novel more realistic 'reading

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1 Wicker, Op. Cit., pp. 151-168.

2 Sykes, Op. Cit., p. 142.

3 'Du Côté de Chez Waugh', Review of English Literature, II (1961), 89-100.

conventions', to use Jonathan Culler's phrase,<sup>1</sup> than are quite appropriate. Yorke asks that events be 'possible', his approval is for the 'well drawn', the 'convincing', whilst Green will only allow that an 'effect of realism' may be intended to deflect one's attention from 'the essentially mythic nature of each scene'. I have argued the reverse to be the case. The alteration in technique lamented by Yorke is then not a misjudgment, but a development exactly corresponding to the breakdown of Tony Last's Hetton myth.

That night there was little sleep for anyone on board; the plating creaked, luggage shifted from wall to wall. Tony wedged himself in his bunk with the lifebelt and thought of the City.

. . . Carpet and canopy, tapestry and velvet, portcullis and bastion, waterfowl on the moat and kingcups along its margin, peacocks trailing their finery across the lawns; high overhead in a sky of sapphire and swansdown silver bells chiming in a turret of alabaster. (161-162)

The passage demonstrates in miniature the manner in which Tony's idyll, at its most poetic, is identified with an order, a controlled performance. It echoes the confidence with which the equally fictional Imogen Quest was presented in Vile Bodies.<sup>2</sup> There is the double alliteration which ties 'Carpet' to both 'canopy' and 'velvet', 'tapestry' to both 'canopy' and 'velvet'; the order of the progressing pairs of terms; the balance between the waterfowl 'on the moat' and the kingcups 'along its margin'; the vision reaches its climax in the peal of alliterative sound, 'a sky of sapphire and swansdown silver bells'. Tony's myth is precisely his lifebelt, his hope of saving himself from a predatory world, similarly expressed through sound here. The poetic vision is shouldered aside by

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1 Structuralist Poetics, 1975, passim.

2 Evelyn Waugh, Vile Bodies (1930), Penguin Edition, 1978, p. 115.

the subsequent passage - 'Days of shadow and exhaustion, salt wind and wet mist, foghorn and the constant groan and creak of straining metal . . .' (162). This has no such verbal elegance - it is lacking even the form of a complete sentence. The angular labial sounds of 'salt wind and wet mist', and the dissonant harshness of 'the constant groan and creak', 'shadow and exhaustion', are the antithesis of any measured and confident vision; the foghorn replaces the silver bells. Tony's fiction comes increasingly under this sort of attack; as he is stripped of his defences in the second section of the novel, so the proportion and order of his myth become exaggerated in this way and the elaborate systems of metaphor which were its formal equivalent begin to buckle. This breakdown is first seen happening in the account of Tony's trip to Brighton, a prologue to the ultimate jungle fantasy.

This episode occupies most of the chapter entitled 'English Gothic II'. One is immediately encouraged to look for parallels with the previous 'English Gothic', in which Hetton had been introduced. The location is now Brighton, and one notes the similarity in sound between the two placenames. This type of faulty duplication proves to be the model for the rest of the chapter, which proceeds, within the mode of farce, to parody and transform incidents, relationships and motifs previously encountered in a Hetton context. The novel begins to exercise ironies upon its own form and content, rather than simply upon Tony, and one is led to understand his own mythical order, and that of the orderly novel, as mutually dependent. The parallels begin with a detail of Milly's daughter Winnie - "One gentleman gave her a fairy-cycle for Christmas. She fell off and cut her knee" (132). Tony's son was given the horse Thunderclap by his uncle as a birthday present; his accident was rather more serious, and the comic diminishment is important. The child's

insistence on bathing recalls John Andrew's eagerness to ride - the public opinion is that Tony has 'no business to be trusted with children'. 'Unnatural beast' (144). The term 'beast, within the animal system the novel has developed, is inappropriate to Tony, and signals an arbitrariness that threatens that system. Similarly, Winnie 'won't be any trouble - she's got her puzzle' (133). One recalls Mrs. Rattery, 'an easy guest to entertain' (98) who can be left to her cards for hours. The reader fails to place the two characters in any significant relation, and his confidence in the neat verbal correspondence suffers. The Hetton parallels continue. The mistress Brenda has planned for Tony was Jenny, whom he had called a 'joke-woman' (89). Instead he has Milly (and again there is the like sound) -

'Cheer up,' said Milly. 'You have a tongue sandwich.  
That'll make you talk.'  
'Sorry, am I being a bore?'  
'I was only joking.' (138)

The weather during both Jenny's weekend and this is bad; here too the building 'seemed full of weekend visitors' (138). The parallels with the Hetton situation are insistent but once established they become reversed. Tony, a detective predicts, will be glad when Monday comes. Milly invades Brenda's own myth; Tony was always absent from this ceremony at Hetton - 'Step by step, with her hand on his arm, they descended the staircase into the bright hall below' (137). At the party Tony 'wondered whether he was as amiable when people he did not know were brought over unexpectedly to Hetton' (140); we recall his treatment of Beaver - 'Now I've behaved inhospitably to that young man again' (31). These two occasions are then immediately compared again; on the earlier one Tony has denied Brenda's comment that Beaver was 'quite like us in some ways' - 'He's not like me' (35). Now he can only reply 'Yes' to Dan's remark that Milly

"attracts quite a different type from the other girls. People like you and me" (140). The effect of all these reversed and parody-allusions works alongside the alteration in the overall tenor of the writing. The tone of high farce is quite new to the novel, and recalls the manner of Vile Bodies; it anticipates Yorke's remarks on the Demerara trip - '(not) real at all . . . so fantastic that it throws the rest out of proportion . . . Aren't you mixing two things together? . . .'<sup>1</sup> Now Tony reflects that

no outrageous circumstance in which he found himself, no new, mad thing brought to his notice, could add a jot to the all-encompassing chaos that shrieked about his ears. (137-138)

This chaos in Tony's world is precisely paralleled by the degeneration into farce, the fragmentation and comic reorganization of the novel's ingredients. For the first time, Tony is made to reflect on his own need for order, in terms expressing its fictional outline -

He could not prevent himself, when alone, from rehearsing over and over in his mind all that had happened . . . searching for clues he had missed at the time . . . re-living scene after scene . . . (132; my emphasis)

The terms of fiction also occur later in the chapter; Milly describes Tony as 'Love's young dream' (143); Winnie, whom Jock calls 'The Awful Child of Popular Fiction', 'sustained the part . . . knew the classic routine thoroughly, (the) alarming devices' (134). Both Tony and his novel are thus becoming increasingly explicit in their admissions of fictional status. Aware of how 'phantasmagoric and even gruesome . . . the situation might seem', Tony insists on securing roles for Milly and himself -

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1 Sykes, Op. Cit., p. 142.



he was nevertheless a host, so that he knocked at the communicating door and passed with a calm manner into his guest's room; (137)

Like Milly's best frock, in his dinner jacket Tony is 'once more in a uniform, reporting for duty, a legionary ordered for active service . . .' (137). The elaborated and bizarre simile underlines the artificiality of these roles; reading of Tony 'filling his cigar case before the mirror', one recalls Beaver's dressing table, on whose surface 'in symmetrical order' were arranged his father's belongings,

ivory, brass bound, covered in pigskin, crested and gold mounted . . . racing flasks and hunting flasks, cigar cases, tobacco jars . . . (8)

Tony's role, like his cigar case, is thus placed within this old and obsolete order, or articles 'brass bound', 'covered', 'crested', 'mounted'. These objects were irrelevant to Beaver, to the lightweight, formless modernity he symbolized, and now Tony is fighting to retain them -

it was as though the whole reasonable and decent constitution of things, the sum of all he had experienced or learned to expect, were an inconspicuous, inconsiderate object mislaid somewhere on the dressing table. (137)

Even as Tony is making his defence, his actions are being made the stuff of other fictions, equally divorced from any reality. He finds it 'curious to reflect that this (i.e. the arranged breakfast) will be described in the papers as intimacy' (144), but his own behaviour with Winnie scandalises the holidaymakers and 'confirmed the view of human nature derived from the weekly newspapers which they had all been reading that morning' (144). The circularity of this, that newspapers fabricate a warped reality that people's behaviour then authenticates,

supports the idea of role-playing and of a fictionally constructed world that have been stressed in the chapter.

Here the remark is immediately followed by Brenda's warped evidence for the divorce court; again we have a fiction, a text which has superseded any long-lost truth, and which Brenda, like an actress learning lines, must 'get . . . clear' in her mind (144).

The brief chapter in Brighton is an important anticipation of the final, overtly fantastical episode in the jungle, as the form and cohesion of the novel alike come under pressure. Tony's myth and the novel's own former orderliness are being attacked as a single target, their contrived natures increasingly stressed through techniques less equivocably artificial - hence the adoption of farce.

A Handful of Dust is probably best remembered for its bizarre conclusion, which leaves Tony a prisoner of the menacing Mr. Todd, doomed to an endless reading of Dickens. Henry Yorke was appalled.

I was terrified towards the end by thinking you would let him die of fever which to my mind would have been false, but what you did to him was far far worse. It seemed manufactured and not real.

The last remark demonstrates clearly Yorke's refusal to abandon his expectations of a 'realistic' narrative, yet in this same letter he has described the conclusion as 'phantasy' without supposing that this might be precisely the effect worked for. The sea journey and jungle trek take Tony far from Hetton and far from the characters and situation he, and we, are familiar with. The rigid lines of the plot are now lost - like Yorke we cannot now guess what may happen next; there are

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1 Sykes, Op. Cit., p. 142.

several underlinings of this lost order.

'Any idea how many times round the deck make a mile?'  
'None, I'm afraid,' said Tony. 'But I should think  
you must have walked a great distance.' (153)

This exchange opens the jungle chapter, a neat anticipation of Tony's own hopeless wanderings through the jungle, when he and Messinger will talk 'mostly about the number of miles they had done that day' (181). The narrative is robbed of direction in other ways - most literally of course in their getting lost.

Next day they waded through four streams at intervals of two miles, running alternatively north and south. The chart began to have a mythical appearance. (180)

Their progress becomes desultory and random -

the craft . . . was heavy to steer and they made slow progress, contenting themselves, for the most part, with keeping end on, and drifting with the current.

Sometimes they came to a stretch of water scattered with fallen petals and floated among them, moving scarcely less slowly than they . . . (192)

A corollary of this loss of direction is Tony's gradual loss of grip on time. As noted, his concern for the exact time was one endorsed by the novel itself, adding to the structure's confident form. As that structure now breaks down, so Tony struggles to maintain at least this order.

'Half-past eight' thought Tony. 'In London they are just beginning to collect for dinner . . .!' Then, after another bout of scratching, it occurred to Tony that it was not half-past eight in England. There was five hours' difference in time. They had altered their watches daily on the voyage out. Which way? It ought to be easy to work out. The sun rose in the east . . . (170-171)

This struggle is ridiculed; the entire irrelevance of such matters now is neatly expressed - 'Ten o'clock on the river Waurupang was question time at Westminster' (175). The interpolated scenes in London bring to a head the animal metaphor that has operated throughout the novel. As the narrative slows and takes on a simplicity and directness, shedding its complicated 'realism', so this metaphor reaches its most elementary point; the beasts that were figures of speech are now present in fact. The parallels of Brenda's situation are similarly explicit. No longer in fashion, her myth dissolves and like Tony she is abandoned. She is sure Tony 'can't possibly have meant to leave me stranded like this' but like him has to go 'out alone in the sunshine' (198-199). She too is immobilized, short of food, and spends her time 'reading a biography of Nelson that had lately appeared; it was very long and would keep her going well into the night' (180). The parallels are exaggerated in this manner; she and Tony break into tears in consecutive passages. Such directness is a feature of the technique now, as earlier ideas are simplified. Tony's isolation had been presented in terms of Brenda's private language -

they had the habit of lapsing into a jargon of their own which Tony did not understand . . . a thieves' slang. (80)

and through her use of technicalities - 'Bimetallism, you know' (90). Now it is simply a question of different languages; Messinger

addressed the woman in Wapishiana. She looked at him for the first time. Her brown, Mongol face was perfectly blank, devoid alike of comprehension and curiosity. (173-174)

With the onset of Tony's fever this abandoning or simplifying of the order and the complexity of the narrative reaches a climax. In his

delirium, he brings together in a chaotic amalgam images, characters and metaphors that have previously made up the fabric of Yorke's 'convincing' and 'possible' world - the council meetings, the hunts, the Shameless Blonde, the Green Line buses. The novel has ceased to be one of those imaged in Vile Bodies as a new car, 'bought all screwed up and painted . . . maintaining (an) essential identity'.<sup>1</sup> The various screws and painted parts are here being whirled together. The babble of voices in debate might be taken from Alice in Wonderland, and one recalls the Carroll quotation prefacing Vile Bodies, 'I hope you don't suppose those are tears?'<sup>2</sup> The reality of all these ingredients is similarly in doubt as they are flung together, as if to be finally and impatiently dismissed as illusory. Tony is left free to relish his Hetton myth in its purest, because most delirious, state.

Tony saw beyond the trees the ramparts and battle-  
ment of the City . . . From the turret of the gate-  
house a heraldic banner floated in the tropic breeze  
. . . The gates were before him and trumpets were  
sounding along the walls . . . (203)

Having thrown off its former shape, the narrative now conducts Tony to his apposite fate. Mr. Todd is a grotesque parody of his own condition, existing on the boundary of fiction and real life - 'I am quite absorbed in the book' (212) - and clearly a close relation, in his disguised menace, of Sweeney Todd. The framing of the chapter by Todd's references to his medicines - 'There is medicine for everything in the forest . . . (207) 'the forest has remedies for everything' (216), the clever use of the grave and cross, and of Tony's wristwatch, all lend the chapter a neat circular form; Tony is an easy victim of Mr. Todd's little plot, and of his own daydreaming. This last is superseded by Todd's fiction now.

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1 Evelyn Waugh, Vile Bodies (1930), Penguin Edition, 1978, p. 161.

2 Ibid., preface.

(Tony) began to narrate to himself incidents of his homecoming - . . . Darling, you've been much longer than you said. I quite thought you were lost . . .

And then Mr. Todd interrupted. 'May I trouble you to read that passage again? It is one I particularly enjoy.' (214-215)

Tony's last hope of order, his reliance upon time, is similarly overcome.

The chapter set in Todd's camp frequently avoids this precision -

One day while Mr. Todd was engaged in filling some cartridges . . . (204)

At first, days of lucidity alternated with delirium . . . (207)

During the early days of his convalescence . . . (208)

One day, running his thumb through the pages . . . (211)

'A month . . . two months . . .' (212)

Weeks passed hopelessly. (213)

Tony's only chance of rescue is taken from him with his wristwatch; its loss confirms his final abandonment, and his grip on time as a saving order is broken in this neat metaphor. He is now the prisoner of someone else's fiction, someone more obviously insane than he was in holding his. Unlike Tony however, Mr. Todd protects his fiction from the animals; his books are

tied up with rag, palm leaf and raw hide.

'It has been hard to keep out the worms and ants . . .'

He unwrapped the nearest parcel and handed down a calf-bound book . . . (209)

The chapter has the simplicity and vividness of parable, and of course offers the ultimate criticism of Tony's deranged absorption in the Hetton myth. In a related sense it comments frankly on the 'realistic' novel it has superseded. Like Hamlet, Mr. Todd is able to rationalise on the nature of the fiction - 'so many characters, so many changes of

scene, so many words . . .' (209). Tony himself is reduced to simply a name, on the piece of paper he smuggles out - rather like Chastity, reduced to a number at the close of Vile Bodies. The chapter ends with Mr. Todd offering a remark that, like the headlines of Joyce's Ulysses, sabotages any attempt to read the text as more than words, to be seriously involved -

'There are passages in that book I can never hear without the temptation to weep.' (217)

A Handful of Dust presents the destruction of Tony's myth by performing a parallel disintegration of its own highly artificial structure. What is often accepted as a realistic novel is made to subside through farce into exotic fantasy, its conclusion a cruel parody of the circumstances in which Tony has attempted to live. The mythical properties of the tale's form and content are together exposed as naive and fragile, both constructs bearing no true relation to any 'real life'. However, the degree to which the reader's sympathies are allied to these ideals ensures that one regrets the destruction of the myths, both the mythical order of Hetton and the novel's mythical shaping of life into a secure literary structure.

No brief account of A Handful of Dust can possibly do justice to the whole performance. Here little attention has been paid to the specific satires of the novel, and less to the humour. However, by placing the novel alongside Vile Bodies one can discover an interesting development in the approach to fictional orderings. The earlier novel sought without success a natural order in events, and was able to develop no single confident approach to storytelling; its art was disordered by the chaos of contingent experience. In A Handful of Dust a fictional order is carefully developed and imposed upon this experience. An artistic

pattern is substituted for the chaos, only to be overthrown just as Tony's private patterns are overthrown; neither is accepted as an adequate response to what Waugh again presents as a predatory and formless modern experience. A Handful of Dust, through its form, approaches from a different direction the same problem broached in Vile Bodies; that of discovering a means of exploring an incoherent modern situation without lapsing into a similar incoherence. The support it draws from a purposive form and inherited models is finally found too constricting, and, like Vile Bodies, the novel concludes in the admission of its arbitrary limits; the hero of the book reading of the heroes of other books.



- III -

SCOOP

WORK SUSPENDED

PUT OUT MORE FLAGS

## SCOOP

Scoop is simultaneously one of the most read and least discussed of Waugh's novels - perhaps only Brideshead Revisited attracts more readers.

Critics have excused their reluctance to expose Scoop to literary critical debate on grounds of its slightness or simplicity, and while this restraint is understandable there is some risk of the novel being undersold through excessive caution. Waugh's biographer writes of Scoop as a 'wild Nonesuch Palace of Foolery before which criticism had to be silent or itself appear ridiculous. Scoop is as farcical as Decline and Fall.'<sup>1</sup> The notion of farce by its nature precluding critical discussion will not stand up; Trimmer's 'Operation Popgun' in Officers and Gentlemen, is at once farcical and serious. Even were this not so, and farce were mere farce, its presence in Scoop should invite rather than deter discussion, for it ensures that the novel approaches the matter common to Waugh's fiction from a unique direction. The reader is allowed around another side of the interest, as it were. Ridicule seems a risk it is reasonable to run.

There follows the question of what one takes to be the novel's subject; it has been held to fail through being about things which no longer matter, and through not being about things which do. Thus Carens regrets that 'Scoop's wild improbabilities are too distant from the real world to ring true . . . Waugh seems to have lost contact with the issues of the conflict taking place in the thirties'<sup>2</sup>, while for Sykes the novel has dated 'in the perjorative sense' because Abyssinia is no longer 'a major preoccupation' - had indeed already ceased to be that in 1938. Still

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1 Christopher Sykes, Evelyn Waugh: A Biography, (1975) 1978, p. 247.

2 J. F. Carens, The Satiric Art of Evelyn Waugh, Seattle, 1966, p. 148.

more obsolete in Sykes' opinion is what he takes the novel's running joke about Stanley Baldwin, 'irresistably funny at the time' but since faded.<sup>1</sup> DeVitis too has no doubts that the novel is at least 'loosely' allegorical, following 'the pattern of the Italian invasion into Ethiopia' and satirising the question 'of Communist, Fascist and imperialist aggression.'<sup>2</sup> All of this seems beside the point, and it is arguable that the novel can only come to seem less slight as the immediate context of its writing recedes. As political satire it is no doubt feeble stuff; Waugh had the feeblest of interest in politics, and the Nazi and Communist elements in the narrative are really quite small. It is the nature, not the subject, of the scoop which interests, and neither necessary nor desirable that Ishmaelia be supposed Ethiopia. The identification must always have devalued the novel - younger commentators on Scoop are noticeably less apologetic than critics personally closer to the historical events.

Scoop the novel about newspapers is taken to be self evident; all agree that this element of the story is completely successful, very funny, all too true and so forth. Yet it is precisely here that the novel's serious argument is located, for it is a widening consideration of the kind of things newspapers do, as writing, that forms the matter of Scoop, and allows one to see how this novel connects with the rest of Waugh's canon.

I want to suggest that the newspaper joke of Scoop serves more than the immediate satirical end. That joke of course is the journalist's

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1 Op. Cit., p. 246. For Stopp, Mr. Baldwin is 'clearly . . . an imaginative reconstruction' of the M. Leblanc who appeared in Remote People (Evelyn Waugh: Portrait of an Artist, 1958, p. 87.); Carens, however, derives him from 'a certain Mr. Rickett', apparently an historical agent responsible for British-American oil rights in Ethiopia (Op. Cit., p. 144).

2 A. A. DeVitis, Roman Holiday, 1958, p. 34.

readiness to invent a story where none exists, scaling up to the newspaper proprietor's determination in advance of a desirable course for history. Variations on this joke punctuate the novel, from the 'Beast Policy for the war' ('Remember that the Patriots are in the right and are going to win')<sup>1</sup>, through Corker's exposition of the 'luscious, detailed inventions that composed contemporary history' (66), to the novice Bates, whose training is 'inventing imaginary news' (188). All this is immediately diverting but the joke carries further. Already, in Vile Bodies, Waugh had indicated some parallels between the journalist and the novelist, with Adam Symes, as gossip-columnist, demonstrating all the former's ruthlessly confident invention in ironic contrast to his own narrator's honest helplessness. With this cue one can draw from Scoop's running joke consequences for the practice of fiction. Scoop's journalists enact the novelist's role at its purest limit, with story paramount and engagement with events at a minimum. Where narrative advantage, in terms of shapeliness, excitement or political colour, can be won by overriding facts, the writer does not hesitate. Shumble's Soviet agent did not merely pre-empt William's story, but constituted, with his false beard, one altogether superior, 'better than yours all round' in spite of his bogusness (102). Waugh locates and enhances in the journalist an extreme independence, to equate with that of the novelist, each operating within a self-sustaining and enclosed system. The novel is littered with examples of language out on its own. The rival Ishmaelian consul-generals vie in the passion of their oratory, but neither are true Ishmaelites, neither has even visited the country.

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1 Scoop, (1938), 1961 Penguin reprint, p. 42.

William sat down. The consul-general turned off the music and began to talk.

'The patriotic cause in Ishmaelia,' he said, 'is the cause of the coloured man and of the proletariat throughout the world. The Ishmaelite worker . . .'  
At length he paused and wiped the line of froth from his lips.

'I came about a visa,' said William diffidently.

'Oh,' said the consul-general, turning on the radio once more. 'There's fifty pounds deposit and a form to fill in.' (50)

Language here is a continuum of music, formalised, available, dispensed on request, essentially disengaged from anything outside itself. The nature of the Political Address is well understood by the Ishmaelian natives, who enjoy the performance for itself and do not suppose the content in any way relevant.

Oratory pleased them . . . They liked the human voice in all its aspects, most particularly when it was exerted in sustained athletic effort . . . They had been agreeably surprised to learn that the Jacksons had that morning all been sent to prison; now, it would be a treat to see them all again. As long as something, good or ill, was happening to the Jacksons, the Ishmaelites felt an intelligent interest in politics. (175-177)

The same quality of remoteness informs Mr. Salter's exposition of the Ishmaelian situation. The passage has been read as political satire, insofar as it makes no distinction between communist and fascist.

'You see, they are all Negroes. And the Fascists won't be called black because of their racial pride, so they are called White after the White Russians. And the Bolsheviks want to be called black because of their racial pride. So when you say black you mean red, and when you mean red you say white and when the party who call themselves black say traitors they mean what we call blacks, but what we mean when we say traitors I really couldn't tell you.' (43)

Once again a greater interest lies beyond the apparent satire. The war correspondent's prime need is a pair of clearly distinguished combatants;

white/black is a suitable system. What the terms might denote is of little interest - in any event the Patriots will win. William has no idea whom the war is between, and Mr. Salter very little; 'Oh, I don't know that. That's Policy, you see. Its nothing to do with me.' (43). The crucial quality of Salter's exposition is the relativity of his terms. An inevitable consequence of the newspaper's enclosed nature is the absence of any fixed points, real values. ('Traitor', therefore, can mean nothing to Salter). Lord Copper's rival magnate, owner of the Brute, is Lord Zinc; as here presented by Waugh, fiction approximates to a form of algebra, where x and y might serve as aptly as white and black, Copper and Zinc, Beast and Brute.<sup>1</sup> With his newspaper's reportage conforming to policy, and this in turn to his personal inclination, Lord Copper is finally the author and inhabitant of his own reality; Mr. Salter must use 'Up to a point, Lord Copper' because his master cannot, in the nature of things, be wrong. A negative is irrelevant. The remoteness of this reality is exposed at various points. Early in the novel Lord Copper attends Julia Stitch's luncheon, for once uneasy, unrecognisable, 'a stranger in these parts'. Later he proves unable to draw a cow -

He tried it one way, he tried it the other; both looked equally unconvincing; he tried different types of ear - tiny, feline triangles, asinine tufts of hair and gristle, even, in desperation, drooping flaps remembered from a guinea-pig . . .  
(179)

The world is distressingly various, not least in its types of ear, and Lord Copper cannot operate there. Real life, sometimes intractable,

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<sup>1</sup> The parallels between Waugh's thesis and Saussure's classical description of language as a system of arbitrary signs are interesting. Waugh's fictional procedures are always more 'modern' than he himself would ever allow.

threatens the writer by resisting his effort to discipline and transform it into simple and single narrative. Twice within three pages employees of the Beast are brought thus to despair, first when Corker and Pigge are stranded en route to a hot story at the Fascist headquarters.

Corker surveyed the barren landscape and the gathering storm clouds, the mud-bound lorry, the heap of crapulous black servants, the pasty and hopeless face of Pigge, the glass of soda-water and the jagged tin of fish.

'It makes one despair of human nature,' he said again.

(136)

The journalist's impartial eye scans all the available ingredients, from storm clouds to jagged tin, in search of the Story, but they remain several and unconnected, merely and accidentally present. Back in London the first leader-writer struggles to turn William's telegrams into copy.

He gazed out of the window; it opened on a tiled, resonant well; he gazed at a dozen drain pipes; he gazed straight into the office opposite where the Art Editor was having tea; he gazed up to the little patch of sky and down to the concrete depths where a mechanic was washing his neck at a cold tap; he gazed with eyes of despair.

'I have to denounce the vascillation of the government in the strongest terms,' he said. 'They fiddle while Ishmaelia burns. A spark is set to the corner-stone of civilisation which will shake its roots like a chilling breath. That's what I've got to say, and all I know is that Boot is safe and well and that the weather is improving . . .'

(139)

The distance between the thrilling, if senseless, phrases of the first leader and the inert panorama before its writer's eyes is enormous.

Waugh frequently employs a 'neutral' list to this effect, mocking the impulse to locate connectedness and meaning - the impulse to narrate.

Like Corker, the observer registers all the ingredients equally and cannot find in them the pattern of significance needed to construct the story his editor demands. This is the fear, the 'despair' that surrounds the

novel as it surrounds the Beast. William's wonderful scoop is engineered by his narrator as flawlessly as is the Patriot's victory by Copper; it constitutes the 'Waugh Policy for the Novel' (Remember that William is in the right and is going to win). But the Byzantine fantasies of Copper House contain concrete depths where mechanics wash their necks; the maternal rodents of William's column are in truth hunted by owls . . . Copper's world and our narrator's are exclusive, and what they exclude threatens to invade.

The sense of dissociation implicit in the opening section's account of the newspaper world has been held to meet its counter in the novel's second section. The description of Boot Magna Hall constitutes a kind of second beginning to Scoop, for Carens a portrayal of 'blissful seclusion . . . security . . . a positive and affirmative standard.'<sup>1</sup>

Other commentators have echoed Carens' judgements, and while most appreciate the limited nature of Boot Magna's affirmation, there is generally too prompt an imposition on Scoop's argument of some simple city/country division. A closer reading of the description qualifies this assumption.

Uncle Theodore's mournful song, 'Change and decay in all round I see' frames the two-page account of Boot Magna Hall and its inmates, very firmly setting the tone. The first main paragraph is solely concerned with the estate trees, heavily metaphorical in their age and feebleness. The next is less frequently discussed and rather more interesting.

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1 Op. Cit., passim.



The lake was moved by strange tides. Sometimes, as at the present moment, it sank to a single, opaque pool in a wilderness of mud and rushes; sometimes it rose and inundated five acres of pasture. There had once been an old man in one of the lodges who understood the workings of the water system; there were sluice-gates hidden among the reeds, and manholes, dotted about in places known only to him, furnished with taps and cocks; that man had been able to control an ornamental cascade and draw a lofty jet of water from the mouth of the dolphin on the South terrace. But he had been in his grave fifteen years and the secret had died with him. (17)

The idea of a lost relation which characterised the newspaper world persists in the countryside. A time when man still lived within his natural environment is only remembered; that man is fifteen years dead, and no one now recalls how it was done, where to find the sluice-gates and manholes. The movements of the lake are now independent, a mystery to the hall's occupants, who must merely endure the intermittent flooding. All of this is fully as symbolic as the trees' thin and slow-running sap. Man's broken relation with nature is then echoed in other collapsed orders. The third paragraph details the Boot family and its retainers. The sequence of listed names only emphasises the lack of actual hierarchy within the family -

There were in the direct line: William who owned the house and estate, William's sister Priscilla who claimed to own the horses, William's widowed mother who owned the contents of the house and exercised ill-defined rights over the flower garden, and William's widowed grandmother who was said to own 'the money'. (17-18)

William, notional head of the family, has the least prestige or control; these are in other and various hands. The richest occupant is Nannie Bloggs, one of ten more or less invalid servants whose well-being is of first importance in the domestic organisation. The arrangements are perverse and chaotic; Uncle Bernard, ironically, is absorbed in tracing the Boot pedigree within a household where precedence and natural order have collapsed. Widowhood is a state nicely expressing the sense of

separation and gradual enfeeblement central to the description. The framed introduction disperses any vision of Boot Magna Hall as a rural, paradisaical alternative to the madness of city life, more briefly sketched in the novel's opening pages. It follows that William should be less than authentic as the Countryman.

His job as author of Lush Places had been passed on to him by the widow on the death of its previous holder, the Rector of Boot Magna. He had carefully modelled his style on the late Rector's, at first painfully, now almost without effort. The work was of the utmost importance to him: he was paid a guinea a time and it gave him the best possible excuse for remaining uninterruptedly in the country.  
(20)

William is no man of the land. His job and style are alike inherited, and constitute only an excuse for avoiding the atrocious city. His column is 'lyrical but wholly accurate' (20), the accuracy owed rather to the encyclopaedia and head keeper than to 'the observations of a lifetime' - and the lyricism, of course, to the previous holder. William is another of Waugh's journalists, his style as manufactured as the first leader-writer's, his relation to the countryside as tenuous as Corker's to the war. True Nature is consistently hostile in Scoop, scarcely as amenable as William's column suggests; it is, rather, the periodic inundation, Bannister's 'Pet - but far from tame - cheetah' (98-99), Frau Dressler's ferocious goat. Modern man can only return the hostility, Bannister collecting eggs and skins, and Priscilla Boot filling her bedroom with 'slots of deer, brushes of foxes, pads of otters, a horse's hoof, and other animal trophies' (203). Here Mr. Salter must sleep, the family dog growling beneath his bed. Already nettled, and chased by cattle and dogs, Mr. Salter has had his ideas of the countryside confirmed -

. . . there was something unEnglish and not quite right about 'the country', with its solitude and self-sufficiency, its bloody recreations, its darkness and silence and sudden, inexplicable noises; the kind of place where you never knew from one minute to the next that you might not be tossed by a bull or pitch-forked by a yokel, or rolled over and broken up by a pack of hounds. (27)<sup>1</sup>

The paper Salter edits, the column William writes, eventually the novel of which both are part, constitute the alternative, written reality to be turned to once a true, organic relation with the world has been lost. To suppose Boot Magna Hall a genuine alternative to the atrocious city is to misread the novel. The modern disruption is more complete than that.

Scoop is a novel full of blockages, interruptions, delay. The disjunctions I have described are reflected in a story whose forward progress is consistently balked; movement from one sphere to the next is torturously difficult, a consequence of the enclosed systems into which modern experience divides and subdivides. On the most literal level, physical movement is characterised by the London traffic jams, by Corker's stranded lorry and the 'elaborate household machinery' set in motion to effect William's departure from Boot Magna Hall (22); his grandmother fully expects to have died before his return. Travel is most hampered by those facilities designed to ease one's progress; passports have to be found

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<sup>1</sup> The novel's language maintains the spirit of animal aggression. The navvies are 'rending' the road in search of the tubes that 'controlled the life of the city' (10); William is 'bayed on all sides' by the Paris customs officers (53), Julia 'finally (run) . . . to earth' by John Boot (72). The papers at Boot Magna Hall are 'brought by the butcher, often blotched with red' and return from the sickroom 'hopelessly mutilated' (20).

and repeatedly stamped, luggage packed and unpacked, carried in huge quantities but ever incomplete -

when they were crossing the fiery coastal plain, there had been no ice; on the second night, in the bush, no mosquito nets; on the third night, in the mountains, no blankets . . . (83)

In Ishmaelia taxis are a prime means of getting lost, and maps something over which William falls asleep. Already in London an atlas has expressed figuratively the gulf between William and his editor.

William took a cigarette. He and Mr. Salter sat opposite one another. Between them, on the desk, lay an open atlas in which Mr. Salter had been vainly trying to find Reykjavik . . . (27)

The atlas, seemingly a guide, serves only to divide further; neither is able to negotiate its pages, to find Reykjavik. Conversation in Scoop is as arduous as travel. William and Mr. Salter field complimentary misconceptions, about journalists and countrymen respectively; the resulting exchange is scarcely a dialogue. Copper House itself is filled with all the spurious movement of Joyce's earlier newspaper office, in the 'Aeolus' episode of Ulysees.

Six lifts seemed to be in perpetual motion; with dazzling frequency their doors flew upon to reveal now left, now right, now two or three at a time, like driven game, a series of girls in Caucasian uniform. 'Going up,' they cried in Punch-and-Judy accents and, before anyone could enter, snapped their doors and disappeared from view. A hundred or so men and women of all ranks and ages passed before William's eyes. (25)

Amid all this sits the concierge, a source of information sealed in a 'plate-glass enclosure' and only approachable via 'a small vent in his tank' and a completed form (25). Communication throughout the novel, from

the Boot's dining table to the Press Association meetings, is characterised by dissent and miscomprehension. Language itself forms a barrier; 'We paid Professor Jellaby thirty guineas for the feature article and there's not a word in it one can understand' (15). The newspaper scoop everyone seeks is not an act of communication, of information and accuracy; it is other qualities, of novelty, splash, colour, that make news -

News is what a chap who doesn't care much about anything wants to read. And it's only news until he's read it. After that it's dead. We're paid to supply news. If someone else has sent a story before us, our story isn't news. Of course there's colour. Colour is just a lot of bulls-eyes about nothing . . .  
(66)

The 'particularly high-class style' (16) for which William is recommended is just such bull's-eyes; as communication it is all but incomprehensible -

"Feather-footed through the splashy fen passes the questing vole" . . . would that be it?'  
'Yes,' said the Managing Editor. 'That must be good style. At least it doesn't sound like anything else to me . . .' (16)

In its own physical structure Scoop reproduces the sense of blockage and interruption which informs the narrative and which as ever focuses at last upon the nature of writing. Scoop is probably the most fragmented, in its textual organization, of all Waugh's novels - which set high standards in this. The novel's three Books each fall firstly into parts numbered in written capitals, then into smaller sections under arabic numbers, and, finally, into unnumbered sub-sections announced by an omitted line. The Penguin edition, of 210 pages, thus falls into a total of 128 separate pieces, yielding for each an average length of scarcely more than one and a half pages; in practice, one in three of the passages is not more than three quarters of a page. This is clearly an extreme but appropriate format for a novel expressing geographic and intellectual division. The

reading experience is multiple and fragmented; one struggles with William toward Ishmaelia, with Mr. Salter toward Boot Magna Hall, and so forth. In addition, and in a sense in contrast, the novel as a written thing receives emphasis in these sub-divisions, as the mechanics of composition are paraded. Many of the interruptions are needless, their arbitrariness a signal of Waugh's lofty editorship. The narrative breaks which enact division are equally enacting his intervention. In this Waugh's manner is again strikingly modern - short textual divisions, foregrounding the text, are a very typical post-modernist device.

Scoop lays emphasis, then, upon disengagement and dislocation, as the characteristic qualities of modern experience - but William still achieves his scoop. The sureness with which he is propelled to his triumph is the more striking for the attendant problems; sheer ingenuity of plot is therefore foregrounded, as Sykes notes in likening the novel to an eighteenth-century farce.<sup>1</sup> The uncamouflaged presence of the narrator is then reinforced by the inclusion in Scoop of several characters clearly invested with a large degree of independence, emancipated from the run of mere actors. In his consideration of Scoop as a fairy tale, Alain Elayac has identified Julia Stitch as a 'pagan goddess', her room as a magic cavern, and certainly she represents a potent agency in the novel, hedged with terms such as 'preternatural' and 'transformed' (12).<sup>2</sup> Her husband's inability to put on his own coat serves as direct contrast to Julia's multitude of talents.

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1 Op. Cit., p. 247.

2 "Technique and Meaning in Scoop: Is Scoop a Modern Fairy Tale?", The Evelyn Waugh Newsletter, VI (1972), 1-8.

From high overhead, down the majestic curves of the great staircase, came a small but preternaturally resonant voice . . . So Stitch went out to the Ministry of Imperial Defence and John went up to see Julia. (6)

The exaggerated balance of the phrasing draws the contrast and makes it clear where the power really lies. Julia's detachment from the novel is further expressed in an idle, connoisseur's interest in stories in themselves -

'You can come and buy carpets with me; I've found a new shop in Bethnal Green, kept by a very interesting Jew who speaks no English; the most extraordinary things keep happening to his sister . . .'  
' . . . Poor John. I wonder what went wrong . . . I like the bit about the pig very much.'  
(7, 73)

Julia's part in the action is minimal, the meddling of some bored minor deity in the affairs of men. The Jew's sister, and the pig, are at least as interesting as John Boot's misadventures.

A second figure casually but crucially involved in the story is William's schoolfriend Bannister, now British Vice-Consul in Ishmaelia. He too can appreciate the humour of the main action.

'What the hell are you doing here?' said the Vice-Consul.  
'I'm supposed to be a journalist.'  
'God, how funny. Come to dinner?' (96)

Bannister is present in Scoop chiefly in order that he may casually dismiss, in a single paragraph, the whole matter of the novel -

'What's in the sack, anyway?' He opened it and examined the stones. 'Yes,' he said, 'just what I expected - gold ore. The mountains in the West are stiff with it. We knew it was bound to cause international trouble sooner or later. There have been two companies after a mineral concession - German and Russian . . .' (154)

Any idea that the novel was about a trade war has to be abandoned in the face of Bannister's nonchalant dismissal of the apparent chief interest. That is no more the subject of the novel than it is of Corker's despatches, and once again the novelist and journalist have to be seen as identical in their production of story; 'Stones £20' is an entirely ironical expression of the novel's concern. For Bannister as for Julia the action of Scoop is of only passing interest.

The third emancipated figure is of course Mr. Baldwin, often regarded by critics wishing Scoop were a true satire on political intrigue as a regrettable excess; P. A. Doyle feels that Baldwin 'jolts probability to such a degree . . . that even Waugh is not able to carry off such authorial acrobatics successfully'.<sup>1</sup> In the sense of performance and extravagance, acrobatic is precisely the word to account for Baldwin. He is injected into the story at a point when the narrative has reached a dead stop, the Soviets in control, Kä'tchen departed, the lesser scoop achieved. William's prayer at this point is to the great crested grebe, to the spirit of Lush Places already understood as nonsense, unreal, merely written - and so of course Baldwin, the answer to that prayer, is equally nonsensical, equally a manifestation of writing, plot, magical invention. His nature is deliberately total and non-specific, so that he might stand for all kinds of invention; 'It is a convenient name,' he explained. 'Non-committal, British and above all easily memorable . . .'  
(167). Baldwin is extravagantly capable. He travels with ease, plays expert ping-pong, grows perfect vines, speaks faultlessly in five or six languages. The negative is as irrelevant to him as to Lord Copper. Baldwin's is the larger empire; there is clearly no point in a plot mechanism whose powers are restricted, and so Baldwin's sway is total.

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1 Evelyn Waugh: A Critical Essay, New York, 1969, p. 23.



Carens is right to point out that the 'might exerted by Mr. Baldwin differs only in degree, and not in kind, from the force employed by Benito' and that what Mr. Baldwin represents, both as capitalist-imperialist and as narrative device, hardly amounts to a 'moral alternative' one might celebrate. His insistence on Scoop-the-political-satire sets Carens problems which do not arise in a less pointed interpretation of the novel.<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Baldwin, and the filmic conclusion of 'Stones £20', clearly represent only the most explicit mechanisms in a novel freely exposing its own operation - William himself, after all, is first discovered within the pages of the Beast. When Salter closes the first section of the novel with the reflection, 'Funny the chief wanting to send him to Ishmaelia' (16) he is only predicting Bannister's and our own amusement. Julia's rescue from the gentlemen's lavatory constitutes just the 'very nice little story' William's colleague supposes, and an anticipation of William's real adventure - 'simply a case of mistaken identity'. The narrator's flaunted control ensures that every article in William's apparently ludicrous baggage finally comes into its own, down to canoe and Christmas dinner. William himself can find no use for the cleft sticks, but his narrator can at last incorporate even these -

A telegraph boy was loafing about the platform uttering monotonous, monosyllabic, plaintive, gull-like cries which, in William's disturbed mind, sounded like 'Boot. Boot. Boot.'. William turned guiltily towards him; he bore a cardboard notice, stuck, by a felicitous stroke of fancy, into a cleft stick . . . (185)

The same authority can interfere, when convenient, with maxims it has already drawn; thus Frau Dressler's murderous goat eventually breaks

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1 Op. Cit., p. 148.

loose to butt, not William or Kätchen, but the threatening 'welter-weight champion of the Adventist University of Alabama' (153). The bloody hostility of the natural world has been opportunely diverted; the goat obligingly eats the Soviet manifesto. The same kind of ostentation is occurring at the immediate, linguistic, level when we read that 'Corker's face, still brightly patterned, was, metaphorically, a blank' (68), or that Sir Jocelyn's reputation for early rising was partly metaphorical, partly false, and in any case wholly relative, for journalists are as a rule late risers' (88). In each case the gap between the literal fact and the procedures of expression is foregrounded. In real life the goat would probably attack William too; in actual fact Corker's face is anything but a blank. The extravagances of Scoop are only an extension of qualities already present in language itself, and in the nature of storytelling. When the narrator writes without apology of 'the lovely Mrs. Stitch', or of Lord Copper's 'frightful mansion' and its 'ghastly library' (14), he is mocking the reader who would prefer to passively consume some (invented) detail of loveliness, or frightfulness, and then to reach the required conclusion by a seemingly 'realist' route; Waugh insists on deleting this procedure, denying his reader even the illusion of interpretation. Thus, Julia's car is not really or incidentally black, but black by blatant design, so that once in the lavatory it might make 'for the photographer, a happy contrast to the white tiles about it' (40). The passive reader is a type of camera, for whom the narrator arranges models and setting, and it serves Waugh's purpose to emphasise this relationship - a direct reversal of Isherwood's position in the Berlin novels, and a further indication of the modernity of Waugh's technique.

I have identified within Scoop a number of spheres or areas of action, enclosed in themselves but resembling each other in their operation; thus the newspaper empire of Lord Copper, the Boot Magna regime, the society life of Julia Stitch, and the rival political organisations. Each of these has been shown to bear upon the nature of fiction and narrators. William Boot, as the figure briefly connecting these areas, becomes the focus of their shared quality, which is formulated, in his terms, as lushness. It is a suitably arbitrary noun, of a piece with Zinc or Beast; lush only takes on its real meaning as the novel develops.

' . . . it seems a silly sort of scheme. I mean, how will it look in Lush Places when I start writing about sandstorms and lions and whatever they have in Ishmaelia? Not lush, I mean.' (31)

At this early point in the novel, the term retains its literal sense of green moistness, a term of pasture and riverbank. Over dinner Mr. Salter draws out William's real objection -

'Is there nothing you want?'  
'D'you know, I don't believe there is. Except to keep my job in Lush Places and go on living at home.'  
(33)

The two desires are really one in the argument of the novel, the column merely an excuse to avoid the atrocious city. Boot Magna Hall is itself a retreat, a lush place, as Mr. Salter well understands.

It was a familiar cry; during his fifteen years of service with the Megalopolitan Company Mr. Salter had heard it upon the lips of countless distressed colleagues; upon his own. In a moment of compassion he remembered the morning when he had been called from his desk in Clean Fun, never to return to it. The post had been his delight and pride; one for which he believed he had a particular aptitude . . . First he would open the morning mail . . . Then he would spend an hour or two . . . Then the ingenious game began . . . From this task of ordered discrimination he had been thrown into the ruthless, cut-throat rough-and-tumble of The Beast Woman's Page . . . (33-34)

The small but safe orderliness of Clean Fun, enacted in Waugh's 'First . . . Then . . . Then . . .', corresponds with that of Boot Magna, where despite the real decay there is little apparent change. Mr. Salter has been forced out of his own lush place, and must now force William. The nature of lushness is then more precisely defined in William's journey to France. The idea of flight has 'haunted his dreams and returned to him, more vividly, in the minutes of transition between sleep and wakefulness' (46). Already qualities of disengagement are assembling around the literal idea of flight, an idea belonging to dreams and mild stupor, to being exhausted, or 'fuddled with port' (46). Set upon a dreamlike adventure, the idea of flight 'loomed through the haze that enveloped him as the single real and significant feature'. It is however not travel, but flight in the sense of escape that excites William -

High over the chimneys and giant monkey-puzzle, high among the clouds and rainbows and clear blue spaces, whose alternations figured so largely and poetically in Lush Places; high above the most ecstatic skylark above earth-bound badger and great crested grebe, away from people and cities to a region of light and void and silence - that was where William was going . . .  
(46)

These are 'high places' (53), an enhanced form of lushness but again sought primarily as an alternative to the people and cities. There is a negativity in this; the 'light and void and silence' William seek amount to the kind of vacuum for which Guy Crouchback, in defeat, will later yearn on Crete and achieve only in the self-abnegation of parachuting and bathing.<sup>1</sup> William too wishes to be 'above' and 'away from', to remove himself from the disorderly and indiscriminate. Lushness as illusion is then stressed in the next reference, when a doubtful tropical fish propels William into

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<sup>1</sup> Officers and Gentlemen (1955), 1973, p. 223, Unconditional Surrender (1961), 1971, p. 102.

an English reverie:

. . . Far away the trout were lying among the cool pebbles, nose upstream, meditative, hesitant, in the waters of his home . . . 'Fresh green of the river bank; faded terra-cotta of the dining-room wallpaper, colours of distant Canaan, of deserted Eden,' thought William - 'are they still there? Shall I even revisit those familiar places . . .?'  
(61)

This is the 'high class style' of his column, incomprehensible as anything else and itself a refuge, as imaginary as Eden, from the barbarous world.

There the appropriate style is "Anyone mind if I park myself here?";

William's first prayer to lush places is 'imperfectly understood' (61) and invokes only Corker (who is nevertheless as English as river trout).

William's narrator will later make amends for this irony, and produce Mr. Baldwin, but the point is made; as it was when William, 'mut, rapt' in his fantasy of flight, sat 'oblivious of the cleft sticks and the portable typewriter' (46). These instruments, like the Airline omnibus in which he sits, are the banal but actual means whereby such fantasies are manufactured.

A final form of lushness William experiences is his love for Kätschen. Once more he is entranced, 'tipsy with love' (126); love constitutes another way of escape, not, this time, into the sky, but under the seas,

far from shore, submerged among deep waters, below wind and tide, where huge trees raised their spongy flowers and monstrous things without fur or feather, wing or foot, passed silently, in submarine twilight.  
A lush place. (127)

As ever, William's ideal is hardly manifest in actual circumstances; Kätschen's own need of escape is more obviously the source of her interest. The nature of lushness as refuge is apparent in her child-like plans, where the principle, of escape into blinkered contentment, is applied in

its most literal form.

Taking up Lord Copper's toast, Scoop closes with a list of projected futures for the novel's main characters. Copper's dinner guests are possessed by a 'calm and vinous optimism', a dazed state which carries over from William's fuddled and tipsy lushness to inform the subsequent list. The futures anticipated by the narrator represent for each a continuation within the appropriate sphere; thus Lord Copper will manage his empire, Mr. Salter his knitting magazine, Julia will move in her own realms and Corker, once extracted from the deserts, in his. Each is sustained within a lush place, entire in itself and quite insulated; the larger lush place, enclosing them all, is Scoop itself, as a novel with a beginning and an end, discontinuous with the 'real world' to which 'Evelyn Waugh' and 'the reader' belong. With only a page of text remaining, there can be little actual future for any of the characters in that world. The novel ends when William puts down his pen and goes up to bed. The trailing line, which confesses that 'Outside the owls hunted maternal rodents and their furry brood' contains all that is otherwise omitted from, and therefore serves to define, the novel proper.

Scoop can be considered the last novel of Waugh's first phase, the 'thirties novels with which he made his name and for which, even today, he is probably best remembered. Thereafter, as is generally noted, his fiction tended toward a new emphasis, specifically Catholic in the case of Brideshead Revisited and the military trilogy, but generally in these and in Put Out More Flags and Work Suspended towards a more positive, though not necessarily optimistic statement. Scoop represents a summation of much

of the matter of the preceding fiction, its simplified form allowing the purest expression of their position - as it were, a deliberate exaggeration, as under a microscope. The distortion is only in degree, not in kind. Scoop's account of the nature of fiction is one which diminishes, establishing an extreme parameter, but which is nevertheless truthful. The artist is equated with the journalist, his art essentially commercial; a number of incidents directly express this equation. The Poet Laureate, having written for Lord Copper an ode on 'the fluctuation of our net sales' (13), admits it was 'the most poetic and highly-paid work he had ever done'. The yoked terms pull in opposite directions, but the commercial instinct ensures the ode's composition. William's own column, both 'lyrical and highly accurate', expresses the same uncomfortable reconciliation, and the happiness of the Ishmaelian natives is ascribed to 'the perfect leisure which those people alone enjoy who are untroubled by the speculative or artistic itch' (74). This repeated twinning of the two activities reinforces the bond upon which the novel is insisting, downgrading art to the level of Copper's commercialism, to mere produce. The model elephant which Corker buys, valued by him in yet another ironic pairing as 'large and very artistic' (85), supplies a particularly wry image. The contrast between the ivory Corker supposes it to be, and the bakelite of which it is actually made, expresses very concisely the division enacted in the novel, between the organic and the artificial, Natural Man and Modern, Self-Made Man. The older idea, of art as a kind of divine inspiration, the artist an almost priestly figure, is utterly overthrown in Scoop. The Press Bureau issues to the journalists very apposite cards of identity -

They were small orange documents, originally printed for the registration of prostitutes. The space for thumb-print was now filled with a passport photograph, and at the head the word 'journalist' substituted in neat Ishmaelite characters. (95)

This is hardly an accidental comparison, for the journalists of Scoop are evidently selling a travesty of the truth, as prostitutes a travesty of love, simply to the highest bidder. Scoop's equation puts the novelist on the same footing. The Frenchman William meets on the Françmaçon is an entirely incidental figure, with no part in the plot; very typically in Waugh's fiction, he is allowed to make a crucial observation from this peripheral position.

' . . . You are still studying the map of Ishmaelia  
. . . It is a country of no interest.'  
'No.'  
'It is not rich at all. If it were rich it would  
already belong to England. Why do you wish to take  
it?'  
'But I do not wish to.'  
'There is no oil, there is no tin, no gold, no iron -  
positively none, said the functionary, growing vexed  
at such unreasonable rapacity, What do you want with  
it?'  
'I am going as a journalist.'  
'Ah, well, to the journalist every country is rich.'  
(59)

The Frenchman hits in passing upon both the apparent and actual sources of William's story. In fact there is gold, to be dismissed by Bannister as an item of little interest; the truer remark is that to the journalist there is richness everywhere, the richness, at last, of his invention. Once again the novel's equation promptly extends the argument to its own form, as the narrator offers a detailed and engrossing, but above all redundant, portrait of the Captain's wife -

The Captain led a life of somewhat blatant domesticity; half the boat deck was given up to his quarters, where a vast brass bedstead was visible through the portholes, and a variety of unseamanlike furniture. The Captain's wife had hedged off a little veranda for herself with pots of palm and strings of newly laundered underclothes. Here she passed the day stitching, ironing, flopping in and out of the deck-house in heelless slippers, armed with a feather brush, often emerging in a dense aura of Asiatic perfume to dine in the saloon; a tiny hairless dog capered about her feet. (60)



W. J. Cook writes of Scoop as 'a germinative attempt at a positive serious moral statement',<sup>2</sup> but this overstates the novel's ambition, for Boot Magna Hall represents, as Malcolm Bradbury comments, only a 'retirement' from the problems the world sets.<sup>2</sup> It is easier to agree with Kleine that William's adventure represents a 'quest for value in the modern world',<sup>3</sup> in more traditional terms 'a search for moral insight'.<sup>4</sup> The quest is not yet achieved in Scoop, which predicts rather than prefigures the committed fiction Waugh was shortly to produce. The feeble reach of de-naturalised twentieth-century man is indicated, a consequence of his ersatz philosophies, and this limit equated with those of novel form. These last Waugh plays strongly upon, as offering a precisely analogous idea of artificiality. For Waugh, reintegration and even survival meant Catholicism, and the problem Scoop predicts is that of reconciling that sense of authority with the independence inherent in narrative, as an archetypal lush place.

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1 Masks, modes and morals: The Art of Evelyn Waugh, New Jersey, 1971, p. 165.

2 Evelyn Waugh, 1964, p. 73.

3 'The Cosmic Comedies of Evelyn Waugh', South Atlantic Quarterly, LXI(1962), p. 539.

4 Steven A. Jervis, 'Evelyn Waugh, Vile Bodies, and the Younger Generation', South Atlantic Quarterly, LXVI(1967), pp. 440-448.

WORK SUSPENDED

Probably the most useful criticism of Waugh's novel-fragment Work Suspended (1942) occurs in Malcolm Bradbury's short study Evelyn Waugh. His remarks, though brief, indicate the point of essential interest, that this work clearly prefigures a new, outward movement in Waugh's fiction. Bradbury notices the theme of

a man of Waugh's own situation (who) strives to reconcile himself with the disorderly and unattractive modern world . . . Plant is not trying to cut himself off, but to meet it . . .

and his account of this reconciliation is convincing. Both Bradbury's and Frederick Stopp's<sup>2</sup> remarks on the position at the beginning of the story are, however, very brief, and it is by closely attending to the first chapter, 'A Death', that the relation between this fragment and the earlier novels can be seen. For Bradbury, this is a novel about

a man who has to revise a settled and ordered life because he is deprived of the things that make it possible, and<sup>3</sup> about the acceleration of political events . . .

In fact Plant is deprived only of his father, and this loss provokes a perfunctory grief. Political events do not greatly impinge upon the story, Roger Simmonds's textbook Marxism being too easy a target for strong satire; the postscript is a harmonious conclusion only to the mood of the last few pages, not to the story's larger movement. The nature of Plant's advance can be seen most clearly if one examines from what it is he has been emancipated, and the crucial point here is that he is a writer.

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1 Malcolm Bradbury, Evelyn Waugh, 1964, p. 80.

2 Frederick J. Stopp, Evelyn Waugh: Portrait of an Artist, 1958.

3 Bradbury, Op. Cit., p. 76.

The John Plant who introduces himself in the novel's opening chapter is a man with a confident grasp upon his own life, a grasp reflected in a measured, balanced style and in the calm logic of his exposition - 'At the time of my father's death I was in Morocco, at a small French hotel outside the fortifications of Fez.'<sup>1</sup> That essential first detail, of his father's death, is submerged in the concern for an orderly and precise outlining of the circumstances; it is a prompt intimation of Plant's emotional constriction. He feels we must know exactly where he was - Morocco, a French hotel, Fez. Frederick Stopp is surely misreading the text, and incidentally misquoting it, when he comments -

This carefully regulated routine of writing, relaxation and erotic satisfaction is swept away in the first line of the book, by the words 'At my father's death'.<sup>2</sup>

The rest of this first paragraph is similarly concerned to be factually correct; the first four sentences all establish details of timing -

I had been there for six weeks . . .

In three weeks I should pack it up for the typist ... .

I was thirty-four years of age at the time, and a serious writer . . . (107)

The last remark indicates Plant's approach to his art; for him, 'serious' is a category of artist, just as 'thirty-four' is a particular age. He holds to a rigid form in his writing; his novels take nine weeks to write, and are of uniform length and structure - 'I had always been a one-corpse man'. They have sold in consistently larger numbers, and are to be found where books should of course be kept, 'in the library, all

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1 Evelyn Waugh, Work Suspended (1942), Penguin Edition, 1978, p. 107.

2 Stopp, Op. Cit. p. 101.

seven of them together on a shelf'. The nature of his fiction is above all apparent in his title, 'Murder at Mountrichard Castle'. The alliteration suggests the self-containment, the balance and completion of his art, paralleled in the cool progression of his exposition here, with its short, smug sentences - 'I took pains with my work and I found it excellent'. Waugh achieves an effect of solemn foolishness here; the ironic opposition of 'serious writer' to 'one-corpse man' established this, and now the tired triteness of Plant's first metaphor further undermines him. His art is patently a manufacturing concern, and not an organic creation the 'delicate fibres' of which will 'suffer' in serial form and 'never completely heal'. Plant's inclusion of his own reflections on the work of a competitor is rich in unconscious and pompous comedy, as he recalls that 'I have said . . .', 'I would reflect . . .' and that 'she must not expect . ..'. The subsequent passage continues and heightens the comic tone -

I have never found economy the least irksome; on the contrary, I take pleasure in it. My friends, I know, considered me parsimonious; it was a joke among them, which I found quite inoffensive. (108)

The genteel elegance of 'My friends', 'on the contrary' and 'I know', and of the balancing semi-colons is more than a little reminiscent of the quiet ironies of Grossmith or Jerome - 'It is not that I object to work; I can sit and look at it for hours . . . moreover, I am careful of my work . . .'<sup>1</sup>. Plant's diction is erudite and archaic, approaching a Victorian portentousness - 'parsimonious', 'eradicate', 'devised', 'profusion', 'quite inoffensive', 'live modestly'. There is a considered, literary quality to the whole, born of Plant's secure

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1 Jerome K. Jerome, Three Men in a Boat (1889), Everyman Edition, 1957 p. 161.

assumptions. The paragraph is generated by 'I . . . me . . . my' - Plant 'chose', 'acquired', 'preferred', 'decided', 'devised'. His world is one directed by himself with assurance, an almost gnostic confidence - 'money wasted meant more money to be earned'.

His measured prose style is the expression of this control; the rules of grammar, of the decorous phrase and the semi-colon are rigidly obeyed. He follows these rules even when they lead him into ugly or over-refined constructions - 'There seemed few ways of which a writer need not be ashamed by which he could make a decent living' (108). That 'of which/by which' pairing obstructs the sense, but is employed by Plant because technically precise. He 'chose' his career, 'deliberately', fitted for it by 'a naturally ingenious and constructive mind'. His concept of art shares the self-sufficiency of his approach to life; both are things enclosed. Writing, like being 'a good mother', is a job. Plant aims to 'produce something saleable in large quantities to the public'; it is 'difficult' because 'complicated'. There is no suggestion of any emotional or spiritual commitment to his art - he quite specifically insists that his work has 'absolutely nothing of myself in it', and the mute contrast of Plant's detachment with the catchpenny clamour of Vengeance at the Vatican stresses the division. Plant imposes his will upon his surroundings, controls and directs his life as he controls his diction; the books he writes are circumscribed, works of 'technique and taste', and reflect the insular and organized personality of their author.

The three opening paragraphs swiftly outlined Plant's relation to his art, and our suspicions of a certain cramped sterility are now reinforced as Waugh puts him in his larger context. Plant has moved between 'a dozen or more retreats in England and abroad'. He stays at inns down in the country, at cottages taken already furnished, at seaside hotels 'out

of season'. Beyond the need for quiet there is in each case the element of the impersonal, of Plant as the unlocated, forgotten man. Fez, a fortified city, he finds best, but his almost enthusiastic eulogy -

in early March, with flowers springing everywhere in the surrounding hills and in the untidy patios of the Arab houses, one of the most beautiful (cities) in the world. (108-109)

is immediately undercut by the practicality of his choice of hotel, and the small, smug correctness of his grammar and diction -

I liked the little hotel. It was cheap and rather chilly - an indispensable austerity. The food was digestible with, again, that element of sparseness which I find agreeable. (109)

The details of his position again place him as a man 'between', uncommitted by any loyalty.

I had an intermediate place between the semi-Egyptian splendours of the tourists' palace on the hill, and the bustling commercial hotels of the new town, half an hour's walk away.

One notes the additional intermediates, 'semi-Egyptian' and 'half an hour'. The hotel's guests are similarly distanced; they are 'exclusively French; the wives of civil servants . . . elderly couples'. No young Englishmen. Similarly, 'In the evening Spahi officers came to the bar to play bagatelle. I used to work . . .' (109). The play/work opposition furthers this setting apart of Plant; rather perhaps a setting above, for his detachment is stressed as the artist's, the privileged observer's. Plant works 'on the verandah of my room, overlooking a ravine where Senegalese infantrymen were constantly washing their linen' (109). From his elevated position he quite literally sees the washing of other people's dirty linen. He is an observer; earlier he had admired the

beauty of 'the untidy patios of the Arab houses'. His own engagement with the life teeming around him is slight, and of fixed routine, captured in the quick repetition of 'Once a week . . .' and in his unconsciously comic bathnight arrangement. His isolated presence in this exotic context is imaged most vividly in his visits to the local cinema, 'where old, silent films were shown in a babel of catcalls . . .' (109). Plant is implicitly associated with these mute and irrelevant importations from another culture, in opposition to the native uproar about him. His life seems thin and insubstantial, expressed in the brittle precision of his grammar -

In these circumstances the book progressed well. I have since, on occasions, looked back at them with envy. (109)

One notes especially the slight fussiness of that 'on occasions'. At this point Plant finally returns to the section's crucial event, the news of his father's death, but only by way of a comic miniature of the town's postman. Plant rather condescendingly describes this 'character', equipped with bicycle and having 'a badge in his cap and on his arm a brassard with the royal escutcheon', and turns a neat literary figure about the man's salute -

he invariably honoured me with a stiff, military salute which increased by importance in the hotel at the expense of my reputation as an innocent and unofficial man of letters.

The adroitness of this balance foregrounds Plant-the-writer, the man for whom Fez is a source of quiet or of the usefully picturesque, but scarcely at all the town in which he lives. As a writer, he is committed to precision, to an accountable world; 'the news of my father's death' (109) might have closed this description of Fez quite effectively, but

to be precise one must continue 'in a letter from my Uncle Andrew', and to be even more exact add 'his brother'. Once again the emotional impact of the news has been deflected, channelled into words, grammar, image and quaint detail. This evasiveness within Plant's apparent control and sufficiency is the weakness from which he is to advance in the novel.

The account of Plant's father that occupies the second section of 'A Death' allows Waugh to indicate further the nature of the weakness. Malcolm Bradbury has written that Plant 'recollects with no more than a distant affection or mild nostalgia his father's values . . . His father's views . . . are not Plant's'.<sup>1</sup> In a literal sense this is so, but the inherited assumptions are quite apparent. The second section opens with the son still sitting calmly on the verandah, 'smoking and considering the situation in its various aspects. There seemed no good reason for a change of plan' (111). Again the human, the emotional, is overridden. The brief, simple sentences reduce the potentially wrecking experience to manageable, phrase-shaped proportions.

My Uncle Andrew would see to everything. The Jellabies would be provided for. Apart from them my father had no obligations. His affairs were always simple and in good order. (111)

His father, it seems, led a similarly isolated life, bound by the house he owned. He had no savings, no politics, and 'aloofness . . . was his dominant concern in life' (113). His deliberate recoil from any popular movement clearly bears upon his son's intermediate status. He subscribes to a rigidly categorized view of social structure, in which everyone is

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<sup>1</sup> Bradbury, Op. Cit., p. 78.



politician, tradesman or slave; this fixity recalls Plant's own certainties, about the place of a serious writer, or of a mother. It is in relation to art that the identity of son with father is most apparent. Mr. Plant's art is strictly representational - 'given some whiskers he was a master' (115). Here is the assumption, always implicit in his son's unhurried grammar, that the world is a fixed and renderable place, accessible to personal intervention and offering scope for individual choice and direction. Later, the elder Plant's technique is described -

painting over a monochrome sketch, methodically, in fine detail, left to right across the canvas as though he were lifting the backing of a child's 'transfer'.' (129)

and at his death he leaves 'four or five square feet of finished painting . . . ' (130). His paintings and Plant's thrillers alike are regular, quantifiable productions, their shared response to a knowable world. The father places thriller-writers fairly low in the scheme of things, but finds consolation in the correctness of his son's grammar. He too knows the place of art. Just as Plant had won a place for his books on library shelves and cultivated a 'reputation as an innocent and unofficial man of letters', so his father 'dressed as he thought a painter should, in a distinct and recognizable garb . . . ' (14) and displays his work each year in the appropriate contexts, 'ranged round the studio on mahogany easels; the most important work had a wall to itself against a background of scarlet rep.' (118). His paintings, moreover, are always given titles, they are all unmistakably about something, they have subjects. He 'could paint in any way he chose'; one recalls Plant's own decisions, 'I chose to live modestly . . . I chose my career deliberately . . . '. The Plants share a common response to a world they

view as essentially hostile, but, because fixed, to some degree biddable. Their confidence carries through into their art, and is reflected in Mr. Plant's deft whiskers, his son's intricately constructed mysteries, above all in John's calm and precise grammar.

Yet even here, in the stolid independence of Plant Senior's lifestyle, something rings hollow. He is able to enjoy a life 'of gentlemanly ease', with 'all the substantial comforts and refinements' (116) only by producing a steady stream of forgeries -

my father could paint, very passably, in the manner  
of almost any of the masters of English portraiture  
. . . (116)

His son offers no comment on this practice, seeing it only as 'a rather less reputable side to my father's business'. It is clearly something worse than this, but the manner in which both father and son rationalise is a part of their commitment to a delusion. It is obviously insufficient for Mr. Plant to declare of the forgeries that 'What they do with them afterwards is their own business' (117); his responsibility goes further than this. The obsolete values he is resurrecting in opposition to Picasso and Gauguin are, literally, bogus. In typical Plant style the hollowness is disguised by verbal elegance, and by an air of reasonableness; "It would ill become me to go officiously about the markets identifying my own handicraft . . ." (117). For Plant Senior the buyers are not cheated, but only 'under a misconception about the date'; the comic euphemism, as earlier in the term 'restoration' (116), conceals a serious flaw. The painter is clearly no gentleman, despite his airs; the values he seeks to restore are implicated in his rather pathetic villainy and rendered as obsolete and phony as his portraits. The son's art must then come under suspicion of a similar hollowness; insofar as

his writing celebrates no part of the modern experience - instead, as we have seen, reproducing the arid functional detachment of his own life - that too is a fake. Plant is masquerading as an artist, just as he will later masquerade as an exporter of fruit.

In the third section of 'A Death' we are returned to Fez for a first experience of Plant in action, not merely in reminiscence. This potential immediacy is blurred for a time by the use of phrases such as

It was the evening when I usually visited the Moulay  
Abdullah . . .

I always visited the same house and the same girl . . .

Now and then tourists appeared with a guide . . . (122-123)

The effect is to restore the sense of measured routine that had been threatened at the close of the previous section, by the resonant phrase 'I must go back to England soon to arrange for the destruction of my father's house' (121). For Plant these visits to the Moulay are now 'routine, a regular resort', of use in clearing his mind 'of the elaborate villainies of Lady Mountrichard'. The inversion here is a significant one; moonlight visits to an African brothel have become a relaxed counter to the excitement and adventure of novel-writing. Plant is untouched by any notions of glamour at the house. He visits it at its most orderly periods, talk of its 'trade', and selects the most prosaic of hostesses, 'a chubby little Berber with the scarred cheeks of her people . . . She went by the unassuming professional name of Fatima . . .' (122). The girl had the virtues one expects Plant to admire - she is 'cheerful, affectionate . . . working hard to collect her marriage dot' (123). His description of the house is disinterested, unengaged; he gives details of the clientele, of the prices, from a position slightly removed from that of the ordinary tourist. The House, one notes, stands 'between the

old city and the ghetto', another neutral venue for Plant's activities.

His relationship with Fatima is similarly indeterminate -

We sat . . . drinking our mint tea . . . or, rather,  
Fatima drank hers, while I let mine cool in the  
glass. It was a noisome beverage. (123)

The classic symbol of union, the shared repast, is here very neatly  
flawed. Coolness is an adjective easily applied to Plant himself, and  
equally telling is the very un-Eastern, very literary phrase, 'noisome  
beverage'. The distance between them is further embodied in the staccato  
exchanges of reported dialogue -

She asked about my business.  
I had told her I exported dates.  
The date market was steady, I assured her. (124)

Plant has elaborated for her consumption a fiction of himself as a  
firmly-married businessman, and again one perceives the curiously  
reversed positions of fact and fiction in his life 'When I was in the  
Moulay Abdullah I almost believed in this aspect of myself as a  
philoprogenitive fruiterer; St. John's Wood and Mountrichard Castle  
seemed equally remote' (124). These different orders all partake of  
reality for him. It is the obverse of his statement that nothing of  
himself enters his stories. These are themselves infiltrating his  
personality. The incident of the police raid, and Plant's consequent  
recoil from an intimacy with the Consulate, serves as the final, complete  
statement of his vulnerability. He had been forced to expose more than  
'the bare minimum' of himself and withdraws completely from the 'sudden,  
mutually unwelcome confidence' (125). What is particularly striking  
here is the eruption of the first of several extended metaphors -

It was a salient in the defensive line between us that could only be made safe by a wide rectification of frontier or by a complete evacuation. I had no friendly territory into which to withdraw. I was deployed on the dunes between the sea and the foothills. The transports riding at anchor were my sole lines of support. (126)

The first figure - the salient in the line - is an apt and clever analogy, but the three subsequent sentences are surely a needless elaboration, and a dilution of that initial choiceness. There is a perfunctory development, each image of a similar length and with an air of contrivance and self-delight that distracts from the point of the metaphor. The reader is disturbed, moreover, by the references to dunes and the sea, unsure if these are still images or refer literally to Fez. It is a confusion entirely appropriate to Waugh's thesis. Apparently encouraged, Plant launches a second analogy immediately. 'As a spinster in mean lodgings fusses over her fragments of gentility . . . I set a price on Modesty . . .' (126). His seeming intoxication with words and images is the impression one takes most easily from these two passages, perhaps because one is invited to share in it, but the cue for this display, Plant's discomfort and chagrin at the arrests, has been glossed over. The passages camouflage events with the verbal artifice one has already noted amongst Plant's defensive armoury. The section's terse closing comment, 'Next day I set off for London with my book unfinished' is heavy with a significance only half-expressed; the strangeness of his attitude remains unremarked.

Something of the same literariness is projected into the opening of the chapter's next section, 'I travelled from spring into winter', as Plant deploys very standard images of decline. In addition there are the parallel constructions, 'spray in the Straits', 'seas in the Bay', 'fog off Finisterre', 'fog in the Channel', 'grey weather in the Thames', all

establishing through repetition Plant's syntactic control of his narrative. However, as it develops, this section begins to signal the breakdown of such comfortable order. The first indication of this is the untraditional response of his father's servants, the Jellabies, to their freedom and legacy.

They had . . . invested it in Portsmouth, not, as would have been conventional, in a lodging-house, but in a shop . . . which enjoyed a trade in second-hand wireless apparatus. (128)

This is a break with ancient practice, and the modernity of wireless apparatus underlines this. It is however during Plant's visit to his father's house that the sense of a disrupted order is clearest -

Every object was familiar and yet so much a part of its surroundings that later, when they came to be moved, I found a number of things which I barely recognized. (129)

For the reader, that sense of a disparate jumble of parts is experienced not later but now, in the list of various materials and sources -

there were Dutch tiles round the fireplaces; Levantine rugs on the floors; on the walls Arundel prints . . . rosewood and mahogany . . . carved German oak, Spanish walnut, English chests and dressers, copper ewers and brass candlesticks. (128-129)

Waugh has again made use of a list which stresses the distance between its contents rather than their contiguity; in the elder Plant's day this may have been 'a harmonious, unobstructive jumble', but now that ordering context is lost and there is only this mass of contrasting fragments.

At the close of the section comes a centrally important passage which illustrates Plant's self-deluding trait more vividly than ever. Standing

in his father's study he composes a possible obituary, 'and with the phrases my esteem for my father took form and my sense of loss became tangible and permanent' (130). This in itself only bears out what one has discerned already of Plant's reaching for form through narrative or literary orders, obituary being a type of biography, a story. In his subsequent reflections on this aspect, however, one sees Plant performing a characteristic about-turn, and once again retreating from the implications of his analysis.

No good comes of this dependence on verbal forms.  
It saves nothing in the end. Suffering is none  
the less acute and much more lasting when it is  
put into words. (130)

He asserts that pain is the greater for being verbally expressed, that until now his sorrow had been 'damned and canalized'. Words, then, will bring him more quickly to a human and emotional response; they will 'save nothing', that is, save him no pain. As he elaborates the idea, in a second burst of extended metaphor, some imprecision begins to intrude -

For the civilised man there are none of those swift  
transitions of joy and pain which possess the savage;  
words form slowly like pus about his hurts; there are  
no clean wounds for him . . . (130)

The uncertainty begins here, for this image of pus about a wound, of there being 'no clean wound', is suggestive rather of a clouded issue, than one made free and accessible. The analogy is pursued -

first a numbness, then a long festering, then a  
scar ever ready to re-open. Not until they have  
assumed the livery of the defence can his emotions  
pass through the lines. (130-131)

Again there is the distracting ambiguity, as the reader tries, and fails, to relate the 'scar ever ready to re-open' to 'the lines' through which

his emotions must pass. By this point the metaphor is simply becoming unintelligible; what, really, does 'the livery of the defense' connote? What, in the previous paragraph, did 'adolescence like a stained tablecloth' mean? The reader follows Plant's imagery from the medical to the military, as it descends consistently through spies, the Fifth Column, 'a wire cut, a bolt loosened, a file disordered'. Once more there is the spectacle of a metaphor being generated for its own sake, depositing the reader at last with 'civilized man'. This was where the paragraph began, but in the interval one has lost grip of the subject. As in the previous extended metaphor, Plant has erected a verbal form between himself and the experience; the cleverness of the figure overwhelms the initial statement of a sudden sorrow. In truth it is words themselves, 'this literary habit' (130), that have damned and canalized his responses. The section, exactly parallel to its predecessor, ends in a brief coda -

I returned to the house and darkened the rooms once more, relaid the dust-sheets I had lifted, and left everything as it had been. (131)

Once again it is a patently dishonest and insufficient conclusion to the issues Plant has uncovered and then abandoned.

His retreat to a safe literary order is underlined by a confident beginning to the next section; 'The manuscript of Murder at Mountrichard Castle lay on the chest of drawers in my club bedroom, reproaching me morning, evening and night' (131). The degree of artifice one detected in the imagery of wounds and garrisons is here quickly confirmed, as each notion reoccurs in the title of Plant's neatly constructed thriller. One notes also the glib predictability of 'morning, evening and night', which in turn anticipates the sterile formality of the following sentence -



It was promised for publication in June, and I had never before disappointed my publishers. This year, however, I should have to ask grace for a postponement. (131)

This is quite clearly a solidified language, and tends to undercut Plant's subsequent confession to his publisher that he feels his writing is 'becoming mechanical' (132), that he is in danger of becoming 'purely a technical expert'. He later modifies this, saying he intends 'just some new technical experiments'; either way, this element of Plant's life, and of the novel, remained undeveloped when Waugh abandoned the fragment. As it stands it constitutes an early gesture on Plant's part towards some kind of truly human content in his work, and is matched by the slow awakening which here begins, to a human element missing in his life. He refers to his club accommodation as a 'little hired room above the traffic' and in a metaphor genuinely effective, because brief, likens his father's house to an 'earth (that) had now been stopped, and I thought, not far away, I could hear the hounds' (133). In immediate reaction, however, Plant reverts to a semi-comic analysis - 'My worries at this period became symbolized in a single problem; what to do with my hats'. The language sheds its brief sincerity and turns to humorous rhetoric; 'Was I doomed for the rest of my life to travel everywhere with this preposterous collection?'. Plant is finally content to reduce the question to a joke, a play on words - 'Somewhere to hang up my hat, that was what I needed'. In the conversation on housing with his friend Roger Simmonds the same pleasure is taken in an exotic and overblown diction, to the detriment of any serious concern.

There was the rub . . . the choice which torments to the verge of mania, between perpetual flight and perpetual seige; and the unresolved universal paradox of losing things in order to find them. (135)

The humour here, in the extravagant vocabulary - 'torments', 'mania', 'perpetual seige', 'universal paradox' - overlies the more serious matter. Plant may exploit the Hamlet reference to make his joke of being or not being housed, but there is a reminder of that other hero, forestalled in his actions by interior dialogue and by words, words, words. Plant's imagery, moreover, is repeatedly that of the battlefield, the hunt, and of the possibility of betrayal and pain; his adroit flippancy cannot disguise a real concern.

The chapter 'A Death' concludes with a pair of interviews. The first, Plant's rejection of Atwater, is the necessary prelude to the acceptance that Bradbury has explained in terms of Plant's emancipation. The second interview, between Plant and the housing agent, allows Waugh to insert his favourite metaphor for a shallow modern sensibility. The architectural reference has already occurred in several of the earlier novels, most obviously A Handful of Dust.

Both Stopp and Bradbury have concentrated their remarks upon the second chapter of the fragment, 'A Birth', and outlined Plant's growing social and emotional engagement. 'A Death' clearly refers not only to his father's accident, but to the lifestyle Plant has adopted. It is a literary style, a cultivation of form that insulates him from his surroundings. In the novel as it remains we hear no more of Plant's literary notions, but presume that they too were to become more flexible; in 'A Death' his attitude towards his art is the most immediate indicator

of his general disposition.<sup>1</sup>

In looking at the second chapter I wish to examine only a few selected points that proceed from what has already been said of Plant's verbal enclosures, taking the larger argument of Stopp and Bradbury as understood. Early in the chapter there occurs Plant's most flamboyant piece of self-analysis -

To write of someone loved, of oneself loving, above  
all of oneself being loved - how can these things  
be done with propriety? How can they be done at all?  
(151)

It is a passage in some ways parallel to that already noted, relating emotion to verbal forms. Here Plant is arguing the impossibility of rendering emotion - specifically love - in written form, a position almost reversing his earlier statement, that words will heighten a strength of feeling. This in itself augurs well for Plant's emancipation from strictly verbal control; he deprecates the literary uses of love as 'one of the compelling motives of conduct', as something 'tragic', as a 'reward' for the just and above all as some kind of game 'of profit and loss'. All of this indicates a new and healthy awareness of perfunctory, literary uses of emotion. However, as with that earlier passage, there are aspects of Plant's declamation that diminish its credibility. He may disparage the 'catalogues of excellencies of the Renaissance poets', but he himself indulges in vigorous rhetoric. He opens with a string of

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1 Martin Stannard has usefully surveyed the variations between the small 1942 edition of Work Suspended and the revised text used by Chapman and Hall for their 1949 volume, Work Suspended and Other Stories. He finds the later version less 'personal', 'a more soberly "topical" allegory', and notes, in addition to changes of detail and the transferring of the whole from 1932-33 to 1939, a greater emphasis upon the rhythm of decay and regeneration. The two parts were originally entitled, not 'A Death' and 'A Birth', but 'My Father's House' and 'Lucy Simmonds'. Essays in Criticism, XXIX (1978), 302-320.

rhetorical questions, syntactically inverted for greater effect, as quoted above, and proceeds through a long series of semi-colons to deliver neatly paired expressions, the balance of which seems to belie the writer's distrust of his own medium -

I have written it up as something prolonged and passionate and tragic; I have written it down as a modest but sufficient annuity . . . How does any of this avail . . .? How can others see her except through one's own eyes, and how, so seeing her, can they turn the pages and close the book . . .  
(151)

The repetitions, the archaic literary phrases ('I have treated of love . . .', 'How does any of this avail?'), the solemnity of tone ('live on as they have lived before') and the use of rhetoric assert that Plant, for all his avowed doubt, is very willing to attempt the telling of his love. Such verbal finesse is not the sign of one who has despaired of his medium; he presumes we will understand when he writes of 'Love, which has its own life, its hours of sleep and waking, its health and sickness, growth, death and immortality . . .' (152). It is a well-worked irony that we, as readers, are indeed persuaded by his doubts, and do not understand Plant when he writes of love as 'this hooded stranger' and as something which 'completes itself in its work of completion'. He himself has still to resist the temptation of a substitute literary order at this point.

The chapter traces his gradual drawing near to Lucy, as the touchstone of the un-clever, the spontaneous and intimate. This is most directly charted through social engagements; Plant will not accompany Roger and Lucy to the theatre or share their taxi; later he invites them to luncheon, and accepts the return invitation to dinner. His dissection of Lucy's note is given as a comic deflation of analytic Plant; the

invitation could scarcely be more straightforward. The verbally-orientated analyst in Plant is baffled for once, his own grammar disturbed - 'I wondered whether she had wondered what to put' (156) - and he loses patience with himself. The growing ascendancy of man over writer is plotted in minor details, in particular through Julia's infatuation -

'I wish you'd give me something as a kind of souvenir.'  
'Of course. I'll send you one of my books, shall I?'  
'No,' she said, 'I'm not interested in your books any more. At least, of course, I am, terribly, but I mean it's you I love.' (165)

In speaking for her sudden love for Plant, Julia declares that 'It was half a game before - now it's serious' (162). The game motif is developed as a symbol of the artificial response to life that Plant has offered until now, and more generally of the intellectual failure to accept social responsibility. Plant has spoken of his literary notion of love as 'a game of profit and loss' (151). Roger Simmonds, whose art has similarly aspired to the purely mechanical and who would even 'cut human beings out altogether' (134), suggests that his dinner guests play 'a new parlour game that had just arrived from New York' (162). Bradbury has described Simmonds as 'the parlour communist'<sup>1</sup>, and there is implicit the suggestion that he has no real appreciation of his wife's nature. In wooing her he had played the intellectual, having 'spotted (an) idiosyncrasy of hers at once and played his game accordingly' (150). The typical relationship between Simmonds, Plant and their friends is a similarly guarded intimacy -

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1 Bradbury, Op. Cit., p. 79.

There was little love and no trust at all between any of my friends . . . each knew the other so well that it was only by making our relationship into a kind of competitive parlour game that we kept it alive at all. (171)

One recalls in addition Plant's assumed persona at the Moulay Abdullah; he savours 'the hide-and-seek with one's own personality' (124). In the early days of his interest in Lucy, he adopts a coolly rational attitude - 'our relationship constituted a tiny disorder in my life that has to be adjusted . . . I moved for advantage as in a parlour game.' (163). During this period of detached concern, Plant still retains some of the old habits. His reaction to an uncomfortable evening with the Simmonds illustrates this -

That evening, next day and for several days, I disliked Lucy. I made a story for all who knew him, of Roger's dinner-party, leaving the impression that this was the kind of life Lucy enjoyed, and that she was driving Roger into it. (162-163).

His literary instinct is to re-write the episode, adjusting life in order to discover a more secure position for himself. Nevertheless, he continues to draw nearer to Lucy; she inspires him to an extended metaphor in which he draws her mind at length as an open and inviting country park (170). Plant continues to use these contrived figures, but this, for once, is undefensive, with no military reference. Plant's love for Lucy crystallizes in the episode set in her bedroom, early one morning. It is a scene often revisited by Waugh. Here the calm, reasoning Plant is overwhelmed by a pure emotional experience -

I had greeted her countless times and always with a keener joy, until that morning I seemed to have come to the end of an investigation and held as a certainty what before I had roughly surmised - her beauty rang through the room like a peal of bells; (173)

That 'seemed' is a rare subjectivity; the 'certainty' he has is not won intellectually, but comes upon him complete. The experience he has is akin to a Joycean epiphany or to Eliot's 'moment in the rose garden' -

thus I have stood, stunned, in a Somerset garden,  
with the close turf wet and glittering underfoot  
in the dew, when, from beyond the walls of box,  
the grey church tower had suddenly scattered the  
heavens in tumult. (173)

These, one feels, are images thrust upon him, rather than figures wittily elaborated. There is a point and clarity in the analogy that has hitherto been forfeited for an extended ingenuity. Plant now believes in 'an inner secret' and accepts Lucy's 'companionship without reasoning'. Reason has been Plant's mainstay; now he moves on without it, 'as an animal, still in profound darkness and surrounded by all the sounds of night, will lift its head, sniff, and know, inwardly, that dawn is near' (163). An instinctive, animal Plant is very different to the figure that opened the novel; the phrase prefigures the kinship he later feels with 'Humboldt's Gibbon', and by extension with Atwater. Both Stopp and Bradbury have dealt satisfactorily with that further aspect of Plant's emergence into a peopled world.

Work Suspended brings to a head the issue of life-and-literature that had been central to the earlier novels. These had explored the perimeters of fictional form and found no way to break out into a fuller 'reality'. John Plant is the writer who might have written the earlier parts of A Handful of Dust, with its intricate systems of symbol and motif. His retreat from the chaos and grossness of the twentieth century, into a finite and orderly world, subject only to the rules of grammar, modesty and the parlour game, is shown to be an inadequate, sterile response. His art is emasculate, a craft, a product, a useful thing. Work Suspended

presents his rescue from verbal forms and his emergence into areas of experience beyond the rigours of a verbal convention. He comes under disordering influences as varied as Lucy's frankness, Atwater's lax diction and the Wimpole Club's alcohol. One is to suppose that any novel Plant might subsequently have written would have been less of a polished production, less ingenious, perhaps more likely to appear in 'spare bedrooms' (107), than safely, and redundantly, on the library shelf.



## PUT OUT MORE FLAGS

' . . . I've come to write a book.'  
'Oh, Basil. I am sorry. Is it as bad as that?'  
There was much that needed no saying between brother and sister. For years now, whenever things were very bad with Basil, he had begun writing a book. It was as near surrender as he ever came . . .'

Critical accounts of Put Out More Flags have been largely concerned with a perceived debate between the rival calls to art and action presented, respectively, by Ambrose Silk and Basil Seal, the novel's two main figures. There has been general agreement that, while retaining much of the author's sympathy, Silk and his cause suffer effective defeat, and that the attitude expressed above directs the novel's action. There is less agreement about the coherence, and usefulness, of this debate; while some have valued the novel precisely for its ambiguity, its continuous qualifications<sup>2</sup> and twin protagonists,<sup>3</sup> others have found the competing viewpoints merely opposed, self-cancelling.<sup>4</sup> Put Out More Flags has been found too serious,<sup>5</sup> and too farcical;<sup>6</sup> Walter Allen thought it 'superbly funny' but not 'in any real sense' satirical;<sup>7</sup> for Sean O'Faolain Basil and the Connollys 'are not funny, nor intended to be funny, but the triumph of wickedness (Basil Seal's) over virtue is first-class satire'.<sup>8</sup> Frank Kermode discovers

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1 Put Out More Flags, (1942) 1982 Penguin edition, p. 76.

2 R. M. Davies, 'The Mind and Art of Evelyn Waugh', Papers on Language and Literature, III (1967), 270-287.

3 Martin Green, 'British Comedy and the British Sense of Humour: Shaw, Waugh, and Amis', Texas Quarterly, IV (1961), 217-227. Green considers the evenness of the debate makes Put Out More Flags 'the most perfect of Waugh's novels'.

4 See Malcolm Bradbury, Evelyn Waugh, 1964; P. A. Doyle, Evelyn Waugh: A Critical Essay, New York, 1969, p. 23; Hena Maes-Jelinek, Criticism of Society in the English Novel Between the Wars, Paris, 1970, p. 438.

5 W. H. Pritchard, Seeing Through Everything: English Writers 1918-1940, 1977, pp. 179-187; and P. A. Doyle, above.

6 Times Literary Supplement, review of 21.3.42. The reviewer was of the opinion that Waugh's previous novels had contributed significantly to a national 'loss of faith', of which the present war was an end-product.

7 Tradition and Dream, (1964) 1971, p. 232.

8 The Vanishing Hero, 1956, p. 58.

'a new sourness' here,<sup>1</sup> Bernard Bergonzi 'one of Waugh's funniest novels'.<sup>2</sup> Such a range of response suggests either a richly plural work or one riven by inconsistencies. Put Out More Flags is not fully coherent, in either its theme or structure, but I wish to suggest that this is one consequence of the debate being more apparent than actual. Ambrose Silk is certainly one kind of artist, and is clearly overthrown - but Basil Seal is less certainly a spokesman for action alone; his ascendancy is arguably that of another artist, and one closer in spirit to Waugh himself. Silk's story 'Monument to a Spartan' is intimate, sincere, emotional, and, for all Basil's aspersions, unambiguous; 'all pure Art' (186). Waugh's writing of the thirties was oblique, unallied and aggressive - anarchic is the epithet that recurs in commentaries, and all these terms begin to characterise Basil's manner, Basil's procedures. Silk's is the voice that supplies many of the novel's long reflective passages. His ideal of the cenobitic artist is presented in some detail and has naturally attracted the bulk of the discussion of the work. Basil's artistry is enacted, but art nevertheless, and it repays consideration. We know from his diary that Waugh looked on the war as, among other things, a superb source of experiences.<sup>3</sup> His initial response, as recorded in Put Out More Flags, came to seem embarrassingly naive - but from the very beginning he had perceived the need to be involved, to expose his art to events. He put this perception into the mouth of Lactantius, the artist-figure of his post-war novel Helena; 'If I had dared stay nearer the centre of things . . . I might have been a great

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1 'Mr. Waugh's Cities', Encounter, XV (1960), 65.

2 'Evelyn Waugh's Gentlemen', Critical Quarterly, V (1963), 23-36.

3 Entry for 27.8.39, The Diaries of Evelyn Waugh, ed. Michael Davie, 1976, p. 438.

writer.''<sup>1</sup> It is in this context, rather than that of an over-simplified debate, that Basil Seal's role needs to be viewed.

Is Basil recruited to the national cause, clinching evidence of 'a new spirit abroad' (222)? Sir Joseph Mainwaring, carrying with him many of the novel's critics, supposes so. That cause is presented in synecdoche on the first page, in a long, figurative description of the Sothill's home, Malfrey.

Malfrey had no secret from the heavens; it had been built more than two hundred years ago in days of victory and ostentation and lay, spread out, sumptuously at ease, splendid, defenceless and provocative; a Cleopatra amongst houses; across the sea, Barbara felt, a small and envious mind, a meanly ascetic mind, a creature of the conifers, was plotting the destruction of her home. It was for Malfrey that she loved her prosaic and slightly absurd husband; for Malfrey, too, that she had abandoned Basil and with him the part of herself which, in the atrophy endemic to all fruitful marriages, she had let waste and die. (9-10)

The closing distinction between Malfrey and Basil is interesting - Barbara Sothill, Basil's sister, has sacrificed him, and something of herself, for a Malfrey even encumbered by Freddy. The Nazis and Basil are alike inimical to what Malfrey represents - an important point established early in the novel. Later it is owned that Basil 'was used, in his own life, to a system of push, appeasement, agitation, and blackmail, which . . . ran parallel to Nazi diplomacy' (49). Basil has long been at war; Barbara's rejection of him was a conscious choice between opposed principles -

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1 Helena, (1950), 1963, p. 79.

They had played pirates together in the nursery and the game was over. Basil played pirates alone. She apostatized from her faith in him almost with formality, and yet, as a cult will survive centuries after its myths have been exposed and its sources of faith tainted, there was still deep in her that early piety, scarcely discernible now in a little residue of superstition, so that this morning when her world seemed rocking about her, she turned back to Basil. (15)

The terms of Barbara's rejection grant Basil's position more weight than 'played pirates' seemed at first to suggest. He is seen to represent something older than Malfrey, something anti-social, irrational, even mystical; 'Thus, when earthquake strikes a modern city . . . men . . . born of generations of literates and rationalists, will suddenly revert to the magic of the forest and cross their fingers to avert the avalanche of concrete'. Invoking those 'creatures of the conifers' that are felt to threaten Malfrey, the animal metaphor here is harnessed and set against the house and its associations. Barbara's banal husband is aware that she carries within herself a residue of Basil's unadapted nature -

it was very rarely, now, that the wild little animal in her came above ground; but it was there in its earth, and from time to time he was aware of it, peeping out after long absences; a pair of glowing eyes at the twist in the tunnel watching him as an enemy. (15)

This particular image pulls one back to Waugh's preface, where he writes of the characters of earlier novels, who 'lived on delightfully in holes and corners . . . (until) disturbed in their habits by the rough intrusion of current history' (7) - and anticipates his account of the Trumpingtons, who now form 'a forgotten cove, where the wreckage of the roaring twenties, long tossed on the high seas, lay beached, dry and battered . . .' (36). In each case the instinctive sympathy is with the impulse to retire, to withdraw from some discerned grossness or inanity in modern living, into either the Trumpington's solitude or Basil's active, guerilla hostility.

Basil's few points of contact with his society hardly presage integration. He has in the past frankly preyed upon his mother, and will again upon his friend Ambrose Silk. Ironically, his one enduring relationship, with Angela Lyne, is thought 'morbid' precisely on that account, as if it were recognized that any social alliance with Basil must be necessarily grotesque - 'It was one of those affairs which, beginning lightheartedly as an adventure . . . seemed somehow petrified by a Gorgon glance and endowed with an intolerable permanence . . . 'Really, you know, there's something rather squalid about those two'' (26-27).

Waugh himself wondered if the suggestion of incest present in Basil's relation with his sister might not constitute a large part of the novel's interest.<sup>1</sup> It is appropriate that this nuance should be registered by Doris, eldest of the Connolly children -

' . . . he's your boy, isn't he?' she said, turning to Barbara.  
'He's my brother, Doris.'  
'Ah,' she said, her pig eyes dark with the wisdom of the slums, 'but you fancy him, don't you? I saw.'  
'She really is an atrocious child,' said Barbara.  
(88)

Doris is not censorious; the Connollys, if not 'evil's knout',<sup>2</sup> are a suitably amoral, non-social agency whereby Basil can wage war upon Barbara's 'Garden Party Only' list. Like Basil himself, the Connollys represent a pre-social and unadapted form of humanity, unimpressed even by taboos as rooted as the forbidding of incest; for Barbara's servant Benson, they are simply ''not human'' (86). Doris, 'ripely pubescent . . . her bust prodigious, and her gait . . . designed to be alluring' (80)

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1 Letter to his father of December 1941, The Letters of Evelyn Waugh, ed. Mark Amory, 1980, pp. 158-9.

2 O'Faolain, Op. Cit.

might stand for sexual appetite, her damp, odorous sister Marlene for another set of natural functions; Micky is frankly murderous, 'a child of few words and those, for the most part, foul' (80). These three are held within an animal metaphor carried on logically from Scoop. Marlene is found 'grovelling under the pantry sink eating the remains of the dogs' dinners' (84); Doris has 'dark pig's eyes' (80) and is discovered in Malfrey's rich, eighteenth century corridor, beneath its cornice and pediments, among the marble busts, 'rubbing herself on a pilaster like a cow on a stump' (88). The age of reason meets its counter in the Connollys; Barbara suspects Basil's methods but recognises the terms in which he operates.

'Just war work, Babs,' he said.  
'Slimy snake.'  
'I'm not.'  
'Crawly spider.' They were back in the schoolroom,  
in the world where once they had played pirates.  
'Artful monkey,' said Barbara, very fondly. (102)

The children were stark expressions of Basil's policy; his deploying of them in the countryside around Malfrey is not, as Heath has suggested,<sup>1</sup> merely an immaturity. His targets on the G.P.O. list are, as symbols of the national cause, hardly distinguishable from Malfrey itself, but the Old Mill House, the Old Rectory, the Malt House have all outlived their original purposes, and are now occupied by the elderly and retired; 'houses that once had been supported on the rent of a thousand acres and a dozen cottages now went with a paddock and a walled garden and their life subsisted on pensions and savings' (113). The lives of 'these modest landholders' are recorded in detail and with evident affection by Waugh, ensuring that his unleashing upon them of Basil and the Connollys is the more pitiless. Basil's assaults are filled - even over-filled - with

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<sup>1</sup> The Picturesque Prison: Evelyn Waugh and his Writing, 1982, p. 156.

the imagery of war, and the 'low winter sun' casting 'his shadow before him, ominously, against the door which Mr. Harkness had had painted apple green' (91) can only recall 'the mild autumnal sky . . . dark with encircling enemy . . . their shadows . . . trespassing on the sunlit lawns' (9), of Barbara's fears for Malfrey. To Basil's act of pillage is added one, if not of rape, at least of seduction, in the fat southern lands of 'cider orchards and market gardens' (121). The victim at the Malt House is 'a large and lovely girl' with 'huge, pale blue eyes, a large shy mouth . . . Everything about this girl was large and soft and ample' (122). She is 'the ripe fruit of his reward, this luscious creature . . .' (124-125). Basil's policies of exploitation march with those of the Nazis, their targets indistinguishable. But this is coincidental, as later will be the chiming of his strategy with that of his country.

When Basil arrives at Malfrey, he announces he has 'come to write a book', in the passage cited above; it is an acknowledgement of defeat. This has been set against Ambrose Silk's own response to the war, the new literary review Ivory Tower - "'Now is the time of all times . . . Don't you see?'" (184) - to establish the poles of the novel's supposed debate; but Basil makes much of his impact upon events through a wielding of narrative and has a strong claim to be called the novel's true artist. His opening tale, for Poppet Green, of 'the Prussian military clique . . . allowing the Nazis to gamble just as long as their bluff was not called; he had had this, he said, direct from von Fritsch' (30) is overturned by events, and his assertion that "'There won't be any air raids on London'" (31) anticipates the first siren by seconds -

'For God's sake don't say that.' Even as she spoke the sirens wailed. Poppet stood paralysed with horror. 'Oh God,' she said. 'You've done it. They've come.' 'Faultless timing,' said Basil cheerfully. 'That's always been Hitler's strong point.' (31)

It is the artist in Basil that appreciates the timing; once armed with the Connollys it is the precise staging of his assault, and the observed reaction, that constitute his reward, rather than the subsequent bribe.

The moment for which Basil had been waiting was come. This was the time for the grenade he had been nursing ever since he opened the little, wrought-iron gate and put his hand to the wrought-iron bell-pull. 'We pay eight shilling and sixpence a week,' he said . . . Count seven slowly, then throw. One, two, three, four . . . 'Eight shillings and sixpence?' said Mr. Harkness. 'I'm afraid there's been some misunderstanding.' Five, six, seven. Here it comes. Bang! 'Perhaps I should have told you at once. I am the billeting officer. I've three children for you in the car outside.' It was magnificent. It was war. Basil was something of a specialist in shocks. He could not recall a better. (95)

In this fiction he has cast himself as the billeting officer; back in London he had circumvented the air-raid regulations by being M.I.13; 'Is that to do with gas?' 'It's to do with almost everything. Good morning' (33). His fictions know no limits, and enjoy gathering success, reaching a climax in his traducing of Ambrose. His superior at the War Office, Colonel Plum, fully appreciates the nature of his talent; their exchanges are correspondingly frank -

' . . . Those are the lines I have been working on. What d'you think of them?' 'Rotten.' 'I was afraid you might say that. It's your own fault. Give me time and I would have had a better story.' (166)

Mr. Todhunter, to whom Basil sold the Connollys, was similarly a connoisseur



of the active fiction;

'So that's how you do it. Thank you. That was most instructive, very instructive indeed. I liked the bit about household gods.'

Basil began to realize that he was dealing with a fellow of broad and rather dangerous sympathies; someone like himself. 'In more cultured circles I say Lares et Penates.' (138-139)

Basil's nature as artist is apparent in other ways. His narratives are sometimes 'loose leaves of Conrad' (175); at others his voice is indistinguishable from that which narrates - for example - Vile Bodies.

So there was the house and the Lyne hooligan and the government moving in to make it a hospital, so Angela had to go back and see to things. It's full of beds and nurses and doctors waiting for air-raid victims and a woman in the village got appendicitis and she had to be taken forty miles to be operated on because she wasn't an air-raid victim and she died on the way. So Angela is carrying on a campaign about it. . . (77)

The ingredients of this, its ironic reversal, cruelty, lack of punctuation and scarcely structured sequence of 'so . . . and . . . and' all recall Waugh's own early narratives. Elsewhere Basil notes 'a typical army paradox. They say we are too old now and that they will call us up in two years' time' (76). Colonel Plum is equally capable of a relished irony; 'We can't go arresting people for what they say in a private conversation in a café. I've no doubt we shall come to that eventually, but at the present stage of our struggle for freedom, it just can't be done'' (188-189). Basil's preference for 'very silly girls' (27) is another mark of his esoteric instinct.

It is however in his defeat of Ambrose Silk that Basil's artistry is most apparent. After the sale of the Connollys both Basil and the novel are momentarily at a halt; his surveying of the doors in the War Office might stand as an image of the artist's choices in the house of fiction; 'A fine

vista lay before him of twenty or more closed doors, any one of which might open upon prosperity and adventure' (145). Basil's overthrow of Ambrose is in essence the overthrow of a rival narrator. The physical theft of Silk's manuscript prefigures its more subtle capture, when Basil prompts its author to make an incriminating amendment to his tale -

'I can only say how it reads to an outsider. What I felt was - here is a first-class work of art; something no one but you could have written. And then, suddenly, it degenerates into mere propaganda . . . Still, of course, we all have to make sacrifices in war time. Don't think I don't respect you for it. But artistically, Ambrose, it's shocking'' (191).

Basil's own tale, of Silk as Fascist agent, finds corroboration in the corrupted text; Susie's unpicking of the A's on Ambrose's crêpe-de-Chine underclothes, and substitution of B's, makes for an appropriately succinct, algebraic expression of one narrative's replacement by another.<sup>1</sup> Silk's story was autobiographical, sincere, honest, Basil's an acknowledged fiction, served up for political ends - both Basil's own and those of the government; 'We aren't doing much about communists at the moment. The politicians are shy of them for some reason . . . Catch a fascist for me and I'll think about making you a Captain of Marines' (149-150). By its nature as expediency, as endorsement of a current ideology, Basil's is the archetypal modernist fiction, and Basil himself, unallied, a-social, the typical contriver of such fictions. He rescues Ambrose from the consequences of his fiction, not on account of their friendship (although 'Other things being equal, he wished him well rather than ill' (194)), but out of the loner's instinctive reluctance to have his private discourse

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. the algebraic terms of Scoop, p. 66 below.

adopted into the public domain - 'the sensation of being on the side of the law was novel to Basil and not the least agreeable . . . (his) share in editing Monument to a Spartan was, he felt, better kept as a good story to tell in the right company at the right time' (193-194). The smuggling of Ambrose to Ireland is itself, for the artist, a rewarding affair - 'Basil came very late that night. He had delayed his arrival on purely artistic grounds. Colonel Plum might deny him the excitements of Scotland Yard and the Home Office, but there should be every circumstance of melodrama here' (195). The drama of this escape makes up in part for Basil not having been recruited as a secret agent in the thrilling manner he had wished.

It has been my argument that the 'debate' interpretation of Put Out More Flags oversimplifies the novel and attributes to Waugh too naive a response to the war, too radical a shift in his position as artist. If one persists in the debate reading - granting that perhaps Waugh himself was not unhappy, in the spirit of the annus mirabilis, for there to be discovered in his latest novel a call to arms - there remains the question of its conclusion. Basil is to join Peter Pastmaster's special service unit - but as liaison officer, not a fighter. The opportunities for misinformation and invention the post offers an artist are evident, and the unit itself is a thoroughly romantic conception. This is certainly a qualified commitment to action - but then Ambrose Silk's defeat as artist was itself less than conclusive. Apparently banished under perfect conditions in which to realize his cenobitic ideal, Ambrose fails not because that ideal is proven false, but for reasons of race, simply because

it was not for him; the dark, nomadic strain in his blood, the long heritage of wandering and speculation allowed him no rest. Instead of Atlantic breakers he saw the camels swaying their heads resentfully against the lightening sky, as the caravan woke to another day's stage in the pilgrimage. (219)

The debate, then, remains open, with Basil not fully recruited, Ambrose not sensibly in defeat. Peter Pastmaster and Alastair are too insubstantial for their enrolment alone to carry the argument.

The opposition of Silk to Seal does however sketch in the sole supportive structure in a novel otherwise ill-organized. The Times Literary Supplement reviewer considered Put Out More Flags to have no 'thread of development',<sup>1</sup> Christopher Sykes that it is 'constructed on odd but firm lines'.<sup>2</sup> The novel does fall into awkwardly discrete parts, making necessary a series of fresh beginnings. The Connolly episode is only the most obviously self-contained of Basil's adventures; it is followed by his scanning of the War Office doors, noticed above. The planned overthrow of Silk begins at this point. Not until the novel is almost over is the comedy of Silk's misallied publishers, Bentley and Rampole, begun; not a very original joke to begin with,<sup>3</sup> it is presented in a hearty and overstated manner uncharacteristic of the novel -

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1 Op. Cit.

2 Evelyn Waugh: A Biography, (1975) 1978, p. 284.

3 There are forgivable echoes of Dickens' Cheeryble brothers (Nicholas Nickleby) and Spewlow and Jorkins (David Copperfield); but in Anthony Powell's 1939 novel What's Become of Waring the publishing brothers Hugh and Bernard Judkins enjoy a working relationship very similar indeed to that of Bentley and Rampole. Waugh would certainly have known Powell's novel.

Mr. Rampole paused in the flagged path to comment on the buds which were breaking everywhere in the little garden.

Look well at those buds, old Rampole; you will not see the full leaf.

'I'll be back at six,' he said.

Presumptuous Rampole, who shall tell what the day will bring forth? (198)

As if conscious of having little space, in every sense, in which to achieve this piece of comedy, Waugh amplifies the narrative voice; the effect is a coarsening of the grain of the humour. The narrative personality is already more tangible in Put Out More Flags than in previous novels - the dissection of Barbara's G.P.O. list is confident and independent, without earlier parallel - but there is a quality of nearly malicious detachment in these Rampole passages that is matched only in parts of Scott-King's Modern Europe. There too, for different reasons, haste was apparently the cause.

A further unintegrated area of the novel's plot is that dealing with Angela and Cedric Lyne. Angela's problems are apparently a register of the social malaise to be cured by Sir Joseph's 'new spirit' (222); she lives in a block of flats in Grosvenor Square, where

layer upon layer of rich men and women came and went about their business, layer below layer down to street level; below that again, underground, the management were adapting the basement to serve as an air-raid shelter. Angela seldom went beyond her door . . . (135)

The equation of modern flat-living with dissociation is familiar in Waugh's fiction, but, distractingly, the impression one takes from the full account of Angela's life is that she simply made a bad marriage. It is hard to see how her life-style otherwise differs from that of Sonia Trumpington. The same impression robs Cedric Lyne's fate of its apparent significance; one might anyway have been more willing to suppose his

withdrawal a kind of cenobitism had Waugh not himself underlined this, forcing the point.

These points of disjunction and new beginning within the plot are paralleled at a lower level in the text. The novel opens with a short paragraph announcing that

In the week which preceded the outbreak of the Second World War . . . and on the Sunday morning when all doubts were finally resolved and misconceptions corrected, three rich women thought firstly and mainly of Basil Seal. They were his sister, his mother and his mistress. (9)

This proves to be a recurrent procedure in the advancement of the story, and it resembles one noted in Vile Bodies (page 17 below). In that novel it was one of several marks of the narrator's difficulty in developing his plot; a statement initiates a series of distinct but essentially static discourses. As each is concluded there is a return to the starting point - in the present case, that particular Sunday morning. When Basil announced to the Harknesses that he was the billeting officer,

After the first tremendous silence there were three stages of Harkness reaction; the indignant appeal to reason and justice, then the humble appeal to mercy, then the rigid and dignified acceptance of the inevitable.  
First: (95)

The Connolly episode covers some sixty pages of Put Out More Flags; then 'Two events decided Basil to return to London. First . . .' (136). The children had been introduced in a long retrospective passage, maladroitly launched by the remark 'In the few hours that he had been at Malfrey, Basil had heard a great deal about the Connollys' (78). The short final section 'Summer' is in part organized about a repetition of Sir Joseph's formula, 'a new and more glorious phase' (213). All of these disjunctions, of plot and in narrative organisation, can be seen as consequences of the lack of

movement in Basil's position; if there were truly any sustained debate within Put Out More Flags it would impose its development upon the novel. Instead we have a collage, a series of adventures, in which Basil represents something too complex merely to complete some simplistic art/action equation.

The static quality of Put Out More Flags is reinforced by the volume of pure war reportage the novel contains; this is static in the sense of being unadapted into the work of fiction - it remains inert, artistically untransformed. Christopher Sykes has complained of The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold that Waugh seemed 'to have not only drawn heavily on his raw material, but to have left it raw',<sup>1</sup> and something like this also mars Put Out More Flags, no doubt a consequence of Waugh's over-excitement with his circumstances. There is an assumption that details of life in war time, of military training and organization, are in themselves sufficiently interesting, needing little or no reconstitution.

Winter set in hard. Poland was defeated; east and west the prisoners rolled away to slavery. English infantry cut trees and dug trenches along the Belgian frontier. Parties of distinguished visitors went to the Maginot line and returned, as though from a shrine, with souvenir-medals. Belisha was turned out; the radical papers began a clamour for his return and then suddenly shut up. Russia invaded Finland and the papers were full of tales of white-robed armies scouting through the forests . . . (74)

The single real intervention here is in the Maginot Line reference - the passage otherwise largely fails to respond to the kind of reading one affords fiction. One might compare the equivalent passage in Men At Arms,

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<sup>1</sup> Op. Cit., p. 490.

where the war in Finland is not merely noticed, but integrated into the novel's own thesis.<sup>1</sup> In part this is also, of course, a loss of topicality - the particular significance of the radical papers having 'suddenly shut up' is now obscure - but the same lack of intervention is characteristic of Waugh's own war stories. The details of Alastair's training, and of his refusal of a commission, are oddly commonplace, with no obvious attempt to secure a comic effect, or indeed any other.

Captain Mayfield addressed him in precisely the same words as he had used to Brodie.

'Yes, sir.'

'You don't want to take a commission?'

'No, sir.'

'That's very unusual, Trumpington. Any particular reason?'

'I believe a lot of people felt like that in the last war.'

'So I've heard. And a very wasteful business it was. Well if you won't, I can't make you. Afraid of responsibility, eh?'

Alastair made no answer. Captain Mayfield nodded and the sergeant-major marched him out. (104-105)

The battalion exercise comes closer, in its disarray, to equivalent episodes in the Crouchback novels and in Anthony Powell's series,<sup>2</sup> but without the point, still less the economy, of those. It is literal and overlong, largely unshaped by artistic choices.

Most of the war reportage, however, focuses upon Cedric Lyne. His place in the novel's argument, not fully defined by the account of his marriage, is made no clearer by his military career. His death is the novel's last event and climactically placed in the closing line of 'Spring' - but its significance is uncertain. The cenobitism prompt is too late, and too unargued. Cedric seems to die for considering the war to be 'damned

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1 Men at Arms, (1952) 1973, pp. 141-142; and page 238 above.

2 A Dance to the Music of Time, 1951-1975.



silly' (211), and the whole of this long battle scene is indeed written in a remarkably earnest and unironic manner. One is left with null, pure action-writing, hardly recognisable as Waugh's -

It was half an hour before D Company was on its way. From the cave they could see them marching along the track where Cedric had walked so exuberantly. As they watched they saw the column a mile away halt, break up and deploy.

'We're too late,' said the Colonel. 'Here come the armoured cars.'

They had overrun the party of Loamshires and were spreading fanwise across the low plain. Cedric counted twenty of them; behind them an endless stream of lorries full of troops. At the first shot the lorries stopped and under cover of the armoured cars the infantry fell in on the ground, broke into open order and began their advance with parade-ground deliberation. (209-210)

The colonel here, almost uniquely in Waugh's fiction, is not a figure of fun; when his adjutant says of Cedric that 'He's doing all right' (210), we are apparently to perceive this to be a valued and endorsable judgement. The battle is described in close detail, a little over-diagrammatically; Waugh did not serve in Norway. (His own battle, in Crete, was to be narrated much less coherently in Officers and Gentlemen).

The tone of the writing at this point in the novel is close to that of Waugh's Life magazine article of 1941, 'Commando Raid on Bardia: Specially Trained British Bands Stealthily Attack Axis Strongholds in Libya at Night'. David Lodge has wondered of that piece, 'Did Waugh suppress his sense of humour in the interest of propaganda, or was he still in the honeymoon stage of his military service?',<sup>1</sup> and the question might also stand against substantial parts of Put Out More Flags. Waugh's view of his novel altered over time, as his letters show. Soon after completion

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1 'The Fugitive Art of Letters', in Working with Structuralism, 1981, p. 135; in the chapter 'Aspects of Waugh'.

he was complaining that, owing to the paper shortage, 'it will not appear until it has lost all point'.<sup>1</sup> This suggests a modest, simply topical estimate of the work, as do together his disclaimer that it was 'a minor work dashed off to occupy a tedious voyage',<sup>2</sup> and the remark that it was 'sweeping America'.<sup>3</sup> The Bardia article was of course directed towards Americans. By 1951 he was claiming that Put Out More Flags was 'about' Brian Howard, whom Christopher Sykes has identified as the model for Ambrose Silk. This is to take the novel more seriously; it perhaps accorded with his own increasingly sombre outlook for Waugh to view the novel in this light. It also represents a back-pedalling on naive patriotism.

With the beginning of the war Waugh had laid aside Work Suspended, and his latest novel was apparently a continuation of his typical, successful manner. But it is clear that Put Out More Flags shares that new orientation to be noted in the abandoned fragment. The more outward, more confidently assertive narrative manner of that piece was in a sense hijacked by the war, which seems to have overloaded Waugh with uncharacteristically public values. Put Out More Flags presents the new manner in an accelerated, coarsened form; in the warmly affectionate account of the Old Mill, North Grappling the effect of the maid's cap is described as 'part Dutch, part conventual, and wholly ludicrous' (91) - an untypically brisk interpolation, as if in resistance to the general seductiveness of the writing. An emotional patriotism removed the edge of Waugh's satire without replacing it with values which thoroughly convinced him, even in 1940.

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1 Letter to Randolph Churchill, September 1941, Op. Cit., p. 154.

2 Letter to his father, December 1941, Op. Cit., p. 158.

3 Letter to his wife, May 1942, Op. Cit., p. 159-160.

It was left to Basil Seal to guarantee, almost subliminally, the survival in Put Out More Flags of Waugh's cooler perception of his society. It is his role that I have been most concerned to emphasise here, but the novel remains excited and ambivalent, open to Basil's charge, 'It glares a bit, you know . . .'' (191).

PART TWO

BRIDESHEAD REVISITED

SCOTT-KING'S MODERN EUROPE

THE LOVED ONE

HELENA

LOVE AMONG THE RUINS

MEN AT ARMS

OFFICERS AND GENTLEMEN

UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDER

- IV -

BRIDESHEAD REVISITED

'My theme is memory, that winged host that soared about me one grey morning of war-time.'<sup>1</sup>

This flourish from the opening of Book Three of Brideshead Revisited is cited by almost all critics in their discussions of this novel. F. J. Stopp prefaces his own chapter on Brideshead with these words,<sup>2</sup> and clearly feels they express something central to the novel, something one might call the 'Proustian element'. It is worth reflecting on what the implications of such an element might be; Proust's novel is concerned with the mutability of the past, the manner in which present needs, personal exigency, drive one to re-interpret and re-value experiences; the ascendancy over actuality of impression. But Ryder's passage continues -

These memories, which are my life - for we possess  
nothing certainly except the past - were always  
with me.

The Proustian element, then, if it is to be discovered in Brideshead at all, lies outside Ryder's own conscious narrative. For him, the past is certain; his theme must be autobiography, and memory only his method - there can be no parallel in his narrative to Marcel's late and sober reconsideration. His remark here occurs within the novel's present time, its latest point. The reluctance of Brideshead's critics to relinquish the Proustian dimension is one example of a characteristic docility in their approach to this novel. It is a book often summarized but rarely

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1 Brideshead Revisited (1945), 1978 Penguin edition, p. 215. I have throughout used a 1978 reprint of the revised version first published in 1960. R. M. Davis has isolated 'at least twelve' different versions of the novel (Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America, LXII (3, 1978) 305-320.) but the 1960 revision is probably that most commonly read today. For convenience I will refer to the novel as simply Brideshead.

2 Evelyn Waugh: Portrait of an Artist, 1958, p. 108.

subjected to strict criticism; Ryder's tale, his memories, are consistently identified as the novel's whole business, and this in spite of there having been - for example - no satisfactory explication of the Proustian parallels, and in spite of the well-documented uneasiness with Ryder as a narrator. I wish to suggest that Brideshead becomes a far more interesting novel if one resists Ryder, and that there is a mass of evidence within the text to encourage resistance. The novel does have a genuine Proustian interest but one which operates at Ryder's expense, rather than at his beckoning. His remark 'My theme is memory' is both untrue and truer than he knows.

The prologue is in every sense a setting-up of the story proper. We are to discover Ryder as a sensitive man, out of step with his time, merely conforming to present demands. Amid a lunatic normality - the inmates of the asylum are 'collaborationists' who have given up the struggle to be sane in an insane world and are thus the 'undisputed heirs-at-law of a century of progress' (10) - a jaundiced Ryder retains within himself the memory of a lost order. Thus far the standard interpretation of these opening pages, finding in them a further expression of Waugh's '30's themes -

There was some way to go . . . quarter of a mile in which concrete gave place to grass at the road's edge. This was the extreme limit of the city. Here the close, homogeneous territory of housing estates and cinemas ended and the hinterland began. (9)

These are familiar images and this is a familiar response, but well might J. F. Carens, accepting all of this, feel nonetheless that we are given the asylum 'As if this ugliness were not enough . . .'.<sup>1</sup> One feels that

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1 The Satiric Art of Evelyn Waugh, Seattle, 1966, p. 103.

this is more than enough, especially within half a page of the novel's beginning, and that the asylum is a sudden and grotesque insertion. The passages of exact and subdued description give way without preamble to the developed figure of the asylum quoted in part above; it is as if a pressure valve is momentarily loosened, and it is characteristic of the tone of the prologue. The sentence rhythms and structure contribute to this same effect. By contrast with the opening pages of Work Suspended before it and Men at Arms after, the prologue has a smaller proportion of short sentences and a larger proportion of long; the remaining short sentences are the more foregrounded for their scarcity and for the contrasting bulk of longer expression, and as a result have a pregnant, bitten-off quality -

We were leaving that day . . . Here love had died  
between me and the army . . . Here at the age of  
thirty-nine I began to be old . . . Here my last  
love died . . . I had been there before; I knew  
all about it. (9, 11, 22)

The first two of these occur within ten lines of the story's beginning; the second is especially dramatic, isolated on a single line and introducing the idea of 'love'. There is an overstated, slightly ludicrous aspect to these insertions, but the prologue's long sentences are no less remarkable, quickly breaking at semi-colons into numerous sub-clauses -

There were few left in the mess now . . .; one way  
and another they were nearly all gone - some had  
been invalided out, some promoted to other battalions,  
some posted to staff jobs, some had volunteered for  
special service, one had got himself killed on the  
field firing range, one had been court-martialled -  
and their places were taken by conscripts; the wireless  
played incessantly in the ante-room nowadays, and much  
beer was drunk before dinner; it was not as it had  
been. (11)



The accretive manner of the construction, the repeated 'some' and 'one', the comprehensiveness of the account and the bitten-off conclusion all combine to suggest a narrator slightly off balance, a narrative marginally out of control. Once again the impression is of buttoned tension, something not quite forcing its way from beneath. The central passage of the prologue adds greatly to this impression, as Ryder delivers himself of a long and detailed simile, comparing the army to a wife. It is prefaced by a short, preparatory sentence, 'Here my last love died', a brooding return, like the reiterated 'Here's', to his central concern. The ensuing sentence is one hundred and seventy nine words long, breaking into twenty-five sub-sections. In its early part it repeats the inclusive manner of the sentence noted above, piling up circumstantial detail -

One day, not long before this last day in camp, as I lay awake before reveille, in the Nissen hut, gazing into the complete blackness, amid the deep breathing and muttering of the four other occupants, turning over in my mind what I had to do that day - had I put in the names of two corporals for the weapon-training course? Should I again have the largest number of men overstaying their leave in the batch due back that day? Could I trust Hooper to take the candidates class out map-reading? . . . (11)

There follows the simile itself -

as I lay in that dark hour, I was aghast . . . and felt as a husband might feel, who, in the fourth year of his marriage, suddenly knew that he had no longer any desire, or tenderness, or esteem, for a once-beloved wife; no pleasure in her company, no wish to please, no curiosity about anything she might ever do or say or think; no hope of setting things right, no self-reproach for the disaster.

Thus far the simile is apt, admirable; the reader makes the conceptual leap from wife to army without difficulty and Ryder's sense of ennui is rendered effectively. It is an appropriate point at which to halt, the figure already half as long again as that addressed to the lunatics. There

follows, however -

I knew it all, the whole drab compass of marital disillusion; we had been through it together, the Army and I, from the first importunate courtship until now, when nothing remained to us except the chill bonds of law and duty and custom. (12)

This is perhaps more than we need, and suspicions of a narrator enamoured of his own dexterity are a little damaging to Ryder's image, but the simile itself is still coherent. It is after this point that it becomes increasingly difficult to keep hold of both ends of the figure.

I had played every scene in the domestic tragedy, had found the early tiffs become more frequent, the tears less affecting, the reconciliations less sweet . . . I caught the false notes in her voice . . . I recognized the blank, resentful stare of incomprehension in her eyes, and the selfish, hard set of the corners of her mouth . . . I learned her slatternly ways, the routine and mechanism of her charm, her jealousy and self-seeking, and her nervous trick with the fingers when she was lying.

Clearly, details such as tears, eyes, set mouths and tricks with fingers have quite escaped from any figure of speech, and become part of a separate story, about a failed marriage. The simile turns round, as it were, the marriage becoming tenor rather than vehicle. This is Ryder out of control of his narrative in the manner of John Plant, whose metaphors in Work Suspended rebound in a similarly telling fashion upon their maker. Neither Stopp nor Carens have comment on this long simile, and presumably accept it as simply expressing Ryder's lack of engagement with his circumstances. This is what Ryder himself invites us to suppose, but his images here confirm one's sense of a strong undertow to the ostensible story. Commentators on this part of the novel have instead concentrated on the character of Hooper, complaining that he is not sufficiently a symbol of the modern world, too limited a target for Ryder's cosmic concept. Thus

Frank Kermode, suggesting that the 'defenders have made a wrong appreciation; their enemy is more dangerous, much cleverer, than Hooper'<sup>1</sup> and Robert Powell more generally that Waugh 'fails to find any objective correlative through which he can make his point'.<sup>2</sup> Ryder's attitude to Hooper is not simply one of contempt, however. The 'affection' he feels for his platoon-commander is borne of a grudging envy he has for Hooper's lack of illusions. Ryder, for all his avowed cynicism, evidently retains a good measure of romanticism, and the paragraph purporting to describe Hooper's frame of mind quickly turns into a catalogue of glorious military occasions, names which still 'called to me irresistibly across the intervening years with all the clarity and strength of boyhood' (15). Ryder's momentarily-revealed zest subsides, but the presence of something half-expressed has again been indicated; one learns much of Ryder, little of Hooper, or the Army, or lunatic asylums in such passages -

He had not as a child ridden with Rupert's horse or sat among the camp fires at Xanthus-side; at the age when my eyes were dry to all save poetry . . . Hooper had wept often, but never for Henry's speech on St. Crispin's day, nor for the epitaph at Thermopylae.  
(14-15)

Ryder still holds onto ideas of 'the sort of things that usually happens in this regiment' (14), but Hooper is unmoved by his ill-treatment; 'I can take a bit of sport'. Hooper is evidently unexceptional, commonplace, an innocent; it is Ryder who is strange and portentous. Ryder lying in bed staring into the darkness, pondering 'Hooper Rallies', 'Hooper Hostels', International Hooper Cooperation'; Ryder watching from the corner of the railway carriage, listening to his men's talk, noting

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1 'Mr. Waugh's Cities', Encounter, XV (Nov 1960), 69.

2 'Uncritical Perspective: Belief and Art in Brideshead Revisited', Critical Quarterly, XXII (Aut 1980), 53-67.

sourly that 'None of them had a book' (18); the Ryder who constructs the tense prose of the prologue, at once trammelled and wild; these impressions combine to suggest a figure far odder than that the novel's critics have discovered, a figure, almost, of hysteria.

Turning to the story proper with this vision of one's narrator, the tale he tells takes on a resonance, becomes at once more suspect and more interesting than mere autobiography. Frank Kermode has remarked that

An important and neglected rule about reading narratives is that once a certain kind of attention has been aroused we read according to the values appropriate to that kind of attention whether or no there is a series of definite gestures to prompt us; of course we may also decide not to be docile,<sup>1</sup> and evade these local and provincial restrictions.

Ryder the story-teller provides a series of very definite gestures, local restrictions, during Brideshead and has enjoyed, to the detriment of the novel's reputation, a compliant audience. Once alerted to the presence of an alternative reading, the novel turns into a species of mystery story; what happened to Ryder to produce in him the effects apparent in the prologue? One learns to look twice at his pronouncements and very soon becomes aware of another story, of which the theme is indeed memory, threaded through his own. Thus the important passage at the end of the prologue, in which Ryder's recollecting mind begins to pass back over his youth, yields other suggestions;

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1 Novel and Narrative, Glasgow University, 1972, pp. 11-12.

it was as though someone had switched off the wireless, and a voice that had been bawling in my ears, incessantly, fatuously, for days beyond number, had been suddenly cut short; an immense silence followed, empty at first, but gradually, as my outraged sense regained authority, full of a multitude of sweet and natural and long forgotten sounds: (21)

The prologue had repeatedly used emergence from fog and mist as an index of clear-sightedness; thus Ryder looking back at the camp 'just coming into full view below me through the grey mist of early morning' (9), and again the 'smoke from the cook-houses drifted away in the mist and the camp lay revealed as a planless maze of short-cuts'<sup>1</sup> (13). The wireless image here is an aural equivalent to these, but revealingly compromised in that the silence that ensues is brief, soon filled by a 'multitude' of other sounds; one distraction displaces another. The idea is immediately repeated and confirmed -

for he had spoken a name that was so familiar to me, a conjuror's name of such ancient power, that, at its mere sound, the phantoms of those haunted late years began to take flight.

The smoke and incessant wireless buzz can be associated with the idea of a haunting, of 'phantoms' besetting Ryder, but that these should be dispersed not by a light-of-day clear-sightedness but only by some superior magic, a 'conjuror's name of such ancient power', constitutes a kind of tautology, suggesting only alternative phantoms, the wireless not switched off but merely retuned. The question of the value of the Flyte experience is central to the novel's meaning; close reading suggests that its status is still ambiguous at the last, not fully incorporated as a 'forerunner'. Ryder will raise the issue on his expulsion from the house, but will again

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<sup>1</sup> Ryder characteristically imputes to Hooper a 'general, enveloping fog' of illusion, much more nearly his own condition (14).

reach no finally satisfying conclusion.

The language of 'Et in Arcadia Ego' has rarely been seriously examined by critics of Brideshead, most of whom confine themselves to generalised remarks on its poetic, idealised qualities. The most detailed commentary is that given by Susan Auty,<sup>1</sup> who states that the imagery and elegiac tone of the Oxford passages form a 'simultaneous celebration and rejection of the world's charm', and that the language 'serves to convey both the attractiveness and ultimate destructiveness' of that charm. This is certainly true, but once again it is possible to adopt too compliant an attitude to Ryder's fine story; Auty considers that it is Ryder's susceptibility to charm, 'revealed in his romantic descriptions, that shows him to be capable of religious fulfilment, capable of a deep appreciation of eternal beauty'. There is this and more in the passages she discusses. Remarking on the hypnotic sentence rhythms, parallels and balances of the picnic episode early in Book One, Auty notes the 'language of enchantment' but does not comment on the image offered by Sebastian which, concluding the section, is strongly foregrounded.

'Just the place to bury a crock of gold . . . I should like to bury something precious in every place where I've been happy and then, when I was old and ugly and miserable, I could come back and dig it up and remember.' (26)

One naturally discerns in this the present novel's *raison d'être*, Ryder's story just such a precious thing consoling his miserable wartime self.

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1 'Language and Charm in Brideshead Revisited', Dutch Quarterly Review, VI, (Autumn 1976), 291-303.

Further than this, one notes that a crock of gold is traditionally located at the end of a rainbow, proverbially inaccessible; that rainbows themselves are illusory visions of light and colour. The Oxford episodes are of course filled with references to changing lights and shadows, to blending colours and heavy scents; in the present instance 'the blue-grey smoke' of their cigarettes rising to 'the blue-green shadows of foliage', the 'sweet scent of the tobacco' merging with 'the sweet summer scents' and the 'fumes of the sweet, golden wine'. By inference, all Ryder's Oxford is questioned by Sebastian's rainbow image. It has further implications; the action of burying and digging up recalls Ryder's refusal in the prologue to uncover and rebury the camp rubbish. Once alert to a mildly hysterical Ryder, these become classic images of repression; if one wonders about the reality of the glowing memories Ryder is recovering, one will also speculate on what truths he obstinately refuses to disinter in camp. The theme of repression, like many other threads of Ryder's narrative, is more active, more telling, than he himself judges. For him, Lord Marchmain's mistress Cara first introduces the subject -

'When people hate with all that energy, it is something in themselves they are hating. Alex is hating all the illusions of boyhood - innocence, God, hope. Poor Lady Marchmain has to bear all that. A woman has not all these ways of loving.' (99-100)

In the context of Ryder's own tale this represents a far-sighted clearing of the ground for Lord Marchmain's eventual return to his church. In the context of the novel's larger narrative, and of the implied portrait of Ryder as just such a collapsed romantic, it clearly bears on the narrator's own repressed nature. The way attention is deflected to Ryder himself is characteristic; six pages later Ryder offers an image of Sebastian's distaste for Oxford company - 'Sebastian became possessed by a kind of

phobia, like that which sometimes comes over men in uniform against their own service'(105). The military reference reactivates the theme of repressed self-hate, once more recalling the paradoxes of Ryder's attitude in the prologue.

The buried treasure motif is used once more in the novel, at the time of Ryder's expulsion from Brideshead. Close attention to his reaction reveals a continuing inability to evaluate his experience with the Flytes.

I was unmoved; there was no part of me remotely touched by her distress. It was as I had often imagined being expelled from school. I almost expected to hear her say: 'I have already written to inform your unhappy father.' (163)

The opening sentence anticipates Guy Crouchback's response to his reprimand at the close of Men at Arms - 'Guy left the office unashamed. He felt shaken, as though he had seen a road accident in which he was not concerned.'<sup>1</sup> Guy's crime too was to provide a friend with the means to destroy himself; his freedom from feelings of guilt register Apthorpe's unreality in that book, his status as Guy's fiction, to create and dismiss. But Sebastian is more substantial than this, and Ryder finally less serene -

But as I drove away . . . I felt that I was leaving part of myself behind, and that wherever I went afterwards I should feel the lack of it, and search for it hopelessly, as ghosts are said to do, frequenting the spots where they buried material treasures without which they cannot pay their way to the nether world.

This is an interesting reversal of the earlier position; not an old and miserable man in search of illusory treasures, but actual 'material treasures' sought by an etherealized Ryder; the Flytes as substance, Ryder as unreal. In recounting his expulsion Ryder vacillates between

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<sup>1</sup> Men at Arms (1952), 1973, p. 242.



feeling the experience to have been illusory, and feeling it to have been of a higher reality. 'A door had shut, the low door in the wall I had sought and found in Oxford'; Ryder is barred from the Garden. Or was there any garden? - 'open it now and I should find no enchanted garden' (163). Has the experience been merely trickery, contrived illusion, a 'Young Magician's Compendium' with folding pennies and hollow candles, or was it the stuff of real magic, that of 'sunless coral palaces' from which he had emerged into the mere 'light of common day'? The converted Ryder will conclude that only spiritual truths are 'real', the world of three dimensions indeed an illusion.

I have followed the line of rainbow and repression images forward from the prologue in order to show how two-handed a text this is; Ryder's story of the Flytes, of his involvement and expulsion, lies alongside a second. In this one learns different things about the narrator, and becomes reluctant to confine oneself to his account. If all the doubts about the value of his experience are dispersed, as they are for Susan Auty, what is the wartime Ryder still so unsure, still apparently repressed, confused in his attitude to Hooper? Ryder's calm conclusion may satisfy himself, but much remains enigmatic.

At this point it is perhaps useful to indicate the kind of writing I have in mind in speaking of 'Ryder's story', in order to distinguish it from the supplementary narrative within the novel. Ryder's story tends always towards 'A Twitch Upon the Thread', and moves in a manner often less than subtle to that resounding finale. There is something overstated in his reference to the 'ominous chill' felt at Sebastian's cool description of

his home, a quality of explicitness recurring in such isolated lines as 'the horrors of that evening were not yet over' and 'there lay our mistake' (129,110). Ryder's analysis, of Sebastian's 'escape from reality' having filled 'a deep interior need' (103), has a banal quality that invites the reader to look beyond for the real interest of the narrative, but some such account of Sebastian's problems, and Ryder's oratorical piece 'The langour of Youth' (77), tend to pass unqualified into critical accounts of the novel - in spite, in the case of the oratory, of Ryder's own acid test; The langour of Hooper - how unique and quintessential it is?

A similar blatant quality can be felt elsewhere in Ryder's telling; he records Sebastian wishing "'it could only be like this always - always summer, always alone, the fruit always ripe, and Aloysius in a good temper . . .'", and after his disgrace sitting in

the shadows beyond the lamplight, beyond the warmth of the burning logs, beyond the family circle, and the photographs spread out on the card-table . . . There was no answer from the shadows. (144-145)

One too many 'always', and then far too many 'beyond's, for the reader not to feel that a card is being forced upon him. In a larger sense Ryder's entire 'forerunner' hypothesis is only an extension of his very purposive method in such passages. He tells early in the novel how he would have abandoned his earnest friend Collins 'had Sebastian made a sign' (44); later likens Sebastian to 'a friend made on board ship, on the high seas' (91). The shape of things to come, particularly on a second reading, is being rather too firmly sketched in such phrases. Robert Powell blames Waugh himself rather than Ryder, but nonetheless rightly protests that as readers 'we want to identify the teller through his tale, and we feel we

have been cheated if we are told what the novel means.<sup>1</sup> Hampered, one feels, by his awareness of Waugh-the-author, Powell is finally dissatisfied with Brideshead. Certainly there is a surfeit of meaning and intention in Ryder's narrative, the source of repeated critical complaints of partisanship, of an absence of irony.<sup>2</sup>

The imagery bedecking Ryder's story is of correspondingly deliberate kind. The handling of light imagery, so adroit in the war trilogy, is especially naive in Ryder's narrative:

Everywhere, on cobble and gravel and lawn, the leaves were falling and in the college gardens the smoke of the bonfires joined the wet river mist, drifting across the grey walls . . . the golden lights were diffuse and remote . . . and the familiar bells now spoke of a year's memories.  
The autumnal mood possessed us . . . (101)

The equation of autumnal twilight with the beginning of Sebastian's decline is at best unadventurous, but it is a parallel worked very hard by Ryder, who is not above declaring that 'the shadows were closing round Sebastian . . . once again the gillyflowers bloomed under my windows . . . but it was not as it had been; there was mid-winter in Sebastian's heart.' (135).

The maudlin relish of such writing encourages retreat from intimacy with the narrator, a withdrawal further prompted by his insertion into the story of sage and gratuitous wisdom, offered more or less casually, off-the-cuff; the 'langour of Youth' passage was one of the less casual, but belongs to a family of such remarks. Thus Ryder reminds us of 'that stoic, red-skin interlude which our schools introduce between the fast-flowing tears of the child and the man' (14) . . . 'the hard bachelordom of English adolescence, the premature dignity and authority of the school system' (45) . . . 'the

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1 Op. Cit., p. 53.

2 Thus, amongst others, O'Faolain, Spender, Churchill, Cronin, Heilman, Griffiths and the Times Literary Supplement. See bibliography.

zest which in youth follows a restless night' (58) . . . 'that easy leap, characteristic of my generation, from the puritanism of Ruskin to the puritanism of Roger Fry ' (79). This comes to feel objectionably paternal, at once an easy assumption of common ground and a complacent readiness to lecture.

The cumulative effect of all of these aspects of Ryder's virile storytelling is to encourage in the reader a reluctance, a disinclination to confine oneself to the areas so clearly marked out as 'significant'. Some of the supplementary readings available in Ryder's imagery were noted earlier, but I wish now to suggest that his entire narrative technique, when awarded that 'certain kind of attention' Kermode describes, produces an interpretation seriously compromising the simple outlines of 'A Twitch Upon the Thread'. For Ryder, Oxford was 'a city of aquatint' (23), and his evocation has all the stylised quality of a watercolour portrait. Susan Auty speaks of 'the persuasive cadences of the incremental sentence'<sup>1</sup> but what they might persuade one of can be debated -

In her spacious and quiet streets men walked and spoke as they had done in Newman's day; her autumnal mists, her grey springtime, and the rare glory of her summer days - such as that day - when the chestnut was in flower and the bells rang out high and clear over her gables and cupolas, exhaled the soft airs of centuries of youth. (23)

Such writing may presage artistic emotion awakening to the spiritual, but it also suggests an intoxication with colour and composition for their own sakes; the balanced pairings of 'spacious and quiet', 'walked and spoke', 'high and clear', 'gables and cupolas', the tendency toward proliferation, the archaic mannerism of a personalised 'her' and exhaled airs, all denote a narrator relishing the creative act of writing, rather

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<sup>1</sup> Op. Cit., p. 291.

than one intent upon exact recollection of a past he holds to be certain. 'Lyonnesse' was only ever recoverable from the pages of Tennyson; Oxford by the 1920's was potentially a city of sepia photographs, and Ryder's preference for the aquatint is a telling one.<sup>1</sup> He is obliged to include Hardcastle's Morris-Cowley, but the eye of the artist can at least pose it 'Beyond the gate, beyond the winter garden that was once the lodge' (25). This kind of recomposition pervades Ryder's literal account -

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1 One critical approach to Brideshead nevertheless finds in the novel a swathe of social documentation, some kind of source-book for the inter-war years, and tacitly assumes a fair degree of reliability in Ryder as a narrator. Thus Bruce Marshall praises the novel for being 'historically, sociologically, artistically and theologically correct. Just think of all the things the author got right . . .' ('Graham Greene and Evelyn Waugh', Commonweal, LI (1949-50), 551-553). Martin Green ambitiously locates in Brideshead 'an implicit cultural theory of England after 1918' (Transatlantic Patterns, New York, 1977, p. 153), while Leo Hines offers as evidence of Waugh's 'rare kind of genius' the point that 'he probably knows more about the art of domestic architecture than any one in the world now writing fiction' ('Waugh and his Critics', Commonweal, LXXVI (1962), 60-63). For John Riley the Paris episode constitutes 'probably the best written dinner scene in modern fiction' ('The Two Waugh's at War: Part 2 - A Reassessment of Brideshead Revisited', Evelyn Waugh Newsletter, XII (Winter 1978), 3-9). These are remarkable species of genius; it is arguable that claims for Brideshead's authenticity generally are beside the point - that one does not at the last read this novel for that kind of interest. Malcolm Bradbury is perhaps the most considerable critic to view Brideshead in this light, finding it 'an intensely social novel . . . a detailed social history' (Evelyn Waugh, 1964, p. 88), in short a "'Condition of England' novel of a recognizable type, with much endeavour to cover recent history' (Possibilities, 1973, p. 156). Bradbury's account of Brideshead tends to be idealized; a novelist himself, he describes his sense of what the novel could or should have been, and certainly it might have been the 'social panorama' promised on the jacket of the Penguin edition. But where, at last, is the description of Venice, of Latin America, or anything more than odes to Oxford? The post-war malaise finds only peripheral expression, in Ryder's scout Lunt, for whom 'things could never be the same as they had been in 1914' (24). The General Strike is only the context for juvenile disappointment - the description of 'Bill Meadows' show' lasts for one page of ironic comedy - and politics is a 'barren topic' (269), something vulgar people like Rex Mottram affect. Ryder is too particular and peculiar a figure to be representative of more than himself, and certainly no Candide exposing the ills of his age, no Paul Pennyfeather or William Boot.

Here, discordantly, in Eights Week, came a rabble of womankind, some hundreds strong, twittering and fluttering over the cobbles and up the steps, sight-seeing and pleasure-seeking, drinking claret cup, eating cucumber sandwiches; pushed in punts about the river, herded in droves to the college barges . . . (23)

The collected manner of the narrator, in his drive toward balanced expression, even vitiates something of the intended sense of rabble; the memory, one feels, is included primarily as the excuse for the display of narrative élan. The strict but unacknowledged disciplining of content by form becomes the characteristic mode of Ryder's narrative, not merely confined to his Oxford days but permeating his outlook generally. He is above all the artist, in his own story a painter, in our own a writer.<sup>1</sup> Julia's furious question, "'Why must you see everything second-hand?'" (277) is crucial, and of course unanswerable by Ryder himself - "'It's a way I have'". The 'other story' I am seeking to define is largely structured about such evaded questions - thus, why is the reclaimed wartime Captain Ryder still as odd as he is? Why did he give

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<sup>1</sup> Thus descriptions of Ryder's painting consistently illuminate the nature of his narrative - 'It was an ambitious subject for an amateur . . . but by some odd chance . . . I brought it off . . . by judicious omissions and stylish tricks . . .' (79); 'Here, in one of the smaller oval frames, I sketched a romantic landscape and . . . filled it out with colour . . . a summer scene of white cloud and blue distances . . .' (80); 'on every visit to Brideshead I painted a medallion on the walls of the garden-room. The custom suited me well . . . people took refuge to complain about the others; thus without effort I kept in touch with the gossip of the place' (156); 'it is my vice to spend too long on a canvas, never content to leave well alone . . . At the end of each passage I paused, tense, afraid to start the next, fearing, like a gambler, that luck must turn and the pile be lost . . . I could not even now leave my picture, although the sun was down and the room fading to monochrome. I took it from the easel and held it up to the windows, put it back and lightened a shadow.' (209-210). Ryder works, characteristically, 'in the smell of the oil lamp' (103), even in near-darkness; imagination is more vital an ingredient than actual attention, and the houses he paints are always more than bricks and mortar in Ryder's mythology.

Sebastian money to buy drink? why are Rex Mottram and Saugrass so pilloried? The answers to these questions are approachable once one has realized the extent to which Ryder's whole way of seeing is suspect.

In the first chapter of 'Et in Arcadia Ego' Ryder introduces a series of characters. The first of these is Lunt, his scout, reacting to the college ball arrangements -

'Gentlemen who haven't got ladies are asked as far as possible to take their meals out in the next few days . . . So as to give the servants a chance, they say. What a chance! I've got to buy a pin-cushion for the Ladies' Cloakroom. What do they want with dancing? I don't see the reason in it. There never was dancing before in Eights Week. Commem. now is another matter . . .' (24)

Lunt's monologue earns and completes a large paragraph, the picture achieved but not spilling over into the rest of the narrative; Lunt's brief reappearance a few pages later conforms to this blueprint, consisting of a 'typical' comment. Ryder's father has by then followed him into the narrative.

'I've been talking about you. I met your future Warden at the Athenaeum. I wanted to talk about Etruscan notions of immortality; he wanted to talk about extension lectures for the working-class; so we compromised and talked about you. I asked him what your allowance should be. He said, "Three hundred a year; on no account give him more; that's all most men have." I thought that a deplorable answer . . .' (26-27)

Mr. Ryder's portion is larger than Lunt's, but he too is delivered neatly into our hands, almost palpably labelled 'eccentric father'. Ryder is careful to delete his own contribution to the exchange - 'I thanked him.' - and so maintain the effect. 'Cousin Jasper' - the relation is always preserved - follows in turn upon Mr. Ryder; his self-revelatory

monologue is prefaced with some angled comment -

He was the son of my father's elder brother, to whom he referred more than once, only half facetiously, as 'the Head of the Family'; . . . he was secretary of the Canning and president of the J. C. R.; a considerable person in college . . . he ate a very heavy meal of honey-buns. anchovy toast, and Fuller's walnut cake . . . (27-28)

- but thereafter conforms to the established model; again Ryder occludes himself, silently attending to fire and lights as Jasper lectures on, the brief aside 'even today I could repeat much of what he said, word for word', reminding the reader by its felt irrelevance that already one is beginning not to suppose all this a very literal account. One reads these descriptions of Lunt, Mr. Ryder and Jasper as pieces of bravura 'characterisation', as essentially burlesqued, and asides such as this seem in consequence strangely dishonest. If one does not then censure Ryder for this, it is because he seems himself scarcely aware of distinctions between fact and fiction -

It is easy, retrospectively, to endow one's youth with a false precocity or a false innocence; to tamper with the dates marking one's stature on the edge of the door. I should like to think - indeed I sometimes do think - that I decorated those rooms with Morris stuffs and Arundel prints and that my shelves were filled with seventeenth-century folios and French novels of the second empire in Russia-leather and watered silk. But this was not the truth.  
(29)

In the face of such admissions - Ryder consistently makes these damaging remarks, pointing the way for the reader - it is easy to suspect that Ryder has tampered more widely, that 'indeed I sometimes do think' is a remark informing much of his tale; which in consequence might well be 'not the truth'. His list of imagined belongings is scarcely less detailed than that of his actual - they are as present in the novel as those, and reach the reader the sooner. His Van Gogh reproduction and Medici volumes



are despatched as quickly and completely as Collins and the dull scholars of the Iffley Road, fading 'into the landscape . . . like highland sheep into the misty heather' (30).

Ryder's introduction of Anthony Blanche is a little different. Blanche is present at Sebastian's luncheon, where Ryder enjoyed him 'voraciously' (34), but he is dealt with, in the sense of recomposition I am describing, a little later in Chapter Two. Ryder transmutes Blanche into a series of types; nearly but not quite 'an Englishman', he becomes in succession 'a clever and audacious schoolboy', 'a Hogarthian page boy', and 'the Wandering Jew', having romantically 'defied the submarines' and emerged unscathed from 'an Oedipus complex in Vienna' (47). More interesting - for Blanche is an obvious target for Ryder's imagination - are the narrator's tableaux of Blanche's life -

as he told the tale of his evening at the gaming table, one could see in the roll of his eye just how he had glanced, covertly, over the dwindling pile of chips at his step-father's party; while we had been rolling one another in the mud at football . . . Anthony had helped oil fading beauties on sub-tropical sands and had sipped his apéritif in smart little bars. (47-48)

One notes how little raw material Ryder needs to construct his vivid scenes - the novelist at work. As ever he is drawn from content into form, from tenor into vehicle; one never learns in just what ways Blanche is cruel or fearless, only that he

was cruel . . . in the wanton, insect-maiming manner of the very young, and fearless like a little boy, charging, head down, small fists whirling, at the school prefects. (48)

These mannerisms of Ryder's narrative constitute in toto a kind of private impressionism, the stuff of his experience dissolved and recomposed as a life of aquatint - in this eminently Proustian, but Ryder will never

acknowledge his intervention, because he will never be aware of it. To him, Chapter One of 'Et in Arcadia Ego' constitutes the 'full account' (41) of his meeting with Sebastian and visit to Brideshead; for the reader persuaded of Ryder's refashionings, it is less than that and also more - one wonders, and then infers. It is hard, for example, not to reject Ryder's trite sketch of Nanny Hawkins -

Long hours of work in her youth, authority in middle life, repose and security in her age, had set their stamp on her lined and serene face (37)

- as the most unreflected of clichés, but equally hard not to read in the nurse's suspiciously pointed monologues, indeed in the shaping of the whole episode, an indexing of Ryder's very purposive narrative approach.

'Did you see this piece about Julia in the paper? She brought it down for me. Not that its nearly good enough of her, but what it says is very nice. "The lovely daughter whom Lady Marchmain is bringing out this season . . . witty as well as ornamental . . . the most popular débutante", well that's no more than the truth, though it was a shame to cut her hair . . . I said, "Well, surely, father, you aren't going to make a nun out of Lady Julia? The very idea!"' (37-38)

Sebastian's reported dialogue with his nurse is confined to the subject of locating and so avoiding his sister. Beyond this he merely 'kissed her . . . introduced us . . . talked on . . . said we had to go'; the reader has been told all he needs to know, exposed to the necessary degree to the presence of plot. If one is docile Ryder's manoeuvres will pass unnoticed. If not, one's impression of his finger in the balance is confirmed, and there follows moreover a freedom to draw other conclusions, about such passages as the following -

laid out on the top of the chest of drawers and carefully dusted, were the collection of small presents which had been brought home to her at various times by her children, carved shell and lava, stamped leather, painted wood, china, bog-oak, damascened silver, blue-john, alabaster, coral, the souvenirs of many holidays. (38)

This is not merely Ryder recording the wealth of the family; the artist is rapt in the beauty of colour and texture and sound. His simple list draws out into fine writing, in the manner of Tony Last's love of the encaustic tiles of Hetton Abbey. As there, significance is held to overflow the literal bounds of the subject; when Ryder's first painting is placed amongst these souvenirs it celebrates his arrival not merely as one of the family but as an entrant upon holy ground. That piece of forerunning is compromised if one has read this passage as, in essence, poetry, as an evocation of style itself. Hetton was ultimately a barren place, its Arthurian virtues finally names on bedroom doors.

Ryder's story encompasses Oxford, Eights Week, Lunt, his father and cousin without difficulty; they are managed, disciplined. The reader may sense a fair amount of interference on the part of the narrator but he is forced to accede to this; in each case the information Ryder releases endorses his account with little residue from which an alternative might be constructed. This is interestingly not true of two major characters Ryder introduces in Chapter Five of the first Book.

Ryder's attitude to Samgrass is consistently hostile, even vicious, but the hostility is never quite accounted for in his own story. Samgrass is first active as Sebastian's character witness at Bow Street court, thereafter policing him mildly in Oxford, but before these events are

described Ryder has already given the reader his general account, and in this his opinion, of the don;

a short, plump man, dapper in dress, with sparse hair brushed flat on an over-large head, neat hands, small feet, and a general appearance of being too often bathed. His manner was genial and his speech idiosyncratic . . . He was a great delver in muniment-rooms and had a sharp nose for the picturesque. (106)

It is an unflattering and caricatured portrait, just a little too nicely turned; the sharp nose, the delving, the details of hair and hands and feet make of Samgrass a plump and dapper rodent, after the manner of Dickens - confirmed by the very Dickensian name. Samgrass's pursuits are described at some length, Ryder's antipathy firmly outlined, yet the don has really very little function in Ryder's story; his Mediterranean trip with Sebastian is only briefly reported. His inclusion in the novel provides a fine example of Ryder once more giving himself away; he is there for Ryder to dislike, and for the reader to wonder why. Samgrass is editing a 'memorial book' about the 'legendary heroes' (105) of Lady Marchmain's family. The parallels with Ryder's own story are clear, his narrative precisely a memory and celebration of the subsequent generation of Flytes - as Stopp has said, he consistently sees the family in mythical terms.<sup>1</sup> Samgrass's material is 'poems, letters, speeches, articles' (105); Ryder's tale is an amalgam of odes and declamations addressed to Youth or Beauty, letters from Sebastian and his mother, little essays on the stoicism of adolescence, the manners of Americans and so forth. Ryder's absorption in the spectacle and lifestyle of the Flytes is echoed in the fascination which genealogy and the intricacies of social and religious position hold for Samgrass. All the attitudes Ryder imputes to the don rebound damagingly upon himself, 'he was someone of almost everyone's who possessed anything to attract him . . .'

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<sup>1</sup> Op. Cit., p. 109.

. . . he claimed to love the past, but I always felt he thought the splendid company, living or dead, with whom he associated slightly absurd; it was Mr. Samgrass who was real, the rest were an insubstantial pageant. (106)

The image of Ryder as the cool observer and amateur social scientist, the 'Victorian tourist, solid and patronizing, for whose amusement these foreign things were paraded' (106) is a persuasive one, undercutting that of the spiritual voyager. The banal nature of his fine writing suggests just the lazy amenity of the dictaphone.

Ryder's hostility is clearly rooted in his recognition of the parallels between himself and Samgrass, parallels harmful to the idea of himself that he is trying to realize. His reaction is excessive, and one is moved to reconsider Samgrass. On closer reading, the don is evidently aware of Ryder's embarrassment, taunting him with a quiet parody of the role that they share in regard to the Flytes -

'This morning . . . we had a lawn meet of the Marchmain Hounds - a deliciously archaic spectacle - and all our young friends are fox-hunting, even Sebastian who, you will not be surprised to hear, looked remarkably elegant in his pink coat. Brideshead was impressive rather than elegant; he is Joint-master with a local figure of fun named Sir Walter Strickland-Venables. I wish the two of them could be included in these rather humdrum tapestries - they would give a note of fantasy . . .'

 (120)

Samgrass diagnoses Ryder's type of interest as acutely as does Blanche his taste in wine. He is aware of Ryder's weaving of the flytes into a tapestry of his own and recognises this as the sport it should remain; he can savour a deliciously archaic spectacle, a figure of fun and a note of fantasy - appropriately, he reads Proust. There is no indication that Ryder is alive to the pointedness of all this.

Samgrass further taunts Ryder during their stay at Brideshead at Christmas -

Mr. Samgrass came to my elbow, put an arm in mine, and led me back to the fire. He warmed his neat little hands and then turned to warm his seat. 'So Sebastian is in pursuit of the fox,' he said, 'and our little problem is shelved for an hour or two?' (154-155)

Insisting upon their shared difficulties, Samgrass identifies a persuasive though ignoble shared aim -

'You thought them (the drinks precautions) excessive? I am with you, particularly as they tend to compromise the comfort of our own little visit . . . I think we may hope for some relaxation tonight . . . it is less Sebastian's welfare than our own I have at heart at the moment. I need my third glass of port; I need that hospitable tray in the library.'

Ryder, very correct, bristles at this - 'I was not going to stand this from Mr. Samgrass . . . It was repugnant to me to talk about Sebastian to Mr. Samgrass . . .' - but not very convincingly; again one feels Samgrass's remarks to be on target. Several incidents have registered Ryder's enjoyment of the comforts of aristocratic life. He records with fascination the exact routine of the cocktail tray (126); he refuses to join Sebastian in fleeing the house, staying in bed but not, of course, sleeping -

He left me but I did not sleep again; nearly two hours later a footman came with tea and bread and butter and set my clothes out for a new day. (130)

Morning tea is apparently a luxury not easily foregone. The comforts of his bathroom move him to eulogy, in a passage the length of which registers the nature of his interest more accurately than perfunctory concern for 'my friend' -

. . . a deep, copper, mahogany-framed bath, that was filled by pulling a brass lever heavy as a piece of marine engineering . . . a coal fire . . . I often think of that bathroom - the water colours dimmed by steam and the huge towel warming on the back of the chintz armchair - and contrast it with the uniform, clinical, little chambers, glittering with chromium plate and looking-glass, which pass for luxury in the modern world. I lay in the bath and then dried slowly by the fire, thinking all the time of my friend's black home-coming. (149)

The damaging juxtaposition reoccurs - 'I sat unoccupied studying the pretty group they made, and mourning my friend upstairs' (129) - and 'my friend' comes generally through repetition in such circumstances to ring hollow. The pain described at Sebastian's drunken attendance at dinner is not Sebastian's, but Ryder's own -

A blow, expected, repeated, falling on a bruise, with no smart or shock of surprise, only a dull and sickening pain and the doubt whether another like it could be borne - that was how it felt, sitting opposite Sebastian at dinner that night . . . (161)

With enjoyment of the image-making, as ever, more in evidence than any actual unease, Ryder's complaint seems primarily borne of a concern for dinner-table decorum -

. . . seeing his clouded eye and groping movements, hearing his thickened voice breaking in, ineptly, after long brutish silences.

Samgrass, then, seems to have read Ryder very perceptively. He is a character invariably accepted at Ryder's own value by criticism of Brideshead, yet it is apparent that his part is a more active one than is generally allowed.

In his perception of character Ryder commonly identifies in those about him a large measure of play-acting. Thus he discovers in Lord Marchmain a striking 'normality' which on reflection he 'found to be studied' (94).

He records that Lord Marchmain 'was standing on the balcony of the saloon and, as he turned to greet us, his face was in deep shadow. I was aware only of a tall and upright figure.' There is certainly a staged quality in this, but one suspects the responsibility for this to be Ryder's, locating this romantic milord 'in the full evening sunlight, with the red damask on the walls behind him' (95), discovering 'a noble face, a controlled one, just, it seemed, as he planned it to be; slightly weary, slightly sardonic, slightly voluptuous.' Ryder has clearly taken up a suggestion of Blanche's in finding 'a Byronic aura' (94) here, and it is characteristic of him that the debt should be unacknowledged.<sup>1</sup>

Ryder imputes to Samgrass the same sort of role assumption; the don 'began to play an increasingly large part in our lives' (105), 'Samgrass, as though in wait for me . . .' (120), 'with a hint of triumph in his voice, as though he had expected the question and prepared the answer' (145), 'as though it were his cue on the stage' (154). In every case - and a crop of 'seemed's belong to the group - the imputation is significant in regard to Ryder, rather than to its subject; it conforms pleasingly to the idea of a narrator freely inventing himself that he should aggressively locate just that trait in those about him. Soon after the introduction of Samgrass there arrives Rex Mottram, whom we are told

exerted himself to make an impression . . . One quickly learned all that he wished one to know about him . . . His life, so far as he made it known . . . (107-108)  
. . . even with me, he was making excuses, as though rehearsing his story for retelling elsewhere.  
(165)

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<sup>1</sup> Blanche has described Lord Marchmain as 'very handsome, a magnifico, a voluptuary Byronic, bored, infectiously slothful . . .' (54). Ryder takes up Blanche's image of Julia as a 'Florentine quattrocento beauty' (54) and presents it as his own - 'the head that I used to think quattrocento' (227).



Ryder makes this approach rather too often, until it becomes a signal that one more assassination is under way. Rex's hostile narrator twice fetters him in inverted commas even before he has begun (107). Ryder's dislike for Rex exceeds even that he has for Samgrass, with whom Rex is paired in 'zeal and acumen' (119), and is only marginally more explained - chiefly, one feels, by all that he and Ryder have in common (including Julia). Rex, like Hooper, is never sufficiently the symbol of modern spiritual collapse that Ryder would have him; the reference to his 'hectoring zeal, as if he were thrusting a vacuum cleaner on an unwilling housewife' (160) recalls the 'travelling salesman' who has disinherited the heroes of the Flyte panoply. That version of history is itself far from unquestioned, compromised as it is by Ryder's banal, bathetic delivery -

Did she (Lady Marchmain) see a sign in the red centre  
of her cosy grate and hear it in the rattle of creeper  
on the window-pane, this whisper of doom?  
Then I reached Paddington and returning home, found  
Sebastian there, and the sense of tragedy vanished . . .  
(134-135)

Ryder's irony somehow fails to affect the breathless 'sense of tragedy' with which he is filled; the passage is typical of many in this uneasy mix, yet criticism of Brideshead consistently chooses to ignore the ambivalence, extracting a simple meaning and then complaining, perversely, of a lack of irony.

Rex, again like Hooper, seems in part to be an object of Ryder's envy, fascinating for the efficacy of his magical draughts (115), his wordly competence - just such another freedom from illusion as Hooper's. This is even more attractive to the reader than to the narrator. For Ryder 'it was a relief' when Rex spoke openly of Sebastian's drunkenness; once again Ryder damages his own case by confirming one's pleasure in the Canadian's contributions. Rex's reactions to his Catholic instruction render him

more, rather than less attractive, to the reader. His sins, like Sebastian's seem largely ones against decorum; he drinks champagne from bottles too large, has friends with names like 'Charlie Kilcartney' whose problems he supposes to be generally known. In describing Julia's and Lady Marchmain's recoil from such grossness Ryder is clearly endorsing their distaste; he enjoys Lady Marchmain's 'sweet irony' (159).

Rex's degenerate nature is primarily expounded in symbol, the first being the jewelled tortoise he gives to Julia as a Christmas present.

It was a small tortoise with Julia's initials set in diamonds in the living shell, and this slightly obscene object, now slipping impotently on the polished boards, now striding across the card-table, now lumbering over a rug, now withdrawn at a touch, now stretching its neck and swaying its withered, antediluvian head, became a memorable part of the evening, one of those needle-hooks of experience which catch the attention when larger matters are at stake. (159)

This is, as it is clearly intended to be, a vivid and memorable ingredient, one of the most striking symbols to be found in Waugh's fiction. Yet one is finally reluctant to place it alongside Agatha's racing car, Mrs. Beaver's chromium walls or the Sword of Stalingrad, for where those emerged from the text in an integrated, continuing way, Rex's tortoise seems imposed and explained, too urgently labelled 'symbol'. One did not need to be told that this was a 'slightly obscene object', that it was to be 'memorable'. In designating the tortoise 'one of those needle-hooks of experience' Ryder is too evidently tendering his equivalent to Proust's damp madeleine, and by insisting he disqualifies his candidate. The significance of Proust's vehicle lay in its insignificant, arbitrary nature; memory is triggered by accident, coincidence, and is uncontrollable. Ryder's vehicle is already loaded with symbolic meaning, and his method, as in so many other procedures, a tautology; as, inventing

things, he scorns inventedness, so delivering a crucial and vivid image he marvels at how memorable it is. The tortoise symbol itself is obviously the largest 'matter' at stake here.

Finally, one is tempted to the reader's ultimate heresy - to wonder if Rex did give Julia such a present, to wonder if the don was called Samgrass, if Ryder's lumpish schoolfriend was called Jorkins, and Bridey's betrothed Mrs. Muspratt. Wholly inappropriate questions, of course, but reflecting the unique sort of response Ryder's narrative elicits; one's sense of his imagination has a corrosive effect on the solidity of the world he depicts. One is aware of Rex as 'the embodiment - indeed, the burlesque - of power and prosperity' but also that Ryder, 'clear-headed now . . . watched and listened with fascination while Rex settled our business' (115). Ryder was last clear-headed following Blanche's awakening of him to his potential as an artist, rising in the night to sit looking at his drawings. Rex as burlesque has emerged from the mind of Ryder as artist, with all the qualifications one has come to have about that mind.

The second symbol registering Rex's shortcomings is located in the dinner he consumes with Ryder in Paris - quite literally in the food and drink. The episode is one found particularly unacceptable by the novel's critics, most of whom make no distinction between narrator and author at this point. Yet Ryder in this episode is a particularly odd figure, the figure already detected in the prologue. In preceding pages, telling of the crisis and his expulsion from Brideshead, he has reported events directly, with only marginal remarks on the action. His dinner and conversation with Rex is punctuated, by contrast, with dark and brooding reflections, concentrated on the mystical qualities of the food and his guest's failure to appreciate

these. Rex's affairs -

could wait until the attention was blunted and one could listen with half the mind only; now in the keen moment when the maître d'hôtel was turning the blinis over in the pan, and, in the background, two humbler men were preparing the press, we would talk of myself. (166)

The young man of the month before has become an old clubman, obsessed with his food and fine liqueurs, a connoisseur and eccentric impatient of his guest's chatter. This is an unbelievable transformation - and instead one believes that the wartime Captain Ryder has stepped into his student clothes and is venting a lifetime's hatred of the Canadian. There is a bizarre and ghoulish quality to Ryder's responses -

We ate to the music of the press - the crunch of the bones, the drip of blood and marrow, the tap of the spoon basting the thin slices of breast. (168)

- that does not win one to his side in this judgement on Rex. Added to this oddness is the suspicion that Ryder's sense of Rex as burlesque is influential here -

'Shouldn't wonder if he hadn't put the old girl up to pitching you out. He was always being pushed down our throats . . . That kid's a walking marvel . . . Ma Marchmain hasn't let on to anyone. She's a very sick woman. Might peg out any minute . . . Well, that's quite a packet, you know . . . Well, that's all washed up. (167-170)

One needs only compare such expressions with Rex's summing up of the boy's legal position after arrest, or with his account of Charlie Kilcartney's alcoholism, to notice how his colonial qualities have been stepped up, evidently in order that Ryder may the more cuttingly mock him with remarks such as "So he's given you the slip . . . ?" (165).

Criticism which objects in this episode to Ryder's easy assumption of superiority invariably takes one or two remarks - such as 'people of Rex's sort' (171) - out of the context of the narrator's prevailing oddity and insincerity; within a continuing apprehension of Ryder as compromised, such comments are a confirmation, rather than the suddenly unacceptable attitudes of our own correspondent. Brideshead Revisited is simply a more complex novel than is usually allowed.

Ryder's insincerity is always apparent; he is clearly very interested in 'the kind of thing' Rex hears, for all his paraded inattention - he certainly recalls the details in full. The 'philosophy of cuisine' is developed by Ryder as a barrier erected between himself and Rex, quite arbitrary in its distinction and borne of his recognition that there is no natural distinction. The Burgundy is no more convincing as an emblem of Mankind's long passion and enduring hope than Rex or Hooper have been of the reverse. Wine has already been invested with a spiritual quality once in the novel; alone at Brideshead, Ryder and Sebastian had explored the cellar.

one transept only was used now . . . 'There's been nothing added since his Lordship went abroad' . . . We warmed the glass slightly at a candle, filled it a third high, swirled the wine round, nursed it in our hands, held it to the light, breathed it, sipped it, filled our mouths with it, and rolled it over the tongue, ringing it on the palate like a coin on a counter, tilted our heads back and let it trickle down the throat. Then we talked of it and nibbled Bath Oliver biscuits . . . (81)

The terms of church architecture and Wilcox's tracing of the decline to Lord Marchmain's apostasy prepare one to interpret the boy's experiments as an anticipation (rather than a parody) of the Mass; the rituals of wine tasting as specific as those of the sacrament, complete with biscuit. The episode anticipates Ryder's Parisian Burgundy, but the promise is not

convincingly fulfilled; one has too strong a sense of Ryder as thoroughly odd, of Rex as given too little chance - how, one wonders, could Rex have celebrated the sole to his host's satisfaction? - for the narrator's correspondence to persuade. Blanche, whom one has learnt to trust, long ago likened drinking Green Chartreuse to 'swallowing a spectrum' (53), and the rainbow/illusion cluster of images exerts as strong a pull on one's responses as any spiritual overtones. A 'faint mist' seems to cloud more than merely Ryder's chives (170).

By the novel's close Rex has been reduced by his narrator to a disembodied voice, exchanging with others stylized snatches of political and economic jargon. This only confirms the drift towards burlesque apparent at the Paris dinner. F. J. Stopp, a very generous critic of this novel, calls these passages 'effective . . . but . . . just out of artistic focus',<sup>1</sup> expressing neatly the sense in which Ryder views his tale through a lens, free to adjust and refocus.<sup>2</sup> Stopp sees faults but no irony in the portrait of Ryder and assumes an error on Waugh's part, rather than one more intervention on Ryder's, in the extreme stylisation of Rex's harangues.

Samgrass and Mottram arrive in Ryder's story at the beginning of the long fifth chapter of 'Et in Arcadia Ego'. They are introduced on successive pages, pushed into the narrative immediately after Ryder has briefly recorded his first meeting with Lady Marchmain. The juxtaposition

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1 Op. Cit., p. 122.

2 Thus his first meeting with Julia is like 'looking through strong lenses', a 'double illusion' (74); he watches Brideshead through a telescope (85).

is a remarkable one. Lady Marchmain is a much heralded figure. She is encompassed in Ryder's 'ominous chill' on hearing Sebastian's description of Brideshead, and in Jasper's unease at the 'odd family' to which Ryder's friend belongs (42). Blanche, usually acute, finds her appalling -

'It's when one gets to the parents that a bottomless pit opens. My dear, such a pair. How does Lady Marchmain manage it? It is one of the questions of the age . . . a voice as quiet as a prayer, and as powerful . . . that Reinhardt nun . . . She came to all the parties in a sort of cocoon of gossamer, my dear, as though she were part of some Celtic play or a heroine from Maeterlinck . . . she was rather a figure of fun that year . . . How does Lady Marchmain do it? . . . she meanwhile keeps a small gang of enslaved and emaciated prisoners for her exclusive enjoyment. She sucks their blood . . . They never escape once she's had her teeth into them. It is witchcraft. There's no other explanation. (54-56)

All this inevitably charges and colours one's anticipation of the character, and Cara's milder account, of Lady Marchmain as 'a good and simple woman who has been loved in the wrong way' (99) does not at all defuse the excitement. Yet this fabulous figure never arrives.

Lady Marchmain found us . . . early in that Michaelmas term (when) she came for a week to Oxford. She found Sebastian subdued, all his host of friends reduced to one, myself. She accepted me as Sebastian's friend and sought to make me hers also, and in doing so, unwittingly struck at the roots of our friendship. That is the single reproach I have to set against her abundant kindness to me. (105)

This, astonishingly, is the whole of the first encounter, and virtually the whole of Ryder's discussion of Lady Marchmain in the novel; Sangrass is now brought in. If one has by this point been persuaded of Ryder's unreliability as a narrator, that the 'true story' is present only by implication, then this passage clearly implies much that is crucial. There is a whole unenacted drama in the tale of Ryder's recruitment by Lady Marchmain; the circumspection with which Ryder skirts the gap its

exclusion inflicts on his narrative becomes, once one gives Brideshead that certain kind of attention, at least as engrossing as the drawn-out tale of Sebastian's disgrace. This first brief passage constitutes an elision, an over-hasty summary and dismissal of a clearly very pregnant matter. As a result, the fabulous creature we were assured Lady Marchmain to be - and which critics have successfully located - never materialises. The interview with his mother that Sebastian dreads is completed in nine lines, with a moderate and understanding Lady Marchmain displaying 'humorous resignation' to rival even Blanche's - 'How am I going to explain it to all the family? . . . They will be so shocked to find that they're more upset about it than I am.' (118). The difficulty one has in reconciling this figure, no less equable in the later scenes of Sebastian's drunkenness and even during Ryder's expulsion, with the monster which continues to terrorize Sebastian - 'She really was a femme fatale, wasn't she? She killed at a touch' - is significant, and a measure of Ryder's inability to realize Lady Marchmain. Conscious of how Ryder has 'coped with' his father and cousin, with Oxford itself, and how he has even more fully recast Samgrass and Rex, one can only read this disappearance of Lady Marchmain as a failure on his part to subsume her, even in disguise, into the tale he is committed to telling. Samgrass's suggestions of a shared stake in personal comfort, and the contempt for Rex's boorish ambitions, are pointing towards a very damaging vision of Ryder's place in the Flyte household, and he cannot afford to admit to having succumbed to the fatal charms of which Blanche has warned. Lady Marchmain is therefore simply omitted, slipped quietly into the story and as quietly out again, her death, reported to Ryder at Fez, again undersold



as a narrative event.<sup>1</sup> Taking Ryder's silence as an invitation, one reads all the more into his response to Sebastian's charge of spying - 'He said more than I can bear to remember, even at twenty years' distance . . .' (129); into Blanche's comment, unanswered, on Ryder having thrown Sebastian over (195); into his image of Sebastian as ignorant Polynesian islander, foolishly afraid of well-disposed traders and missionaries. His is a strikingly more generous image of Lady Marchmain than is offered by any other character in the novel.

I have suggested that critical discussions of Brideshead Revisited accept with too little question the story of his own salvation Ryder offers. It might be argued that the case has been overstated at points - that certain aspects of the narrative, taken in isolation, are as appropriate to a docile interpretation as to one more circumspect. But no part of a narrative does exist in isolation, and to treat them thus - to find Ryder's attitudes in Paris suddenly lamentable, accountable only in terms of Waugh's supposed psychology - is to misread. The prologue, as it should, suggests ways in which one might read the novel, and that these run counter to Ryder's apparent intention makes for a complex and

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1 In 1947 Waugh wrote a memorandum for Hollywood producers wishing to adapt Brideshead for the cinema; in this exposition he declares that "The first half of the story is in essence (sic), the failure of Lady Marchmain". Jeffrey Heath quotes the whole of the memorandum, remarking on this characteristic distance between it and the novel one reads, and doubting that the satire directed at Ryder in the latter could have been incorporated in a film. In the recent television series, however, the irony with which Ryder is hedged was fully transmitted to the screen by John Mortimer's very faithful adaptation; the otherwise fine series inherited all of the novel's damaging ambiguity. Jeffrey Heath "Brideshead: The Critics and the Memorandum", English Studies, LVI (June 1975), 222-230).

interesting novel. The variant reading is of course an accumulative process; the more one is persuaded, the more one is persuaded still further, and ostensibly inert detail comes to be charged.<sup>1</sup>

Most of Brideshead's detractors have centred their objections on Ryder's unfitness as a narrator, even referring on occasion to an element of invention, only to be halted there by a failure to separate Waugh and his character. One of the novel's earliest critics, Rose Macaulay, observed that Julia 'belongs to the realm of fantasy' and found Bridey a 'puritan fantastic';<sup>2</sup> Walter Allen remarks that 'with the Flytes we move further and further into unreality'<sup>3</sup> and Robert Powell that 'what Waugh has presented through Ryder is not a real world, but a realm of fantasy'.<sup>4</sup> C. J. Rolo makes a similar point in concluding that 'Waugh's commitment to Catholicism has been so complete as to distort the nature of reality'.<sup>5</sup>

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1 It is hard, for example, not to become suspicious of Ryder's acute sensibilities. When Sebastian announces he will be joining the hunt, 'Everyone was suddenly pleased . . . it seemed to undo some of the mischief of the evening . . . and we all went to bed quite cheerfully' (151). Soon the amused artist/observer has extracted himself from that 'we' - 'It was touching to see the faith which everyone put in the value of a day's hunting' (157) - but the insight only just precedes Lady Marchmain's self-mockery; 'I say "he's gone hunting" - as though it were an answer to prayer.' One wonders if admiration of 'that delicate irony for which she was famous' (157) has not tempted Ryder to appropriate the insight for himself. Such disbelief is contagious; Ryder's reportage of other characters' thoughts takes on a political hue. Interpreting the look in his C.O.'s eye he debates, not if he has correctly divined his thoughts, but only if these were actually spoken - 'did he in fact say this . . .?' (18). Cousin Jasper is an equally open book; 'Already the perplexities of the examination school were beginning to reassert themselves in his mind' (44). Similarly he purports to know not only what Rex will tell his friends of Paris (166), but even what Rex's party chiefs in turn think of Rex (170).

2 'Evelyn Waugh', Horizon XIV (1946), pp. 360-376.

3 Tradition and Dream, (1964), 1971, p. 232.

4 Op. Cit., p. 61. That 'through Ryder' is encouraging, but Powell later declares that Waugh's commitment to Ryder makes him 'unaware of that character's misapprehensions'.

5 'Waugh: the best and the worst', Atlantic Monthly, CLXXXIV (1954), 63-71.

Thus there have been located fantasy, unreality and distortion, but only one commentator has taken the logical next step. Bernard Bergonzi remarks a boosting of Waugh's 'tendency to myth-making' in Brideshead, and asserts that the novel becomes 'much less of a sober chronicle . . . and much more of an almost uncontrolled fantasy', citing in support the 'disordered memory and imagination' of Ludovic's novel in Unconditional Surrender. The parallels between 'The Death Wish' and Brideshead have often been noted, but usually only to argue a disclaimer on Waugh's part of the earlier novel. Perhaps Bergonzi's most interesting contribution is his only half-idle, parenthetical reflection -

(what, I have sometimes thought, if Ryder were a liar as well as a sentimentalist; supposing he had made it all up, as part of a huge wish-fulfilment fantasy, had scarcely even known the Marchmains, perhaps merely admired Sebastian at a distance in Oxford?)

It is a tempting hypothesis; the novel does contain this alternative. The shape and direction of Ryder's splendid tale of spiritual reclamation are taken from Lady Marchmain's reading aloud of Chesterton's 'Father Brown' story, Cordelia pointing up the theme of 'A Twitch Upon the Thread'. This, of course, becomes Ryder's title for the climactic last Book. Lady Marchmain reads once from this story (128) - but twice from another with a very different and, from the point of view of the variant reading, no less apposite title; the Grossmith brothers' The Diary of a Nobody (150, 162).

Ryder mocks himself, in retrospect, for a juvenile taste for the dramatic. Thus he recalls his lurid visions of Sebastian's accident and how in the event his feeling was one of 'vexation rather than of relief, that I had been bilked of my expectations of a grand tragedy' (75). These admissions, so much more damaging than Ryder ever realizes, crystallise a general

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1 'Evelyn Waugh's Gentlemen', Critical Quarterly V (1963), 23-36.

tendency in the novel, towards a view of Ryder as merely the dilettante of sensation, eager to be thrilled. It is a tendency ever present in his style, in the relish of a well-turned figure; the Polynesian islander he drew displayed just that relish and only a remote engagement with Sebastian's difficulties. It is finally to be asked where this taste for drama has not led Ryder; certainly to racing back to England in 1926 at the promise of revolution, but perhaps also to buying sensation in the form of drink for Sebastian? The unforgivable question, standing at the furthest point of such reflections, is whether Ryder's fall to his knees at Lord Marchmain's bedside is borne of his sense of artistic fitness, and the satisfaction of at last taking a lead role, rather than a response to a sublime summons. It is fine drama, and perhaps at the last irresistible to one of Ryder's sensibility.

With the introduction of Ryder's wife at the beginning of 'A Twitch Upon the Thread' the reader who recalls the long, obsessive simile of the prologue will anticipate some real insight into the narrator's state of mind. Celia is slipped casually into the narrative, in a manner briefly promising a new sophistication in narrative technique -

Grateful words, but, alas, not true by a long chalk.  
My wife, who crossed to New York to meet me and saw  
the fruits of our separation displayed in my agent's  
office, summed the thing up better . . . (218)

The casualness is deceptive; Ryder, still the amateur storyteller, is too aware of his bombshell for such composure to last, and excitedly breaks off in order to begin a fresh section, in which Celia is to be 'dealt with' as purposively as Rex or Samgrass. Like them she is quickly accused of

dissembling - 'in America she assumed an English softness and reticence' (218). Stopp is following the line Ryder indicates when he places Celia in 'the long line of vapid and predatory females descending from Brenda Last and Lucy Simmonds'.<sup>1</sup> Ryder presents his wife as an incarnation of the spiritless modernism otherwise located in the liner and its fittings, yet despite remarks such as 'she talked in this way' (219) and 'it was the sort of thing she had the habit of saying' (255), Celia's conversation is quite natural, even amusing, flourishes such as ''I see everything through his eyes. He is England to me.'' being clearly tailored for the art-critic ('I tried to feed him some paragraphs . . .'). Her comments on the lifestyle of the art-critic are witty and apposite, little different in their tone from Ryder's on 'people who had once bought a wood-cut and were consequently on the gallery's list of patrons' (252). She is surely right to find Ryder and Julia's exchange on King Lear ridiculous - ''it's like that agonizing Foulough conversation over again . . .'' (236) - and is amusingly self-aware in supposing she had 'set a fine example of British phlegm' during the storm (236). In all of this she is a much more balanced and human figure that Ryder will admit, and one can go further; like Samgrass before her, Celia is surely aware of Ryder's peculiarities, though her response is to humour rather than to taunt him. To his portentous remark ''It's just another jungle closing in'' she replies ''I know just how you feel'', making allowances as for a child (221). She knows him well; to his criticism of the ice swan she can answer, justly one feels, ''if you had read about it in the description of a sixteenth-century banquet in Venice, you would have said those were the days to live'' (229). (Ryder's reply, that in those days 'it would have been a somewhat different shape' is baffling, no answer at all). Ryder's gnostic analyses of the modern jungle are reproduced in commentaries upon Brideshead as being

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1 Op. Cit., p. 119.

central to the novel's theme, yet their status is surely undercut. They share the perfunctory quality of 'This was the extreme limit of the city . . .', pronounced so confidently on the novel's first page, and are devalued first by Celia's gentle tolerance and then by their reproduction by the art-critic - 'the snakes and vampires of the jungle have nothing on Mayfair'' (254). That Ryder's attitudes make such slick copy ought to suggest their slightness, their merely fashionable pessimism.

If Celia seems a more able and sympathetic figure in these passages than is generally allowed, Ryder himself is considerably less of one. He confesses to a certain deadness, to being 'a small part of myself pretending to be whole' (218), but his strangeness goes beyond this. His descriptions of his wife are grossly unfair, as the hard edge of his sarcasm is turned against innocuous details -

My wife's softness and English reticence, her very white, small regular teeth, her neat rosy finger-nails, her school-girl air of innocent mischief and her school-girl dress, her modern jewellery, which was made at great expense to give the impression, at a distance, of having been mass produced, her ready, rewarding smile, her deference . . . her zeal . . . her motherly heart . . . in short, her peculiar charm - made her popular among the Americans . . . (223)

The bitterness and contempt which inform such passages find insufficient target and the undirected strength of feeling rebounds upon Ryder himself, who as one reads on comes to seem a still more bizarre and hysterical figure. His lack of concern for his children is damaging, robbing him of any right to the complacency with which he hears of Rex and Julia's sterile union - Julia's still-born child was a girl 'so Rex didn't so much mind her being dead' (247). Yet the idea of a sterile union is clearly still intended - by Ryder - to weigh against Rex, and is often taken so to do.

Throughout the liner episode there is again detectable the tone of the prologue, a sense of strong but subverted feeling, giving periodic rise to fierce expression. Ryder is gratuitously unpleasant about Americans, finding in New York a 'neurosis in the air which the inhabitants mistake for energy' (219); to Ryder the other passengers 'looked a strange crowd,'

some of them, who had been drinking till the last moment with those who were seeing them off, were still boisterous; others were planning where they would have their deck chairs; the band played unnoticed - all were as restless as ants. (225)

Once again Ryder's observation transfers to others his own state; he is the strange, the restless one, for there is nothing remarkable in the others' behaviour. One recalls Captain Ryder sitting in the railway carriage, thinking how strange his officers are. The eccentricity of the club bore is apparent again, as Ryder interrupts his meeting with Julia to supervise the waiter's mixing of his whiskey-and-water. Such details give Ryder away with a subtlety that is finely comic, as again in

I heard the Mottrams' names in conversation; I saw their faces now and again peeping from the Tatler, as I turned the pages impatiently waiting for someone to come. . . . (224)

Ryder's hasty disclaimer only draws attention to his peculiar attitude, his feeling that there is something shaming in being thought to read the Tatler.

Even those critics willing to take the Ryder of this episode at his own estimate, as the baffled artist driven into retreat by the inanities of modern living, have baulked at the account of his falling in love with Julia. Carens objects to its 'superficial glossiness'<sup>1</sup> and Savage to its

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<sup>1</sup> Op. Cit., p. 106.

'tawdry-poetical sentimentality',<sup>1</sup> whilst Reed notes more precisely that 'for many pages we live in the dimensions of a gaudy novelette'.<sup>2</sup> The ever-present suggestion in Brideshead, that Ryder's narrative is working at some remove from his experience, reaches its most persuasive point in these scenes aboard the liner, with a wholesale use of pathetic fallacy in the best tradition of magazine writing -

The gale which, unheard, unseen, unfelt, in our enclosed and insulated world had, for an hour, been mounting over us, had now veered and fallen full on our bows. (235-236)

Such a passage is only incidentally about a storm, just as this next is only peripherally about the difficulties of sleeping aboard ship -

I lay there between dreaming and waking. In a narrow bunk, on a hard mattress, there might have been rest, but here the beds were broad and buoyant; I collected what cushions I could find and tried to wedge myself firm, but through the night I turned with each swing and twist of the ship - she was rolling now as well as pitching - and my head rang with the creak and thud. (237)

In this way Ryder traces in metaphor the violence and torment of his passions, the gale diminishing as he admits his love, to blow up again when Julia physically denies him - "No, Charles, not yet . . ." . . . the storm, it appeared, had the form of a ring; all day we had been sailing through its still centre; now we were once more in the full fury of the wind - and that night was to be rougher than the one before' (244). This extreme move into an almost totally symbolic manner of writing only extends the consistent approach of the narrative. The demands of his story dictate that Ryder should present his affair with Julia in this climactic manner;

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1 'The Innocence of Waugh', Western Review, XIV (1950), 197-206.

2 Review, New Statesman, XXIX (1945), 408-409.



it must not be possible to equate it with Celia's mere adultery, if the lovers' final self-denial is to have the required moment. His concern to invest the action with meaning leads Ryder into just the manner of the novellette, and into ingenuous, overt imagery. After 'neat, hygienic' sex he and Celia 'parted and lay in our twin beds a yard or two distant' (219); on another occasion he 'turned out the light and shut the door between us' (245). This is far from subtle, and still more contrived is the detail of the bronze doors to the ship's lounge. These, swinging and slamming dangerously as the ship rolls, are worked hard as images of the perils of personal commitment run by the lovers -

there was something forbidding in the sight of that great weight of uncontrolled metal, flapping to and fro, which might have made a timid man flinch or skip through too quickly; I rejoiced to feel Julia's hand perfectly steady on my arm and know, as I walked beside her, that she was wholly undismayed. (240)

'Rejoiced' and 'undismayed' are too weighty, in the way that 'our enclosed and insulated world' was too weighty, as registers of the literal occasion. Ryder's artfully symbolic technique has another problem, in that it makes use of objects and articles which as an artist he has previously banished. Thus Ryder has described with bitter relish the philistine grossness of the ship's lounge,

huge without any splendour . . . vast bronze gates on which paper-thin Assyrian animals cavorted . . . carpets the colour of blotting paper . . . yards and yards of biscuit-coloured wood which no carpenter's tool had ever touched . . . tables designed perhaps by a sanitary engineer . . . 'Here I am,' I thought, 'back from the jungle, back from the ruins . . .'

(225)

Having detached himself from such blighted modernity, Ryder nevertheless permits himself to reappropriate aspects of it when convenient, the 'vast bronze gates' now eligible as artistic terms. His elegant contempt is

again compromised.

One has noted how Samgrass and Rex have mirrored Ryder's nature, providing parallels which criticise the elevated role he awards himself in the novel. The shipboard episode provides two more such figures, slighter and offering something closer to parody.

Ryder can do nothing with the 'little red-haired man' he finds at his wife's party. This figure has no part to play in 'A Twitch Upon the Thread' and in consequence is rarely noticed by criticism bent on drawing out that theme. Yet the character is briefly vivid, and difficult to ignore -

There was a little red-haired man whom no one seemed to know, a dowdy fellow quite unlike the run of my wife's guests; he had been standing by the caviar for twenty minutes eating as fast as a rabbit. Now he wiped his mouth with his handkerchief and, on the impulse apparently, leaned forward and dabbed the beak of the swan, removing the drop of water that had been swelling there and would soon have fallen. . . . 'Been wanting to do that for a long time,' he said. 'Bet you don't know how many drops to the minute. I do, I counted.' (231)

The man loses his bet, makes and loses a second about his journeys around the world, and leaves after refusing to disclose his exact route. Celia later asks Ryder who his 'chum' was, and at dinner calls him 'Captain Foulenough . . . simply a comic character . . . an imaginary character in an English paper' (234). Once one is conscious of reading the diary of a nobody, these details draw together Ryder and this figure; Ryder as an unknown outsider, a gate-crasher of the Brideshead world, helping himself to caviar and luxury bathrooms, loath to recall his route to present comforts, having gambled his future on Sebastian rather than Collins and the Iffley Road lodging houses (gambling imagery is plentiful in Ryder's

story).<sup>1</sup> Ryder's ennobling of his own impulses and motives has been noted; in that sense he has precisely the invented quality of 'an imaginary character'. The red-haired man, whom the senator has called 'an imposter' (234), confirms this by being arrested as he leaves the ship. The complex of parallels is extended when on the following page Ryder calls Samgrass 'a crook' (253), and completed when Blanche uncovers the criminal nature of Ryder's art -

'My dear, let us not expose your little imposture before these good, plain people' - he gave a conspiratorial glance to the last remnants of the crowd - 'let us not spoil their innocent pleasure . . . .' (257)

Other facets of the narrator are parodied by the second unnamed passenger Ryder meets - again a figure missing from critical commentaries. The man sitting alone in the ship's lounge is, like Ryder, loath to negotiate the swinging doors on his own, and congratulates Julia and Ryder. His wife, like Ryder's, is seasick, in 'a terrible way' (242). His remark 'Nothing like a bit of rough weather for bringing people together' reduces Ryder's passionate tale to its banal essentials; 'When you get a storm like this you find out what people are really made of . . . it makes for getting together' (242). He too is a gambler, organizing roulette in Ryder's sitting room, and in a final, telling parallel he retails just such a story as Ryder's

'I've had some very romantic encounters at sea in my time. If the lady will excuse me, I'd like to tell you about a little adventure I had in the Gulf of Lions when I was younger than I am now . . . .' (242)

Ryder records Julia's denial of feeling 'like the lady our friend met on the way to Barcelona', but for the reader this is Ryder hiding the

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<sup>1</sup> Thus pages, 61, 68, 146, 187, 210, 274, 283; also references to actual gambling at 243 and 246.

Tatler again, too late.

With the liner episode Ryder's narrative begins the approach to its stirring climax, and simultaneously shifts into a still more elevated and poetic style. Critics happy to accept the earlier manner have found this uncomfortable, but it represents only an intensification, not a suddenly regrettable change. The red-haired man, the passenger, and in a different way Celia, all offer suggestions how one might read these breathless passages; they are certainly hard to accept without qualification. The variant reading I have been tracing incorporates them as something close to comedy, and as a further development in Ryder's splendid private myth. The same myth incorporates the two speeches, by Julia and Lord Marchmain, which a 'straight' reading of Brideshead Revisited finds so intractable. It is, just, possible to read them as passages in which religious revelation enters and transforms the text, if one can sufficiently suppress one's awareness of Ryder's hitherto commonplace sensibility. It is tempting simply to locate in them a further intensification of the general mode -

They know all about it, Bridey and his widow; they've got it in black and white; they bought it for a penny at the church door. You can get anything there for a penny, in black and white, and nobody to see that you pay; only an old woman with a broom at the other end, rattling round the confessionals, and a young woman lighting a candle at the Seven Dolours. Put a penny in the box, or not, just as you like; take your tract. There you've got it, in black and white . . .' (273)

This is very much in the manner of Ryder's impressionist tableaux of Oxford, of Blanche's boyhood or Nanny Hawkins in the nursery; the 'old woman with a broom' is an incidental detail selected as carefully as the clergyman 'black-straw-hatted, white-bearded, pedalling quietly down the wrong side of the High Street' (25), or as 'the lantern swinging in the

prow, and the net coming up full of weed and sand and floundering fishes' (98). The imagery, repetition and balance of Julia's outburst are constructed with just the colour and niceness of Ryder's own manner; when his thoughts break into her speech they do so in an exactly similar style -

'An hour ago,' I thought, 'under the sunset, she sat turning her ring in the water and counting the days of happiness; now under the first stars and the last grey whisper of day, all this mysterious tumult of sorrow! What had happened . . . ? What shadow had fallen . . . ? (273)

His thoughts share the inverted commas of Julia's speech, inviting one to suppose that that outburst, far too controlled to be hysterical, was not, in a literal sense, actually made; all the pressure of Ryder's past interventions drive one to suspect that again the narrator has embellished and heightened, that the excitement is not Julia's but his own. Walter Allen's doubts about Lord Marchmain's oration showing 'remarkable breath control for a dying man'<sup>1</sup> are as relevant here. Allen suggests that 'Waugh has soared into rhetoric and forgotten about his character altogether'; exchanging Ryder for Waugh, the suggestion is convincing, and conforms to the idea of Ryder as complete artist, marshalling his characters. Lord Marchmain's death-speech is an exactly similar occasion, for Allen the 'apotheosis of unreality', something even more like poetry (for Brian Wicker an 'ersatz poetry')<sup>2</sup> and inviting a resetting in the mode of Eliot -

Those were our roots  
In the waste hollows of Castle Hill,  
In the brier and nettle;  
Among the tombs in the old church  
And the chantry where no clerk sings.  
(317, rearranged)

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1 Op. Cit., p. 232.

2 The Story-Shaped World, 1975, p. 67.

The 'actual' Lord Marchmain is a less pliable figure -

We turned to go; as I was at the door he called me back.

'It looks very well, does it not?'

'Very well.'

'You might paint it, eh - and call it the Death Bed?'

(303)

Like Blanche and Samgrass and Celia, Lord Marchmain sees Ryder for the romantic he is, and quietly mocks him. As ever, Ryder is oblivious of this - within half a page he has discovered in the bedroom 'a Hogarthian aspect' and 'an air of pantomime, of Aladdin's cave'. Lord Marchmain's prediction is fulfilled.

J. M. Cameron has argued that if Lord Marchmain's dying gesture had remained ambiguous 'The novel would have gained immensely', and that as it is the author's intervention has subverted 'the logic of the novel'.<sup>1</sup> He is suggesting that the course of the novel up to this late point has prepared one for a rather different conclusion. Ryder exploits this effect himself, in the image of the trapper in his arctic hut, 'alone with his furs and oil lamp and log fire; everything dry and ship-shape and warm inside . . .' (295). The avalanche will sweep all this away, as Ryder's conversion will sweep away his own safe and cynical attitudes. For the reader, however, the trapper's hut contains not merely Ryder's mistakes, but the whole experience of his story, all the detection and enjoyment of narrative infidelities. Brideshead Revisited as a novel about recollection and re-creation, the novel whose theme truly is memory,

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1 'The Catholic Novelist and European Culture', Twentieth Century Studies, I (March 1969), 79-94.

is peremptorily demolished as Ryder falls to his knees in prayer. The sense of cancellation and waste reproduces on a larger scale that felt at Sebastian's dismissal from the story. A. E. Dyson is sorry to see 'human relation swamped by the "mysterious compulsion"' of Catholicism,<sup>1</sup> and certainly in terms of an artistically satisfying conclusion the avalanche is too radical a solution. One might compare the ending of Sword of Honour, which reads to a large degree as a reworking of Brideshead. Guy Crouchback too has followed false gods and come late to an understanding of the nature of personal faith, but his self-knowledge emerges slowly from the experiences of the narrative. Unconditional Surrender is no less certain in its Catholicism than the concluding parts of Brideshead, but that certainty has been worked for and is, in artistic terms, just - and so persuasive. Ryder's enlightenment seems scarcely deserved; the complexities of personal vision raised by his narrative remain unintegrated, unresolved, the reader left only the forerunner hypothesis by now implicated in all the glib shapeliness of Ryder's storytelling.

In the epilogue Captain Ryder wanders about the shell of Brideshead, the rooms now 'echoing' and 'desolate' (327). The house might stand for the novel itself, ruined but unregretted, the hero having moved on. The reader, especially the non-Catholic reader, if he is unable to move on with Ryder, is left standing in the ruins. Thus Carens wonders what happened to 'what ought really to be the center (sic) of the novel, the religious conflict engendered by the love of Julia and Ryder?'.<sup>2</sup> Savage wonders what happened to Ryder's adult life and how his marriage - 'the central event of Ryder's adult life' - came to be omitted.<sup>3</sup> Where, in the end,

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1 'Evelyn Waugh and the Mysteriously Disappearing Hero', Critical Quarterly, II (1960), 72-79.

2 Op. Cit., p. 105.

3 Op. Cit., p. 206.

did the line of reference to repression and self-hate lead? The last word on this was Cordelia's -

'I never really knew your Mother,' I said.  
'You didn't like her. I sometimes think when people wanted to hate God they hated mummy.'  
'What do you mean by that, Cordelia?'  
'Well, you see, she was saintly but she wasn't a saint. No one could really hate a saint, could they? They can't really hate God either. When they want to hate him and his saints they have to find something like themselves and pretend it's God and hate that. I suppose you think that's all bosh.'  
'I heard almost the same thing once before - from someone very different.' (212-213)

This feels like Ryder discreetly attaching Chesterton's thread to his own coat tails; Lord Marchmain, until his final days, is hardly present in the narrative, and the suggestion is of Ryder himself as bound at last to be led to God by Lady Marchmain's example. Arrogating to himself a starring role, Ryder is as unconvincing as ever. One really does not suppose that he has hated Lady Marchmain. His failure to deal with her as a real ingredient of the story always suggested an uncritical reverence that, for the sake of his drama, he could not afford to openly admit. Her speech alone he confesses to paraphrasing, despite the reader's conviction that much rewriting surrounds all the characters - despite, in fact, actual evidence of this.<sup>1</sup> Lady Marchmain's nature is apparently inexpressible in ordinary terms.

Savage's assertion, that Ryder's marriage was a central event in his life, seems at first a naive and inappropriate comment - Ryder does not of course have a 'life', only a sequence of incidents gathered under his name, and his marriage happens not to be an event in Brideshead. This

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<sup>1</sup> Thus the two different and unresolved versions of Julia's description of Rex, pages 193 and 245.



granted, one naturally infers a 'character' from these incidents, and Savage's comment does come on reflection to have point; Ryder's enormous simile in the prologue and the insupportable attitude he displays toward Celia on the liner tend to delineate a space in the novel which a discussion of their relation ought to occupy. In its absence nothing else quite fits the gap, certainly not the specious loss of 'life' that Ryder mentions briefly as a consequence of his leaving Brideshead; his doubts about the value of his experience with the Flytes remain at the time of recollection. The issues raised during the novel are not resolved by its conclusion. Guy Crouchback's recovered faith will explain his errors to him, compassion explaining selfishness, but Ryder's mistakes are merely replaced by his faith,<sup>1</sup> indeed scarcely registered as mistakes by his forerunner theory. Paradoxically, the conclusion Ryder delivers is suspect not only in its rejection of what has already passed, but simultaneously in its identity with it. Although the secular concern with human love, art, ambition and happiness is declared redundant, neither Ryder nor his narrative seem in the epilogue to have changed. The 'old, retired, re-appointed lieutenant-colonel from some miles away' who conducts Ryder around the house and knows what all the Flytes are doing now represents a typical convenience in Ryder's storytelling; Nanny Hawkins' information is as suspiciously full and pertinent as when Ryder first met her -

' . . . only myself here and the two girls and poor Father Membling who was blown up . . . Lady Brideshead too, Marchmain it is now . . . when Julia and Cordelia left for the war, she came here with the two boys . . . Bridey away with the yeomanry . . . Who would have thought of Mr. Mottram doing so well? . . . ' (328-329)

Ryder himself is still musing, the images as sharp and composed as ever,

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1 Thus Donat O'Donnell (Conor Cruise O'Brien) in his essay 'The Pieties of Evelyn Waugh', Marie Cross, 1952, pp. 119-136.

the style as shapely -

'The builders did not know the uses to which their work would descend; they made a new house with the stones of the old castle; year by year, generation after generation, they enriched and extended it; year by year the great harvest of timber in the park grew to ripeness; until, in sudden frost, came the age of Hooper; the place was desolate and the work all brought to nothing; Quomodo sedet sola civitas. Vanity of vanities, all is vanity . . . ' (330-331)

These profound reflections are framed by the sound of the cook-house bugle, sounding 'Pick-em-up, pick-em-up, hot potatoes'; in this, and in his fellow officers' bathetic "'You're looking unusually cheerful today' (331) there is even here at the novel's very end an ironic contrast to Ryder's unflagging sense of epic.

'Something quite remote from anything the builders intended, has come out of their work, and out of the fierce little human tragedy in which I played . . . a small red flame . . . the flame which the old knights saw from their tombs . . . that flame burns again for other soldiers, far from home, farther, in heart, than Acre or Jerusalem. It could not have been lit but for the builders and tragedians . . . ' (331)

His sense of 'tragedy' persists to the end, surviving even Julia's anger and whip. Ryder is never seen to recognize and repent his taste for the spectacular and dramatic, for style and proportion. The repression his vivid story can be suspected of masking does not at last emerge; the charade continues to the end, and Ryder's new faith, instead of prompting self-knowledge, seems itself implicated in all the contrived qualities the reader has come to recognize. As presented by Ryder, Brideshead constitutes a bulky and intriguing parcel through whose layered wrappings one attempts to feel and identify that content he consistently promises is there to be found. The novel finally baffles, and disappoints, because the truths Ryder claims to have grasped and presented are not, for the

reader, sufficiently distinguishable from the elements of story and performance evident throughout his narrative. The supposed solid content is too easily confused with the wrapping; Roland Barthes' onion is the truer image, for no one ever expected to find anything beneath those layered skins except more onion.

Brideshead disappoints in a classic manner, demonstrating despite itself the transpositional nature of fiction, that all the novelist's hand touches will turn into novel. Waugh tackled the same problem more successfully in his military trilogy, in part by re-adopting a third-person hero but above all through the achievement, in Unconditional Surrender, of a deft compromise, whereby God is made Super-Narrator and novel form itself a divine strategy

Brideshead Revisited is a more complex novel than many of its critics have allowed - the incorporation of Catholicism within the narrative seems to have constituted a sufficient mystery for most, no further complications being sought. Much discussion of the novel has taken the form of affirmation or denial of its nature as apologia, literary criticism coming a poor second; the author's personal inclinations have, as always, been thoroughly mixed with those of his characters.

The variant reading I have traced draws a subtle but nonetheless clear distinction between Ryder and his author, and isolates the problem of Brideshead more precisely for being free of the fog of biographical and theological debate. The qualification of Ryder's narrative is rooted in the prologue and continues to inform his storytelling through the novel. It suggests another understanding of Ryder, and invests his tale with a genuinely Proustian depth of reflection.

This supplementary reading, the 'Diary of a Nobody' alternative to Ryder's

'Twitch Upon the Thread', gains just sufficient weight for its eclipse, at the novel's climax, to seriously unbalance and damage the narrative as a whole. Tied down, as it were, at both ends, in prologue and epilogue, integrated into Ryder's story in the way Guy's shortcomings are recognized and repented in the war trilogy, this element of Brideshead could have strengthened and deepened the conclusion. As it is, the 'Twitch' and 'forerunner' theories are allowed to triumph, and the criticism of Ryder remains undirected, a merely destructive element loose in the narrative, not finally focused to good effect. Ryder is objectionable, but not to any purpose, and so merely irritates.

The impulse behind Waugh's revision of Brideshead Revisited in 1959 appears to have been the wish to make Ryder more acceptable, largely by moderating his language and diminishing Anthony Blanche as a voice of criticism.

The 'Diary' reading is only marginally impaired, however; a much more radical rewriting would have been necessary to remove its threat to Ryder's position. One can perhaps imagine an alternative revision, in which that threat is resolved constructively, but Waugh's personal reaction to changes within the Catholic church in the late fifties and early sixties was always likely to confirm a Ryder whose conversion is abruptly achieved, a clean and complete break with past experience. The 'Twitch Upon the Thread' grew still more urgent in revision.

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SCOTT-KING'S MODERN EUROPE

THE LOVED ONE

HELENA

LOVE AMONG THE RUINS

## SCOTT-KING'S MODERN EUROPE

In describing Scott-King's Modern Europe<sup>1</sup> as 'a masterly minor work' Waugh's biographer Christopher Sykes has recorded easily the most favourable verdict on this short novel,<sup>2</sup> more commonly considered to mark a downturn in the quality of Waugh's writing; thus Heath, Benedict,<sup>3</sup> Lodge,<sup>4</sup> Cook, DeVitis. W. J. Cook finds in all the post-war work except Sword of Honour a 'falling off' of the power to produce a sustained narrative, a vulnerable claim but probably least so with regard to Scott-King.<sup>5</sup> Jeffrey Heath has written of 'too much undigested personal experience' and noted Waugh's own admission of 'too much emphasis on fretful detail',<sup>6</sup> while DeVitis regrets a lack of 'the spontaneity and the gusto of the earlier books'.<sup>7</sup> Noting that Scott-King 'retires happily into obscurity', DeVitis concludes that Scott-King's Modern Europe is 'a far different kind of novel from Waugh's next, Helena',<sup>8</sup> yet there is in Scott-King something approaching that sense of the disutility of fictional form apparent in Helena. Stopp's account of the matter of Scott-King,<sup>9</sup> its reiteration of the familiar theme of a modern collapse of values and identity, is unlikely to be improved upon, but neither Stopp nor Heath, who alone have written at any length on this novel, have been much concerned with details of the narrative manner of Scott-King, and it is arguably here, where the difficulties of Helena are anticipated, that the particular interest of Scott-King lies.

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1 Hereafter, for convenience, Scott-King.

2 Evelyn Waugh : A Biography (1975), 1978, p. 403.

3 'The Candide Figure in the Novels of Evelyn Waugh', Papers of the Michigan Academy of Science, Arts and Letters, XXXVIII (1963), 685-690.

4 Evelyn Waugh, 1971, pp. 35-36.

5 Masks, Modes and Morals : The Art of Evelyn Waugh, New Jersey 1971, p. 236.

6 The Picturesque Prison : Evelyn Waugh and his writing, 1982, p. 186.

7 Roman Holiday : The Catholic Novels of Evelyn Waugh, 1958, p. 59.

8 Ibid., p. 60.

9 Evelyn Waugh : Portrait of an Artist, 1958, p. 136-142.

Underpinning both theme and technique of Scott-King is the conviction that, granted the distortion of modern values, success in contemporary terms is necessarily a sign of contamination - and, conversely, that to fail is the only impeccable ambition. One of the novel's most resonant phrases, describing the hero as one who finds 'a peculiar relish in contemplating the victories of barbarism',<sup>1</sup> follows from this; barbarism, irresistible, must instead be appreciated as a spectacle, its instances collectable as if for a hobby. Waugh's phrase for this removed, contemplative state is 'dimness'. His eponymous hero, holding a minor position in a minor public school, is dim, dimmer even than the poet Bellorius, subject of his slight studies. Neutrialia, because removed from the Second World War, is also 'remote, unconsidered, dim' (5). The action of the novel torments Scott-King for his vestigial pride, the discreet hubris which leads him to self-congratulation as Bellorius's sole champion. All of this, as Stopp has indicated, accords with Waugh's persistent concern with inverted twentieth-century values, and Scott-King's crusade might be seen as a secular - and therefore delusory - anticipation of Helena's own. However, the consequence of 'dimness' for the novel's narrative technique are serious, for the act of narration itself necessarily involves processes of engagement and construction. The resulting compromise is a narrative held in restraint, lacking the extremes characteristic of Waugh's best comic writing. Scott-King has grown 'slightly bald and slightly corpulent', known for his 'slightly nasal lamentations'. He is 'barely middle-aged', his school 'entirely respectable' - but 'not the most illustrious'. His subject Bellorius died 'in some discredit', the effect of his sole volume having been to 'annoy', and to cause his pension to be cancelled (1-3). A bald and gross Scott-King teaching at Llanabba Castle, or a bellorius

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<sup>1</sup> Scott-King's Modern Europe (1947), 1950, p. 2.

doomed by an incensed court would be inventions too vigorous to reconcile with the principle of dimness; neither figure is allowed the glamour of absolute failure. The sum effect of this moderateness is a lack of animation, a dangerous invitation to stop reading. Scott-King is a short novel for lack, not of plot, but of the inclination to develop and fully realise its material. When incidents from Waugh's earlier novels are reworked in Scott-King, such as the classroom scenes of Decline and Fall or the airport episode of Scoop, the thinness and tiredness of the later writing are especially apparent.

. . . he left the chapel and went to his class-room, where for the first hours he had the lowest set. They coughed and sneezed. One, more ingenious than the rest, attempted at length to draw him out as, it was known, he might sometimes be drawn: 'Please, sir, Mr. Griggs says it's a pure waste of our time learning classics,' but Scott-King merely replied: 'It's a waste of time coming to me and not learning them.' . . .

. . . 'Has anyone done any more?' (Scott-King still attempted to import into the lower school the adult politeness of the Classical Sixth.) (9-10)

The prompting, parenthetic narrative voice has here superseded the unpredictability of the earlier writing; the unexpectedness and violence of Paul Pennyfeather's threat to 'very nearly kill you with this stick' was a part of that novel's effect.<sup>1</sup> The equivalent scene in Scott-King is altogether smaller, less funny, more single in effect, with that effect underscored for the reader by the narrator's asides - 'as, it was known, he might sometimes be drawn' or, at the airport, 'But is it all right for me to be here?' 'It is essential. You are a V.I.P.' 'I wonder, thought Scott-King, how they treat quite ordinary, unimportant people?' (14-15)

The restraint with which Scott-King and his milieu are realized presents

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1 Decline and Fall (1928), 1977. p. 28.



the narrator with some difficulties in launching his hero into exotic international adventure. The present-tense description of Grantchester, in addition to further immobilising the novel with its sense of the dully probable, guarantees the account of Scott-King's work there, and extends to Bellorius as a plausible subject for that work - but 'Neutralia' is a lazily-contrived name (compare Azania, Ishmaelia) and a footnote insists that the state is 'imaginary and composite' (3). A fertile confusion of realities, such as that achieved by the footnotes of Vile Bodies (see page 15 above), is not the effect here, but a blunt assertion, rather, of narrative authority; the reader may choose to 'believe in' Scott-King and Grantchester, but Neutralia remains hypothetical, a conceit we are coolly invited to entertain. The compendium of ills ascribed to Neutralia, we are advised, is not necessarily entire - 'make the list full, slip in as many personal foibles as you will . . .' (4). The length of the list, and its arbitrary and composite nature, contribute to a growing apprehension of an eccentric narrative personality. The need to inaugurate a plot drives this figure into an embarrassed rhetoric, strongly foregrounded against the dim and enervated surrounding writing.

Something must be known of this history (of Neutralia) if we are to follow Scott-King with understanding. Let us eschew detail and observe that . . .  
. . . This you must know; also that the Neutrals being a clever Latin race are little given to hero-worship . . .  
These, then, in a general, distant view, are the circumstances - Scott-King's history; Bellorius; the history of Neutralia - all quite credible, quite humdrum . . .  
(4-5-6)

It would be tedious in the extreme to recount all that was said in Miss Bombaum's bedroom . . . (58)

It would be inappropriate to speak here of those depths of the human spirit, the agony and the despair, of the next few days of Scott-King's life. (85)

The prevailing sense of failure and dullness which from the beginning was present in the narrative throws these magisterial interventions into great prominence. Their command is that of a Trollope narrator, but transposition to a mid-twentieth century fiction of defeat and uncertainty invests their condescension with a cool, remote malice. The conspicuous wielding of narrative control inside a novel otherwise intent upon understatement and diminution is inevitably suggestive of an amused and inhumane half-interest; the elaborate protocol is ironic, insincere, an empty punctiliousness.

Let us now 'truck' the camera forward and see him  
'close up'. You have heard all about Scott-King  
but you have not yet met him.  
Meet him, then . . . (6)

The contemporary image is handled with a delicate but tangible distaste, the jargon sealed between inverted commas and the business of narration clearly an unavoidable embarrassment (the famous, schooled at 'lesser places', are mocked for precisely this kind of apology on the novel's second page). The narrator's is not an attractive persona, so much less appealing than the dimly earnest Scott-King that the reader sides to some degree with the hero and against its manipulative and vaguely hostile manner. A passage such as that celebrating Scott-King as 'an adult, an intellectual, a classical scholar, almost a poet . . . older, it might have been written, than the rocks on which he sat; older, anyway, than his stall in chapel . . . ' (9) stands in danger, as a result of the reader's defensiveness, of losing at least some of its ironical effect. One comes to wonder, certainly, if it is not the narrator, as a distinct and sardonic personality, who finds relish in barbarism, rather than Scott-King. The unmoved response to the National Monument commemorating 'massacre, execution, liquidation - what you will' (59) represents an attitude much harsher, more removed, than Scott-King's. He can experience

'ghastly fear' at the prospect of being unable to pay for a luncheon (73).

The distaste with which phrases clearly felt to be vulgar are isolated discourages any very comfortable relationship with this narrator -

'that day he was rewarded. His number turned up . . . She had nosed out the grim truth . . .'(73, 59). The elevation of the narrator's position is emphasised further by a scattering of free-standing opinions, donated, as it were, from quite outside the narrative proper -

. . . unlike the sons of lesser places who are apt to say: 'As a matter of fact I was at a place called \_\_\_\_\_ . You see at the time my father . . .'(2)

. . . he looked furtive as men do when they employ that ambiguous expression . . . (15)

Like all modern state-architecture it was a loveless, unadorned object saved from insignificance only by its bulk . . . (57)

. . . all that can be found there and all that the heart of man can properly desire. (52)

The novel's title, Scott-King's Modern Europe, is clearly intended to evoke those school text-books filled with statistics about continental iron-ore production and grain exports; the novel sets its beleaguered classical values against the commercial instincts of Engineer Garcia ('Do you often go to Salford?' (31)), Second Secretary Mr. Horace Smudge ('a genuine enthusiasm for Commercial Geography' (69)) and the nameless Major who runs the escape organization -

'We exist to make profits and our expenses are high . . . We help people irrespective of class, race, party, creed or colour - for cash in advance.' (79-80)

The idea is carried to a climax with the collection of the refugees in a warehouse, prior to departure in the hold of a cargo ship; the greeting of the concierge, 'Welcome to Modern Europe' (83), is perhaps too pointed,

but Scott-King learns the lesson, and will elect not to leaven his classics teaching with 'economic history', the counterpart to Smudge's Commercial Geography.

This opposition works well, but the novel's title might also be said to reveal the purposiveness of the piece - the narrator knows what modern Europe really is, and sets out to show us - this really is a text-book, one suspects. The deliberation robs Waugh's writing of much of its unique effect. Thus, the collated dialogues of the thirties' writing, notably of Vile Bodies, with each utterance on a separate line, managed to stress not the babble of voices but the gaps between those voices, the silence into which they dropped. The novel's moral commentary was present by implication in those silences, and the more certainly felt for being withheld. In Scott-King the running together of the excerpts creates too single an effect and loses that subtlety, and the narrator is in any case no longer content to let the fragments work by themselves. In the following passage even the 'and so on' stales the effect.

'They say the bus has gone back to Bellacita for new tyres.' - 'Have you heard we are to dine with the Lord Mayor?' - 'I heard Dr. Fe say we should not leave till three o'clock.' - 'I believe we ought all to be at the Chapter House' . . . and so on. This was the atmosphere of the tour, and in it the social barriers which had threatened to divide them at Bellacita had quickly broken down. (55-56)

It is this obsessiveness on the narrator's part that relegates Scott-King to the lower ranks of Waugh's fiction, notwithstanding several fine comic passages - the reactions to Miss Sveningen's wardrobe, and the history of the 'Ritz' hotel chief amongst them. There are in addition interesting anticipations of the military trilogy. The image of the Second World War as, not 'heroic and chivalrous', but, rather, 'a sweaty tug-of-war between teams of indistinguishable louts' (5) might have been culled from

Unconditional Surrender, and is certainly Scott-King's most remarkable line (if not very Public School). But the single-minded advance against the dreadfulness of Modern Europe finally leaves little time to deal with Scott-King or his predicament. The sea-voyage is omitted only because the narrator has no interest in relating it, not, of course, because it is too awful to contemplate. There is at the last an indifference, almost a hostility towards the hero that is quite alien to Decline and Fall or Scoop, clearly born of that impatience with the business of narrating which was to be increasingly apparent in Helena. Waugh finds no comfortable narrative position in the novel, and the satire remains undirected, not clearly focused either on or through Scott-King, but instead playing randomly and incoherently upon dried eggs, atheism, modern travel, facism, fake champagne. Scott-King is neither a confessed cipher, like Paul Pennyfeather, nor properly integrated into the novel's serious concern as Guy Crouchback was to be. Scott-King's Modern Europe marks the end of the usefulness to Waugh of the picaresque novel, and the ingénu.

## THE LOVED ONE

The publication in 1948 of The Loved One met with a mixture of revulsion and relief from readers and critics of Evelyn Waugh's fiction. It would not be altogether true to add 'respectively', but certainly the large new readership Waugh had earned with Brideshead Revisited must have found little to enjoy or even recognise in this latest novel. Those commentators familiar with Waugh's pre-war fiction discovered however a return to the earlier manner, after the disconcerting emotions of Brideshead.<sup>1</sup> In a sense, The Loved One has never recovered from that early critical welcome, in terms of discussion of its technique. Clearly, it is a novel closer in many ways to Black Mischief than to Brideshead, and those who enjoy the '30's fiction generally are likely to enjoy The Loved One; but the novel fills an important place in the line of Waugh's artistic development and to group it, rather regressively, with writing of nearly fifteen years earlier is misleading. Thus W. S. Cook, describing The Loved One as 'an interlude', evidence of a 'suspension of development'.<sup>2</sup> Brideshead was not a cul-de-sac, out of which Waugh simply reversed; it stands between the '30's writing and The Loved One.

Both Philip Toynbee<sup>3</sup> and Frank Kermode<sup>4</sup> have described The Loved One as Waugh's 'most perfect' novel, remarks characteristic of much comment on the novel. Cook<sup>5</sup> and DeVitis<sup>6</sup> each call it a 'novellette', and imply not only economy but also a completed, rounded shape. Such remarks begin to

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1 Thus Marie Scott-James, Time and Tide, 29 (1948), 223-4, and the T.L.S. of 20th November 1948.

2 Masks, Modes and Morals: The Art of Evelyn Waugh, New Jersey, 1971, p. 236.

3 'Evelyn Waugh: Mourner for a World That Never Was', Observer Weekend Review, 29th October 1961, p. 21.

4 'Mr. Waugh's Cities', Encounter, XV (1960), p. 65.

5 Op. Cit., p. 236.

6 Roman Holiday, 1958, p. 54.

indicate what is unique in The Loved One. One might characterise the pre-war fiction as fractured, yearning works, insofar as the narratives of those novels are experimental and tentative, successively taking up and discarding attitudes towards the written world. Compared even with Scoop, The Loved One exhibits remarkable balance and completion of narrative form; the relation between the world and the narrative, though complex, seems no longer as problematical, a discovery celebrated in the novel's exaggerated confidence. It is possible to read The Loved One as not only a satirical essay on the Condition of America (with America representing something like 'the future of the West'), but also as an exercise in defining the generation and proper status of a literary text. The two functions are not of course separate. In Waugh's diagnosis it is American ignorance of any such definition that leads to the disastrous substitution of comfortable fictions for more painful truths (notably, death), and the consequent corruption of American language and thought.

It is evidence of the 'demonstrative' nature of the novel's technique that The Loved One lends itself very easily to analysis of a structuralist kind, after the manner of East European and, more recently, French critics.

Detractors of the various theories or methodologies of fiction have cited the unrepresentativeness of the texts these critics choose to work upon; The Loved One is more literary than an advertisement or a James Bond thriller but it is not yet the fully 'realist' novel the theorists are urged to select. One might easily assign the few characters of the novel to categories devised by Propp and later Greimas in their narrative grammars.<sup>1</sup> Thus the object to

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<sup>1</sup> Propp identified a small number of basic roles in the folktales he examined: hero, villain, helper and so forth. Greimas argues for the universality, semantically, of such roles or actants. Vladimir Propp, Morphology of the Folktale, Bloomington, 1958; A. J. Greimas, Sémantique structurale, Paris, 1966; discussed by Jonathan Culler in his Structuralist Poetics (1975), 1977, pp. 207-208, 233-235, and by Robert Scholes in his Structuralism in Literature, (1974), 1975, pp. 59-69, 104-105.

be transferred from one actant to another might be described as 'the experience of America', which Dennis, as hero, is seeking to capture and carry off to Europe. Aimée is herself a part of that object, and Sir Francis Hinsley and Mr. Joyboy are respectively Helper and Opponent. Sir Francis speaks of Dennis's 'sacrifice' and 'heroic resolution', of 'conniving at your escape from bondage', and of himself as 'deep in thrall to the Dragon King'<sup>1</sup> - recalling precisely those legendary roles identified by Propp. V. S. Pritchett's description of the novel as 'a nasty fairy tale' follows from this.<sup>2</sup>

The Loved One responds more interestingly, however, to an analysis, of the kind pioneered by Russian Formalist critics, which distinguishes between 'fabula' and 'szujet'; that is, between the story as it could have occurred objectively, in real time, and the story as it is actually narrated in a particular instance. The second is naturally a distortion of the first. The Loved One exhibits throughout an awareness of this distinction, and the narrative viewpoint is consequently a complex one. We as readers are conscious of The Loved One as a novel, of Dennis as hero, actant, a character; he has an adventure, and we are entertained by it. But Dennis himself is an artist, self-consciously a 'protagonist' (97), deliberately gathering material for the 'opus' (112) he will write on his return to Europe. His experiences in the novel constitute as it were the fabula from which he will extract the szujet of his poem (Dennis is presumably a poet, rather than a novelist, in order that the life/art distinction may be maintained when our novel must serve as his 'life'; Dennis's poem is a step further towards the metaphoric pole than Waugh's novel. Another current methodology is evoked). Having read the author's Preface, we are aware of Waugh's parallel experience, of course, and locate in his actual visit to Los Angeles the fabula out of which The Loved One itself emerged.

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1 The Loved One (1948), 1969, pp. 16-17.

2 'Books in General', New Statesman and Nation, May 7th 1949, pp. 473-4.



Fictions of the most purely imaginative kind will derive from their author's personal experience, but at such a remove that no very useful purpose is served by examining the source very closely. This is generally true of Waugh's pre-war fiction. The Loved One is evidently not a work of pure imagination however, and seems rather to invite, even provoke, reflection on its sources in Waugh's own experience. It seems therefore legitimate to characterise that experience as 'fabula' in this case. Waugh had an idea about what had happened to him in Hollywood. The series regresses one more step; my own discussion of the novel here, insofar as all criticism is paraphrase, might be considered yet another szujet, derived from a fabula that incorporates the novel, my knowledge of Waugh's visit, even Dennis's non-existent poem. The Life magazine article on Forest Lawn which Waugh produced prior to writing The Loved One is presumably both szujet and, feeding back into the novel, fabula.<sup>1</sup>

These Russian-doll enclosures are not simply to be externally observed, but are made integral to the experience of reading the narrative. For as long as the szujet is dealing with American funeral practices, then Dennis is merely an actant; when, however, the emphasis falls, by implication, on the poem Dennis will write, these practices become something like fabula, to be rendered down into that poem, and Dennis himself not a character but an experiencer, a reader. The first chapter of The Loved One moves upon a small series of mysteries, each quickly resolved but serving to push the reader forward; where is the story set? what is the purpose of Sir Ambrose's visit? and above all what job does Dennis now have? The revelation of his employment forms the climax to this process of anticipation ('I never suggested anything so violently macabre, so Elizabethan, as the work you chose' (17)). All of this is very purposeful, and it ensures that the careful falling-away of the chapter's closing line

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<sup>1</sup> Life, 29th September 1947, pp. 73-77.

is the more foregrounded -

Next to a Siamese cat stood a tin of fruit juice and a plate of sandwiches. Dennis took this supper into the reception room and, as he ate it, resumed his interrupted reading. (22)

The coincidence of the interruption with the enforced break in our own reading as the chapter ends is slightly disturbing; one seems to begin Chapter Two alongside Dennis, reading with as well as of him. The detachment suggested in his reading draws Dennis out of the plot, out of his role as character. Similarly, when at the close of Chapter Three Dennis declares that he has 'seen enough for one day' (50), his response to Whispering Glades again parallels our own; the long chapter has dealt in close, fascinated detail with the grisly operations of the institution. Such phrases only crystallise a general effect of simultaneity in the novel, as Dennis both enacts and observes the action. The novel ends on still another example -

He picked up the novel which Miss Poski had left on his desk and settled down to await his loved one's final combustion. (128)

As the novel ends, Dennis is waiting, and he starts to read as we finish; the act reinforces the sense of continuation and circularity already noted in the Russian-doll enclosures. The capitalised 'THE END' seems ironic - experience is flooding in, only just beginning for Dennis, and insists upon being turned into art. As readers we know that insofar as Dennis 'is' Waugh, then The Loved One is the opus Dennis/Waugh would/did produce once back in Europe. The correspondence turns Dennis into the writer of The Loved One - and there are passages in the novel to endorse his authorship. Dennis is given the job of composing something Sir Ambrose might read at Sir Francis's funeral service, but Waugh's organisation of the

text ensures another inference.

Dennis cut out the review and sent it to Sir Ambrose.  
Then he turned to his task of composition.

The pickled oak, the chintz, the spongy carpet and the Georgian staircase all ended sharply on the second floor. Above that lay a quarter where no layman penetrated. It was approached by elevator, an open functional cage eight feet square. On this top floor everything was tile and porcelain, linoleum and chromium . . . (54-55)

The break in the text again releases a variant reading. The description of Whispering Glades that follows the pause is precisely a 'composition', in the older sense of building up a picture - it is a 'portrait', composed of a string of nouns and adjectives. The pause ensures that this account feels like the composition Dennis has set out to write. This is, moreover, the first piece of direct narrative with dialogue to exclude Dennis as actant. The action at Megalopolitan Studios was set, by an intrusive narrator, against the account of Dennis's contentment; disengagement/happiness against engagement/despair. Dennis was present by implication and so ruled out as current narrator. The transition in the above passage, from the public, external face of Whispering Glades to the private interior, draws attention to the parallel shift in narrative source, from Dennis as actant to Dennis as writer. A sense of discontinuity, of moving inwards, is common to both, but where the separateness of the two images of Whispering Glades exposes the falsity of its philosophy, the division of Dennis's roles represents a knowingness in the text, that supple awareness of the generation of fiction which characterises the novel. The spiritual repose of the loved ones is entirely contrived with 'formaldehyde . . . shampoo and hot air and acetone and lavender' (55); the emptiness behind material riches and grandiloquent language is figured in the cold, sterile surfaces of tile, porcelain, chromium and china. Dennis's task will be to redeem the horrors

of Whispering Glades by turning them into art - this is the understood role of the artist in The Loved One, which locates in literature the near-spiritual values to which Whispering Glades can only pretend. The narrative consistently deploys terms of religion; Dennis is granted 'martyrdom, palm and halo' by Sir Francis (16), and elsewhere likened to a monk in prayer (19).<sup>1</sup> Mr. Joyboy's claim, 'It's as if I was inspired, sometimes, from outside; something higher . . . ' (59), is set directly against Dennis's 'moment of vision' (128). Intermittently making Dennis a reader, or writer, of the novel in which he is elsewhere simply an actant, Waugh demonstrates his own complete awareness and control of the creative process, and sets this against the delusions and confusions of Los Angeles, where fiction-making has spilled over from the studios into all thought and culture.

The reader's awareness of Waugh's crucial personal experience, guaranteed by the preface, is made to play into the novel in other ways, further to reinforce the covert exposition of fabula and szujet. Waugh has recourse at several points in The Loved One to the present tense, most notably in the 'straight' descriptions of the memorial park.

The Wee Kirk o' Auld Lang Syne lies on an extremity of the park out of sight from the University Church and the Mausoleum. It is a lowly building without belfry or ornament, designed to charm rather than to impress, dedicated to Robert Burns and Harry Lauder, souvenirs of whom are exhibited in an annex . . . (99)

The effect of such an irruption is not to convince one, by association, of the authenticity of the rest of the tale - its extravagance scarcely

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<sup>1</sup> Aimée, in equivalence, is a 'nun' (58). Elsewhere occur 'atonement' (15), 'transfigured' (75), 'hallowed' (86), 'rites' (89) and 'litany' (121). Whispering Glades is the 'high pure source' for Dennis, his 'Vatican' (38).

allows this - but rather to throw the opposite light on the surrounding narrative. By reminding one of the existence of the actual Forest Lawn park, and of Waugh's visits there, the fabula as it were illegally re-enters the text, unadapted. Something similar is happening in Chapter Five, when Dennis

listened intently to the tones so often parodied yet never rendered more absurd or more hypnotic than the original. (65)

This talk of parody and of the 'original' clearly bears on Dennis's task of composition; the pretence that only in his opus could this original be converted into art can hardly be maintained in the face of the reader's by this time acute awareness of the fabula-sujet relation. This, of course, is the parody; the original lies behind, within. Waugh's narrative provokes the reader to recall and reaffirm these basic relations.

Although I have sought to distinguish between The Loved One and the pre-war novels, there is clearly a measure of overlap. At the points where The Loved One betrays deliberately its written nature it recalls parallel tendencies in nearly all the 1930's novels. The very composed tableau at the opening of Chapter Five, when Dennis and Aimée meet at the Orchid Room, can be appreciated by him for the cliché it is ('Thus in a hundred novels had lovers stood . . .') (61)) -

Dennis was too young ever to have seen an Edwardian conservatory in full fig but he knew the literature of the period and in his imagination had seen such a picture; it was all there, even the gilt chairs disposed in pairs as though for some starched and jewelled courtship. (62)

The same kind of self-consciousness is present in the closing line of Chapter Eight, where the narrative celebrates its own quality of inevitability - 'Thus at long last Aimée came to the Happier Hunting Ground' (105). The last line of the next chapter is fully as coy - 'It was quite without design that she chose Mr. Joyboy's workroom for the injection' (118). This kind of bravura writing does recall the 1930's novels - the inclusion in Vile Bodies, for example, of matter-of-fact footnotes. A remote narrator, unapologetic in his betrayal of fictionality, is common to all those novels, and elements of that attitude are present in The Loved One. (Dennis himself seems a portrayal of the kind of 'hard' artist who might have written those novels; his treatment of the troubled Aimée as source material alienates the reader's sympathy just as Waugh's similar use of Agatha Runcible or Prudence Courteney upset earlier readers).

Beyond these elements however, the narrator of The Loved One is an interestingly different figure, and not occluded by Dennis's periodic usurpation of the narrative line.

'I remember a time when you lived not so far away.'  
'Did I? 'Pon my soul I believe you're right. That takes one back a bit. It was before we went to Beverly Hills . . . Where was it I used to live? Just across the street, wasn't it?'  
Just across the street, twenty years or more ago, when this neglected district was the centre of fashion; . . .  
(11)

Sir Ambrose's ludicrous language is still a novelty at this point; it is to voices, conversation, that the reader is alert, and the narrator's response to Sir Ambrose's question, exactly repeating his words, is assimilated as a contribution to the dialogue, something spoken. The semi-colon ensures that the clause is ungrammatical except as a 'reply'. This exchange marks the beginning of the elaboration in The Loved One of the 'personality' of the narrator. It is not sufficient to characterise

this narrator as simply more intrusive than those of the earlier novels; there emerges a more personal impression. The novel has, for example, few metaphors (although of course in its thesis a completely metaphorical work), and when the narrator coins 'the seven-league boots of failure' (11) or 'the sparse furniture of (Aimée's) mind - the objects which barked the intruder's shins' (106), the clever figures are the more foregrounded, and with them the coiner, the superior, constructing mind. The second of these metaphors comes at the opening of Chapter Nine; as much as the section-closures already noticed, opening passages in The Loved One decisively affect one's reading of the novel. Several chapters - notably Two, Three and Nine - begin with something like a disquisition by the narrator, explaining or summarising the action, frequently in a large block of text. These homilies ('Artists are by nature versatile and precise . . . (23), 'Others in gentler ages had had their lives changed by such revelation . . .' (34)) are set against the intricately plotted main action, and adumbrate a narrator personality almost as separable as Fielding's. This is very different to the more thoroughly erased, inaccessible narrators of the pre-war novels. When comment is passed on 'the high fashion of the place - Donegal tweeds, sandals, a grass-green silk shirt . . .' (20) the impression is of a specific, outraged sensibility, a particular mind; 'to the end he was the least vain of literary men and in consequence the least remembered' (54) is a joke that by its peripheral, incidental nature suggests a narrator with various opinions going unexpressed in the diversion of storytelling. At a number of points in The Loved One this distinct presence threatens to become an embarrassment, for it is the novel's thesis that, appalling though the spectacle of Californian funerary rites is, a (Catholic) art will transform and redeem its awfulness; both Dennis and the narrator, though appalled, are as artists also fascinated and attracted. This thesis

suffers when the narrator appears to find the spectacle more horrifying than does Dennis, and in general more horrifying than fascinating. In Chapter Three Dennis is given some reflections on the homogeneity of the American female -

She left the room and Dennis at once forgot everything about her. He had seen her before everywhere. American mothers, Dennis reflected, presumably knew their daughters apart . . . but to the European eye the Mortuary Hostess was one with all her sisters of the air-liners and the reception desks, one with Miss Poski at the Happier Hunting Ground. (46)

This is Dennis's first visit to Whispering Glades, and prior to this passage his fascination with the scene has forestalled his usual irony. If the reflection halted here the interruption in tone would be acceptable, but it is taken over at this point and elaborated into an essay on 'the standard product', comparing American and European Woman; Dennis, we are told, came of 'an earlier civilisation with sharper needs'. The ordered discrimination is out of step with Dennis's current frame of mind, and seems detached from him; moreover, the *synecdochic* evocation of European Woman - 'the intangible, the veiled face in the fog, the silhouette at the lighted doorway . . .' (46-47) - is, at once, both as simplistic an image as the 'sprawling limbs' of the American female, and one so very individual and private as to baffle the reader.

The suspicion that the narrator is impatient of Dennis's cooler, more reserved observation is damaging to the novel. Sir Francis's face after the embalming is described, apparently by Dennis, as 'entirely horrible . . . a painted and smirking obscene travesty . . .' (62). These are very positive adjectives, but just plausible as Dennis's own view in his relish for such grimness - it is more than he had 'hoped' (63). But the following passage throws doubt on the source of these adjectives, which



then seem only to have been leading up to its own melodrama -

The Yes-men were there in force. Man proposed. God disposed. These bland, plump gentlemen signalled their final abiding assent to the arrangement, nodding into the blind mask of death. (63)

This, certainly, is not in Dennis's style; the narrator-character has broken through with his own verdict. The passage has the effect, similar to the use of the present tense, of implying something suddenly real in the midst of mere pretence; a real disgust, a real outrage. There is nothing like this in the pre-war fiction; Father Rothschild's pronouncement on 'fatal hunger' scarcely obtrudes, by comparison, from its context.<sup>1</sup> The judgement and contained emotion granted to Dennis are compromised by this over-excitement on his narrator's part, by being made to seem less genuine, merely a contrived poise. The novel's intelligent, redeeming response to all the implications of *Whispering Glades* suffers simultaneously.

In the above I have hardly discussed the content of The Loved One, the things about which it is satirical and the techniques of that satire; and I have assumed the novel's deeply religious attitude to be generally recognised today. Waugh's humour, which again I have not mentioned, is of the variety common to the '30's novels and often described as 'Bergsonian', according to the principle of 'something mechanical encrusted on the living' - thus the 'pervasive materialism' of Caren's account of The Loved One.<sup>2</sup> Abercrombie's language, the unfortunate Juanita, Miss Poski's paint, Sir Francis's fragile identity (disappearing by degrees

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1 Vile Bodies (1930), 1978, p. 132.

2 The Satiric Art of Evelyn Waugh, Seattle, 1966, pp. 20-22.

with his typist, car, office and contract), the wholesale American use of capital letters, Joyboy's loudspeaker voice - all exhibit that eclipsing of the natural by the artificial, the solidification of meaning into procedure. Abercrombie's boast is at root self-cancelling - 'never do before the camera what you would not do at home and never do at home what you would not do before the camera' (13). Dennis cultivates an animal stealth to safeguard himself and his vision in this deadly environment, a toughness readers have found repellent. Before completing the capture of Aimée he 'thought it well to lie low' (108), to 'lay in wait for her'. In defeat and death Sir Francis is 'stripped of the thick pelt of mobility and intelligence' (62). Toughness is manifest in the narrative in the use of unusual or obscure words - thus 'umbrageous', 'tocsin', 'rude', 'nugatory'; Dennis has to explain 'moribund' to the Mortuary Hostess (37) - and in the hostility to the American idiom maintained throughout -

'It is really very valuable experience for me, Mr. Schultz,' Dennis said, seeking to extenuate the reproach of desertion . . .  
'What for you want new ideas?' asked Mr. Schultz . . .  
(51)

In all of this an opposition is constructed between one nexus of values characterised as European (a quality incorporating animality but expressed most succinctly in the coincidental descriptions of English literature and religion - the first 'casual . . . despondent . . . ceremonious . . . exacting' (85), the second 'ceremonious, verbose, ingenious . . . ' (111) and another which is at least Californian - typically a confusion of the spiritual and the commercial. At root the opposition is between the human and the inhuman.

DeVitis has written of The Loved One's 'indignant tone',<sup>1</sup> Cyril Connolly

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<sup>1</sup> Op. Cit., p. 58.

more strongly of its 'impatient savagery',<sup>1</sup> and it is certainly this engagement of the narrator that marks off the novel from the pre-war writing; the narrator of those novels never cared enough to be indignant. The character of Dennis Barlow, as if to compensate for this engagement, is made especially remote, and the novel's tone especially acerbic, even morbid. But this remoteness was clearly no longer as amenable to Waugh as it had once been, and the poise is maintained, and then imperfectly, only with particular rigour. Connolly argues that in the military trilogy, the major project for the rest of his working life, Waugh began to 'delve';<sup>2</sup> in the self-investigating Sword of Honour and the still more candid Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold Waugh did at last abandon that poise of the 'dandy' Brian Wicker has described.<sup>3</sup> The Loved One exhibits both Waugh's command of that poise and its lessening usefulness to him, just as Scott-King had previously seen the final exploitation of the ingénu. For the hero of his trilogy Waugh needed a more substantial figure, capable of real development.

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1 'A Critique of Waugh', The Listener 78 (October 1967), pp. 267-269.

2 Ibid., p. 267-269.

3 The Story-Shaped World, 1975, pp. 159-168.

## HELENA

It is reported (and I, for one, believe it) that some few years ago a lady prominent for her hostility to the Church returned from a visit to Palestine in a state of exultation. 'I got the real low-down at last,' she told her friends. 'The whole story of the crucifixion was made up by a British woman named Ellen. Why, the guide showed me the very place where it happened. Even the priests admit it. They call their chapel "the Invention of the Cross".'

It has not been my primary aim to disillusion this famous lady but to retell an old story.

This is a novel. (9)<sup>1</sup>

In a sense, the sense the prominent lady uses here, Evelyn Waugh ceased to invent stories after finishing The Loved One. The military trilogy is certainly more than fictionalised autobiography - although Pinfold is essentially that - but there is little extended, freely inventive writing, such as characterises Put Out More Flags or Brideshead. Helena repays critical attention here not as an ignored masterpiece, which it is not, but for its (implicit) diagnosis of the problems Waugh felt he faced in writing fiction as he grew older. Helena is marked by a reluctance, a lack of commitment to its own form, and its poor critical reception follows from this; the work is not disliked, but unfamiliar, as, uncomfortable about its place or type, commentators have preferred to overlook it. W. S. Cook, in an otherwise exhaustive study, deals with Helena, and with Scott-King, The Loved One, Love Among the Ruins and Pinfold, in a page and a half.<sup>2</sup> Complaints against Helena have been various, but have in common a feeling that the work is too single, finally too dogmatic. This is especially true of the later parts of the work, and is the impression one takes away on closing Helena. The narrator underplays

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1 Helena (1950), 1963 Penguin reprint, p. 9.

2 Masks, Modes and Morals: the Art of Evelyn Waugh, New Jersey, 1971, pp. 237-8.

the dramatic potential of the Discovery, writing as it were against the grain of his fabula. The tone of the last few pages is increasingly dismissive -

'Go on,' said Helena. 'You'll find a cross in there. Perhaps more than one. Bring them up carefully. I will stay here. I've a few more prayers to say.'  
. . . Now that her quest was at last accomplished all sentiment was dead and she was as practical about arrangements as though some new furniture had been delivered at her house . . .  
. . . she set about the division of the property. Half was for Macarius; half for the rest of the world. She took the cross-beam of the True Cross and left him the upright . . . (154-155)

The unsentimentality is a part, of course, of Helena's direct, searching faith, but it combines with the narrator's unapologetic reporting of fantastic Helena legends to close the narrative on a diminishing, offhand note ('The cross which she left was put up in a church where it hovered, without support, for centuries, till the infidels took the island . . .' (157)). There appears to be an attempt, at the last, to slough off responsibility, an embarrassment on the narrator's part with those elements of 'novel' to which he has had recourse in pursuing another end. Helena's formal difficulties in fact lie not in its singleness but in an ambivalence; the late elision and summary are saying something like - "but - never mind all this - the point is -", and the work ends with a very clear, single voice.

But the wood has endured. In splinters and shavings, gorgeously encased, it has travelled the world over and found a joyous welcome among every race. For it states a fact.  
Hounds are checked, hunting wild. A horn calls clear through the covert. Helena casts them back on the scent. Above all the babble of her age and ours, she makes one blunt assertion. And there alone lies Hope. (159)

The hunting metaphor, recurrent throughout, is here a refugee from

Helena-the-novel, locked between the 'fact' and the 'blunt assertion'.

This is a resounding closure, but scarcely that of a novel.

Helena is one of a very few of Waugh's works to have had from its beginning a preface, and this provides a useful place to begin tracing the piece's formal unease. In it an attempt is made to draw up a contract, advising the reader what might reasonably be expected of the narrative. The opening passage was cited at the head of these remarks. A famous lady is mocked for taking literally the term 'invention', and for supposing the crucifixion to have been 'made up'. A brief, foregrounded sentence sets against her 'made up' the phrase 'an old story', the retelling of which will disillusion the lady. The terseness of this declaration opposes her garrulity, before an even more terse, more strongly foregrounded sentence completes the narrator's seizure of our attention - 'This is a novel'. Much of the narrator's, and Helena's, business in this work is the making of these aggressively blunt assertions, cutting across excesses of speculation and imagination, until the single voice of the ending alone remains. The prominent lady's embryonic narrative is only the first to suffer. Garrulity is one key element of storytelling; its eclipse here is significant.

The preface can be examined further. The novelist is one who 'deals with experiences which excite' his imagination. In the present case that experience was 'desultory reading in History and Archaeology'. There is something circular in this; would not a broad, instinctive division place historical and archaeological studies, and the novel, in one camp - as artifacts of a kind - and experience in another?

The resulting book, of course, is neither History or Archaeology. Where the authorities are doubtful, I have often chosen the picturesque in preference to the plausible; I have once or twice, where they are silent, freely invented; but there is nothing, I believe, contrary to authentic history . . . and there is little that has not some support from tradition or from early documents. (9)

The careful arguments for historical accuracy do not sit easily with aggressive claims for a novelist's poetic license. The known facts of Helena's life are rehearsed through a measured series of semi-colons. the picturesque is preferred only when sources are vague; four names are admitted fictitious - implying that all others are historical. (In the event, three of the four play very little part in the narrative). The discovery itself is of course undiluted miracle, inexplicable in historical terms - but the wood might certainly have endured . . . 'The story is just something to be read; in fact a legend' (11); the closing line repeats the stress of 'This is a novel', but the claims of history and archaeology have been persuasive in the intervening paragraphs - it is not apparent where an experience, some take-off point for a novelist's inagination has occurred, nor yet now 'an old story', 'a novel', 'a legend' are demonstrably superior to the prominent lady's 'made up' story. The relative claims of history and the novel remain unsorted, and as Helena develops this failure proves damaging. The principle represented by the novel here is apparently that of release, of something emerging from history/archaeology as Helena emerges from mere humanity into sainthood. Helena does in part work in this way, but elsewhere the novel form itself falls under suspicion. Lactantius makes a key speech for the defence midway in Helena, but the late, crucial prayer to the Magi is contrite; the miraculous vision is earnt by this confession. The parenthesis into which the preface lapsed so quickly, 'It is reported (and

I, for one, believe it) . . .', registers at the outset the problem of fictional 'truth' that is to beset Helena.

Once, very long ago, before ever the flowers were named which struggled and fluttered below the rain-swept walls, there sat on an upper window a princess and a slave reading a story which even then was old: or, rather, to be entirely prosaic, on the wet afternoon of the Nones of May in the year (as it was computed later) of Our Lord 273, in the city of Colchester, Helena, red-haired, youngest daughter of Coel, Paramount Chief of the Trinovantes, gazed into the rain while her tutor read the Iliad of Homer in a Latin paraphrase. (13)

No sooner has the narrative proper begun than, as in the preface, there is a fracture. Two contrasting types of discourse, hinging at the colon, establish the poles between which novels will occur, but the awkwardness with which the narrative swings from one extreme to the other ('or, rather, to be entirely prosaic, . . .') anticipates the formal unease of the work as a whole. The passage as far as the colon is consciously poetic, after it as consciously not - though not, even then, entirely prosaic; it is the uncommittedness of the narrative locally that generates the thorough tonal ambivalence. The abrupt shift, with its angular apology, indicates an inability to select and develop a single narrative mode. The narrator is aware of the potential of his *szujet*, in traditional, story-teller's terms, but suspicious of that potential and reluctant to sacrifice the authority of fact. A repeated critical complaint about Helena is that it is never firmly established as a novel. Sykes believes there is insufficient fact for this to be history (the heroine is too 'shadowy'), but that the bulk of theology prevents its proper development as a



novel.<sup>1</sup> DeVitis sees the religious theme achieving prominence 'at the expense of art',<sup>2</sup> and Ronald Knox failed to find in Helena the 'full illusion of reality'.<sup>3</sup> This failure of art, failure as a novel, is presaged in the opening fracture, and can perhaps be understood by examining a pair of narrative structures deployed by Waugh in his fictional writing. In their accounts of Helena both Stopp<sup>4</sup> and, more recently, Jeffrey Heath,<sup>5</sup> have analysed the work's structure in terms of the 'foreshadowing' idea already used openly by Waugh in Brideshead Revisited. Troy and Rome are successive stages on Helena's progress towards the City of God. This is neatly arranged, but Waugh was to abandon foreshadowing after Helena, and the difficulties it causes him are apparent here. His other habitual structure, one used largely in the 1930's writing and again in the military trilogy, can be conceived as circular, and might be termed an 'island' structure. Typically, it presents a lifestyle or principle that caricatures the novel's 'ideal way', and which forms an enclosed and self-sustaining, but crucially faulted and sterile system. Tony Last and William Boot are both marooned on such islands, and Guy Crouchback escapes only with difficulty from the many islands of Officers and Gentlemen, a novel almost wholly conceived in this way. The circularity of this is potentially at odds with the linear drive of foreshadowing, but it is the location of the idea of narrative itself, within both structures simultaneously, that provokes Helena's particular insecurity.

The Homeric references in Helena, for example, do not work as simply as

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1 Evelyn Waugh: A Biography (1975), 1977, p. 427.

2 Roman Holiday: The Catholic Novels of Evelyn Waugh, 1958, p. 67.

3 'The Reader Suspended', Month, 8 (1952), 236-238.

4 Evelyn Waugh: Portrait of an Artist, 1958, pp. 123-129.

5 The Picturesque Prison: Evelyn Waugh and his Writing, 1982, pp. 198-205.

has been suggested. As foreshadowing, Troy is clearly a lesser Rome, but Homer elsewhere provides inadequate and inappropriate parallels, and Helena is often ironically aware of the poet's license. Her tutor rejects as an interpolation (in fact, Waugh's own) a passage Helena relishes precisely for being 'inconsistent with the heroic virtues' (20). For Helena, Homer is, like 'the Great Longinus' and her nurse's father, a figure 'half of fun . . . half of awe' (21). The Homeric analogy invoked on her wedding night is highly ambiguous - 'It is like being alone on an island, isn't it? Like "sea-girt Kranæ".'

'Kranæ?' said Chlorus. 'Kranæ? I don't think I know the place. Is it one of the islands of Britain?' And Helena turned back to her husband. (32)

Constantius himself is a character awkwardly allocated within both types of structure. Helena's passion for the efficient, unattractive soldier is conceived in poetic imagery that, developing through the novel, will come to express her love of and submission to the Christian faith -

Helena was playing horses, a game which began with her first pony . . . but of late years, as her womanhood broke bud, a keener excitement infused the game. Two played it now. There was the will of the rider that spoke down the length of the rein, from the gloved hand to the warm and tender tongue under the bit . . . Then at the height of the play . . . came the sweet moment of surrender, the fusion, and the two were off together, single, full stretch . . . She took some handling, the chestnut. (24-25)

The sexual element incorporates the conceit within the story of Helena's love of Constantius, but she is more largely to be understood as moving, through her marriage, nearer to Rome, and the Faith. By the wedding night she is clearly straining beyond Constantius.

Helena picked her way to the window, barefoot through the baggage. Standing there, she could see only the golden globes of flame moving below in the mist.

'The minstrels, Chlorus. Come and look.'

But Constantius lay still, invisible in the lampless room behind her. (32)

Helena looks out; Constantius remains silent and invisible. The fog allows her to substitute, for the second time in the novel,<sup>1</sup> a finer Homeric context; but her husband is ignorant of this and for the moment Helena relinquishes her vision and turns back to him. Thus far her marriage ~~is~~ foreshadowing, but 'The marriage-house seemed to stand solitary in the night and the fog' (32), as later Bellamy's club will stand in the London blackout, equally an image of void and negativity. Guy Crouchback and Helena are similarly placed at this moment, each lost, seizing the wrong things. The Homeric romanticism Helena invokes is as empty as Guy's tales of Captain Truslove.

Constantius is increasingly the measure of all that is deprecated in Helena, his political ambition shown as mean and meaningless, the world of politics another island, vicious and relentless, but for all that quite static. His son, at his apogee of power, will wonder 'what's the difference? . . . Why is it "necessary" that I should live rather than anyone else?' (113). Nor does Constantius retain any warrior glamour -

This was Chlorus's victory, this his mystery; for this his journey, his furtive interviews, his fox-like doubling on his tracks, his lies and silences; this butchery of a betrayed army, this traffic with the betrayer . . . (47-48)

In all of this, and above all in his embracing of the Mithraic cult, Helena's husband illustrates 'the wrong way', perhaps over-deliberately.

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<sup>1</sup> Helena transmutes Colchester into Troy, pp. 14-15.

The disquisition on Mithraism is long and detailed, and awkwardly detached from the main narrative flow; an explicit island. Helena's marriage is never properly a part of the novel's foreshadowing structure; in retrospect, and in subsequent readings, the account of the couple's travels and of Constantius's slow advance to power seems overlong. Waugh is a victim of his chosen subject; his thesis is dismissive of History, of wars and politicians, but for lack of biography he is forced back on good measures of these. The reader is merely irritated by being given just enough documentary comment to become interested in these 'doomed Flavians', only to learn that such interest is inappropriate.

When asked how she had spent her time in Britain, Helena replies 'I was being educated. I read poetry. I hunted.' (43). This states the case for literature as foregrounding at its clearest; the hunting metaphor is Helena's most explicitly poetic device. In this positive light literature is wielded by the narrator as a weapon to subdue 'history' - the crises of Roman politics are syntactically derided:

Then for the first time in anyone's memory the Empire was at peace. Through the full length of its frontier the barbarians were stopped and shaken . . . A great undertaking was begun in the marshes of Sirmium. They were to be drained and planted and settled . . . Probus directed the work in person. One warm day the men got bored, chased the emperor up a tower and murdered him on the summit. (60)

The casualness of this is clearly studied, an arrogant literary effect, and Helena's indifference - 'That ought to make Chlorus a little happier about being on the shelf' - is an endorsement of the narrator's attitude. When Constantius returns from Nicomedia, Caesar at last, his triumph is

dismissed by narrator and Helena in turn, on aesthetic grounds:

He was soon back, resplendently, imperially over-dressed.

'Chlorus, the purple!'

His was not the complexion for it. (67)

The personal 'style' for which Helena is enjoyed as a character is itself a literary device; the directness that will be a crucial element in her belief is equally a matter of poise, an independent élan. She is firmly in the line of 1930's heroines, of Brenda Last, Angela Lyne; Virginia Troy was in 1950 an imminent development. The town of Trèves has an equivalent chic, which Helena enjoys, but here the limitations of élan also become apparent. Helena is happy to patronise the town's poets, but confesses, 'I don't think they mean a great deal . . . but they are thoroughly nice young men and very badly off; they like coming here and when they read aloud they do so much remind me of my dear father in one of his poetic moods.'" (78). It is a facility which Helena admires, as she admires a 'remarkable' statue -

The Jupiter held a golden thurible, two feet across, like a toy in his marble fingers, and grains of incense thrown into it filled the whole temple with sweetness while remaining unconsumed and undiminished. 'Of course it's all a trick,' said Helena. 'But I can't think how it's done and I never get tired of seeing them do it.' (78)

A view of art as virtuoso performance, remarkable, even intriguing, but meaningless, underpins much of Helena. This is art within an island structure, little different from the varied perversions of Christianity Helen encounters. Her old tutor Marcias graduates from one to the other, in ironic parody of the novel's own foreshadowing structure. In Colchester he was 'sole lord of the schoolroom', his letters 'elegant, esoteric, speculative, rhapsodic', his mind 'sailing free and wide in the void which

he made his chilly home' (13-16). Marcias arrives in Trèves a religious savant and lecturer.

Those who still sought to follow Marcias's meaning, looked anxious; happier those who surrendered without resistance to the flood of buoyant speech and floated supine and agape; they were getting what they had come for. (82)

For Helena this is 'Marcias, still up to his old tricks' (82); again, a facility, empty cleverness. Marcias, we remember, is a eunuch. The Trèves poets remind Helena of her father's ancestral lament, presented in the first chapter as straight comedy but already undermining the subsequent narrative. The lament is compounded of 'classic myth, celtic fairy tale and stark history'; it 'mingled and swelled inharmoniously'. (24)

High and thin and heartless sang the fiddles and the chanter; deep and turgid and lacrimose sang the bearded choristers. Lax and supine sprawled the soldiers; rigid and erect sat the royal women. Softly the page stepped from couch to couch with the mead-bowl; heavily the District Commander stumbled once more to the vomitorium. (23)

The inverted word order, the balance and repetition enact the contrived formality of Coel's genealogy, until the District Commander's stumbling departure disperses all gravity, all the paragraph's poise. The implausible tale caricatures Waugh's own, another of the work's 'reservations'. The most remarkable example of Waugh drawing away from his novel, however, comes at the close of the seventh chapter, with the account of the Edict of Milan, giving toleration to the Church. The abandonment is, ironically, accomplished by a clutch of careful similes - Diocletian's boredom as a 'Second Spring', the 'new green life', horse-riding (again). Waugh passes into straight historical commentary ('In terms of documented history . . .'), amidst which these isolated similes cease to be truly literary devices and become, rather, illustrative sketches, marginal and briskly

purposive. Helena's tutor Lactantius, most nearly Waugh's mouthpiece, is 'left breathless, quite outrun, with all his fine vocabulary exhausted, and only the clichés of court eulogy ready to mind' (88). This, clearly, is to draw a line beyond which the literary art is declared insufficient - a disastrous admission for any novel to contain. God has dislocated the fiction; the vivid simile which follows, likening the power of warring emperors to 'a watch still ticking on the wrist of a dead man' (89) is coined quite outside the historical novel Helena has hitherto been. It then seems reasonable for Waugh to announce Helena's baptism without apology. DeVitis complains of Waugh's inconsistency, in being prepared to give us Helena's dreams, but not to imagine her baptism, but the oddity of this is only apparent in retrospect - the short seventh chapter is, by its close, scarcely being read as fiction at all.

Although Helena is, very largely, omitted from generalised accounts of Waugh's writing, two passages have several times been rescued and, as it were, anthologized; and each of these bears on my thesis here, that Helena exhibits an anxiety about the possibilities of fiction. Lactantius is set, as a tutor, against Marcias, whose mysticism he pronounces 'complete bosh' (85). He is a literary figure voicing all Waugh's misgivings about the craft of writing. He enjoys 'unrivalled powers of expression' but is 'vague about what to express' and fearful of 'falling into error' (79). Helena celebrates in its argument the ascendancy of content over form, matter over manner, blocks of wood over Homocousion. Lactantius is conscious of his power, but also of being at best a craftsman, adept at 'the kitten games of syntax and rhetoric'; 'Words could do anything except generate their own meaning' (79). He regrets not having stayed 'nearer

the centre of things, across the Alps . . .', where meanings were being generated. (After Helena Waugh saw his only remaining task, as a novelist, to be the fictional rendering of his war experiences, in Crete, in Yugoslavia, at the centre of things.) The gibbon joke regretted by Sykes<sup>1</sup> works not only at the expense of the Protestant historian; chiding Lactantius for his defensiveness, Helena assures him he is 'a great pet' (80).

Lactantius's account and very partial defence of the writer come halfway through Helena. Art alone cannot bring Helena to the Cross, and those who have read Helena wholly as a novel have regretted the necessity of the dream and the Wandering Jew. It is the 'intervening impulse' once again, 'beyond normal calculation', beyond acceptable plotting (88). Like Lactantius, the reader is obliged to 'accept the mystery'. The vision is earned by Helena's Easter prayer to the Magi, the second of the anthology pieces.<sup>2</sup> There is implicit in her address to the wise men an apology for the artist, for Helena itself and the necessity of kitten games and rhetoric. All Helena's plotting and imagery, Lactantius's 'joinery and embellishment', are apparent in the Magi's slow, encumbered approach.

'How laboriously you came, taking sights and calculating, where the shepherds had run barefoot! How odd you looked on the road, attended by what outlandish liveries, laden with such preposterous gifts!' (144)

Artists, it is clear, stand amongst the 'learned, the oblique, the delicate' (145), that make a 'tedious journey' to the truth, 'confused with knowledge and speculation'. Worse than this; they 'stand in danger

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1 Op. Cit., pp. 428-429.

2 Sykes records its use by Dame Flora Robson at an Epiphany Service in her local church. She had previously read the part of Helena in Sykes's own adaption of the novel for radio. Op. Cit., p. 432.



by reason of their talents', and can 'make themselves partners in guilt' (145). Guy's admission of guilt to Madame Kanyi is directly anticipated, his rich fictions having long delayed his understanding.

Waugh's own fiction, inevitably, is soon concluded after such a confession, with the abruptness already remarked. It closes at its most dogmatic, less like a novel than ever. Throughout Waugh's writing, his vision of a fraudulent quality in (modern) society finds acute expression in narrative techniques which exploit the anarchic nature of the literary imagination. As commentators have remarked, even Helena, unique in many ways within the canon, contains nothing new in its actual theme. It clearly has much in common with an otherwise very different novel such as Scoop, which, I have argued, demonstrates 'literature as lushness'. In Helena an attempt at redeeming that lushness largely fails. In each work a modest, rather complacent figure is led by supernatural intervention to make a startling disclosure. Helena's prompt, we understand, comes from God, William Boot's from a deus ex machina; but Mr. Baldwin does not foreshadow the Almighty. The pre-war novels, Scoop amongst them, explore a society terrible, and comical, in its lack of meaning, and sift the disguises adopted. William Boot returns to his nature column unchanged, because all the action of Scoop is circumscribed within the island of the novel itself, an enclosing lushness. All the world is changed by Helena's discovery, and the novel itself, now as redundant, as patently fantastical as Fausta's Homoousion, can only give way to blunt assertion.

Fascination with the novel form is yielding in Helena to impatience and distrust; it is something for which one apologises, to be resisted and circumvented. Helena's inconsistencies of tone and technique, like the anomalies of its structure, are born of a casting about for the positive, uncompromised expression Waugh sought in his later writing.

## LOVE AMONG THE RUINS

Love Among the Ruins evoked comparatively little comment on its publication in 1953, and has since been largely neglected. Waugh himself, invited by the Spectator to review his novel's reviews, made no strong claim for it being more closely considered. The novel's opening word is 'Despite', and the work as a whole was a designedly inappropriate, and unwelcome, contribution to post-Festival, New Elizabethan England. The Welfare State provided an immediate target within that Modern World more generally belaboured in Brideshead and Scott-King, and the resulting work benefits from that immediacy, in its tightness of construction and aspect of completion. Love Among the Ruins, almost uniquely among the minor post-war writing, is carried through to an artistically coherent conclusion, as Scott-King, Pinfold and for different reasons Helena are not. The Loved One and Love Among the Ruins are the best sustained, most achieved of these lesser works - with The Loved One certainly the more considerable of the two.

Love Among the Ruins belongs to a genre of writing which Anthony Burgess has called 'cacotopian', characteristically presenting a reversed Utopia.<sup>1</sup> Orwell's 1984 is the clearest example of the genre. Such writing, under the distinction elaborated by Roman Jakobson,<sup>2</sup> masquerades as an extension of the present, forward into the future - an apparently metonymic exercise in which the intervening period is excised or deleted; the future described is seemingly contiguous with our own present. Burgess's examination of 1984 exposes the pretence, and shows Orwell to be writing instead about his own time and society, about 1948, not 1984. Burgess

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1 1985, 1978, p. 52 and passim.

2 First set out in the essay 'Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances', Fundamentals of Language, ed. R. Jakobson and M. Halle, 1956.

then constructs a more truly metonymic and contiguous cacotopia, which he calls 1985 and which, as a literary exercise at least, is markedly less interesting than Orwell's metaphoric example. That had said, not 'our life will be like this', but rather 'Life is like this, now'. Waugh's 'New Britain' is clearly metaphoric in this way, and hardly credible as an account of how any society could change within a single generation. Mr. Sweat and Soapy can remember when crime led to 'disaster and degradation in this world and everlasting damnation in the next',<sup>1</sup> but the Euthanasia principle is already well established, and the Whitehall Cenotaph has no significance for Miles Plastic. Burgess makes the same point about 1984 - 'As a projection of a possible future, Orwell's vision has a purely fragmentary validity . . . It is the metaphorical power that persists: the book continues to be an apocalyptic codex of our worst fears.'<sup>2</sup> W. Warren Wagar, in a recent survey of 'end of the world' literature, characterises such visions as

not just stories about the end of the world, or the end of the self. They are also stories about the nature and meaning of reality as interpreted by world views. They are propaganda for a certain understanding of life, in which the imaginary end serves to sharpen the focus and heighten the importance of certain structures of value.<sup>3</sup>

The metaphorical transformation of Beveridge's Britain involves a reworking of the idea behind Scott-King's Modern Europe that contemporary success is a kind of failure. What was there essentially a conviction brought by Waugh to his novel and 'written into' the realist text, becomes in Love Among the Ruins much more the work's governing metaphysic - here, to be normal is to be mad, to welcome euthanasia 'sane' (199). Life

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1 Love Among the Ruins (1953), 1978 (Penguin edition: with The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold and Tactical Exercise), p. 181.

2 Op. Cit., p. 51.

3 Terminal Visions: The Literature of Last Things, Indiana, 1983; reviewed by Anthony Burgess, 'The apocalypse and after', Times Literary Supplement, 18 March 1983, p. 256.

itself, without God or personal identity, has become a kind of death. The same transformation occurs in The Loved One, for all its actual adhesion to Californian mortuary practice. Scott-King, on the other hand, is apprehended by the reader as an essentially realist, metonymic text, in which the narrator scarcely needs to heighten contemporary ills for satire to result - the failings need only be accumulated and juxtaposed. Waugh's embarrassment in the handling of plot in that novel follows from the untransformed nature of the work; the world goes on being gross, foolish, hypocritical, but the text, even the metonymic text, must begin and end.

Love Among the Ruins shows to advantage when read alongside Helena and Scott-King. There is relatively little overt narrative comment, relatively much more dialogue and description. The futurist setting yields Waugh some obvious advantages. Whereas there is a need to describe just how - for example - modern air travel offends the cultured man, merely to invent an Euthanasia Centre, or a Minister of Rest and Culture, constitutes authorial comment, without that risk of separation between form and content run in Scott-King. The very occasional lapses in Love Among the Ruins into that kind of external prompting confirm the generally much tighter artistic organisation of the novel -

They wore open flannel shirts, blazers with numerous pens and pencils protruding from the breast pocket, and baggy trousers. This was the dress of very high politicians. (186)  
The glasses were modern, unbreakable, and unsightly. (207)

When Mountjoy is finally eradicated, its replacement 'a familiar, standard packing-case, set on end' (221), the narrator intercedes to confirm, in an isolated line, that 'Modern Man was home', and recalls the warehouse concierge bidding Scott-King 'Welcome to Modern Europe', in a similarly

overstated interpolation. These are exceptional in Love Among the Ruins, the rounding metaphorical structure of which enacts Waugh's argument without need of appended opinion. Much more typical is the organic quality of the following passage, in which the superficial nature of the hospital building, and the 'obscure folk play', are integrated expressions of Waugh's persistent theme, of the emptiness behind the facades of New Britain; the hospital merely 'a jumble of huts', the nativity a record of 'maternity services before the days of Welfare'.

At dusk Miles walked to the hospital, one of the unfinished edifices, all concrete and steel and glass in front and a jumble of huts behind. The hall porter was engrossed in the television, which was performing an old obscure folk play which past generations had performed on Santa Claus Day, and was now revived and revised as a matter of historical interest. It was of professional interest to the porter for it dealt with maternity services before the days of Welfare . . . 'People here are always complaining,' he said. 'They ought to realize what things were like before Progress.' (211-212)

The irony of the porter's closing comment is much more typical, in its terse effectiveness, of Waugh's 1930's writing than anything in Scott-King's Modern Europe.

The work's cohesion is not of course won without cost; its metaphorical unity is consequent upon Love Among the Ruins being a very theoretical piece of writing, borne of a very personal animus against the Common Man's Welfare State. Clara's beard is variously 'corn-gold' (198), 'ripe heads of barley' (200), 'silvered like a patriarch's' (204) and evocative of 'some carefree deacon in the colonnaded schools of fifth-century Alexandria' (200); it carries connotations of Nature, fertility, classical learning and wisdom - literary procedures. But as a beard on a woman, it is, above all, abnormal. It 'stands for' something, clearly - for resistance, for an alternative way - but it is the arbitrariness in the

choice of symbol that it most striking, and which betrays the theoretical aspect of Love Among the Ruins. As an extreme, Saussurean signal of the literariness of the work, this is at least potentially damaging, suggestive of an element of pure play. Wagar concludes the passage quoted above by characterising 'terminal visions' as 'games of chance, so to speak, in which the players risk all their chips on a single hand. But games just the same.'<sup>1</sup> Clara's beard almost refuses to read metaphorically, threatening to prevent the reader passing back from Waugh's vision into the world, from vehicle back to tenor. It is of course vital to the novel's function as social criticism that movement back and forth in this way is possible. Clara's beard is the work's 'difficulty', although not, as Christopher Sykes has suggested, because bearded women are too common a subject of jesting.<sup>2</sup> In abstract summary the novel can easily sound playful, merely ludicrous; in the process of reading the highly schematic nature of its strategy is less apparent, such is the cohesiveness of vision within the work. The manic principle of reversal, already noted, is, for example, as cumulatively persuasive here as in the pre-war fiction - prison is idyllic, freedom something inflicted 'bluntly and brutally' (185) upon one; officials are harder worked, less well-paid, than workers; and so forth.

Jeffrey Heath is surely right in arguing that Love Among the Ruins is a better novel than its reviewers, and subsequently Waugh's critics, have been willing to grant. Heath's discussion of the work is the fullest it has received and offers an interesting sidelight on the novel's conclusion.<sup>3</sup> He argues that R. M. Davies' belief, that Love Among the Ruins has an

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1 Ibid.

2 Evelyn Waugh: A Biography (1975), 1978, p. 476.

3 The Picturesque Prison: Evelyn Waugh and his Writing, 1982, pp. 206 - 209.

optimistic conclusion, is better served by the unpublished first draft of the novel, which ends with Miles aboard a train, pondering the inflammability of homes in the American Midwest. The ending as published, Heath asserts, is 'hard to accept as unambiguously 'laudable'', even granted its element of free-will. It might be noted, however, that the socialist policies of the coalition government of New Britain are already meeting 'considerable opposition . . . vocal and unscrupulous' (221). Miles was the government's 'first success, the vindication of the Method', the sole 'complete case of rehabilitation . . . our Result' (188). His suicide is conceivably a political event.

The novel's other main commentator, F. J. Stopp, does not find the novel 'well assembled',<sup>1</sup> but the 'desultory and whimsical manner'<sup>2</sup> of Waugh's allusions to Tennyson, Browning and Canova is arguably appropriate to the novel's depiction of the place of art in this society. Clara has in her cubicle two little paintings in chipped frames, 'a looking glass framed in porcelain flowers, a gilt irregular clock' - 'delicate bric-à-brac' (204). In the new, Godless society art persists only as debris, broken images with which to shore up the ruins. The illustrations Waugh contrived for his story enact this idea, as travesties and fragments of an older tradition. At the last even the debris exists only as the memories that torment Miles. His suicide is the final eradication of Mountjoy, and the climax of the rising crescendo of violence within the novel - the slaughter of the peacocks and burning of the airmen (both offstage), the Euthanasia Centre, Clara's operation, the firing of Mountjoy. The mounting violence is, ironically, both caused by and seen against the contrasting background of a dully sterile and static society; in Waugh's vision the world seems capable of ending with both a bang and a whimper.

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1 Evelyn Waugh: Portrait of an Artist, 1958, p. 46.

2 Ibid., p. 155.

- VI -

MEN AT ARMS

OFFICERS AND GENTLEMEN

UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDER



## MEN AT ARMS

The military trilogy, although Waugh's most extended and ambitious work, has attracted little detailed commentary. Criticism of Waugh's writing has always been bedevilled by comment upon strictly biographical matters, and the endless discussion of the moral - or immoral, or amoral - position of the 'thirties novels only grows larger when Waugh's Catholicism is taken into the balance; it is easier to talk about Waugh than about his writing.<sup>1</sup> The most perceptive discussion of the trilogy is again probably that by F. J. Stopp, qualified by its necessary confinement to the first two volumes.<sup>2</sup> Of the other commentaries, that by Andrew Rutherford is perhaps most typical, in dealing efficiently with the hero's changing beliefs and growth in human awareness, but hardly at all with the novels as novels, as crafted productions.<sup>3</sup> It is the same approach as that taken to the pre-war fiction, that of the personal response - crystallised perhaps in Rutherford's comment that A Handful of Dust can be taken 'cynically or satirically, according to taste'. His unprovocative contention that Sword of Honour fuses Waugh's tragic and comic visions take us little further into the writing itself.

Such comments as have been made on the technical features of the trilogy are however interesting. Setting aside Stopp's discussion, a survey of these soon isolates the areas of especial concern. The humanist and moral criticism referred to above gravitates in its discussions towards the second and third volumes, where the hero's advancing sympathies are

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1 In 1975 G. D. Philips published a book-length study of the real-life models behind Waugh's characters and situations, Evelyn Waugh's Officers, Gentlemen and Rogues : The Fact Behind His Fiction, 1975.

2 Evelyn Waugh: Portrait of an Artist, 1958.

3 The Literature of War, 1978.

clearest; remarks confined to Men at Arms are marginally more technical.

Of the first two novels Steven Marcus has written that

The qualities that make them interesting and worthy are not organic to the structure or their moral implication, but are there in the things that exist before the reader's eye, in the events arranged and acted out.<sup>1</sup>

This might stand as a precis of much other criticism, but particularly of Men at Arms. The phrases 'exist before the reader's eye' and 'events arranged and acted out' are especially central; before going further one might line up alongside this some other remarks. Walter Allen -

the (first) two novels taken together seem a series of brilliant fragments rather than a composed whole or even part of a whole.<sup>2</sup> There is the splendid incidental comedy, of course . . .

John Lynde, of Guy Crouchback -

a rather nebulous and hopelessly secondary figure, surrendering a unique personality, forfeiting his independent identity to his foil or alter-ego, Apthorpe . . .<sup>3</sup>

and Christopher Sykes, preferring the second volume to Men at Arms for having dealt

with more dreadful subjects . . . (including a haunting description of the Crete campaign) . . .<sup>4</sup> a host of lifelike inventions came on the scene.

The reservations being variously held here are essentially the single one

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- 1 'Evelyn Waugh and the Art of Entertainment', Partisan Review, XXIII (1956), 348-357.
  - 2 Tradition and Dream (1964), 1971, p. 233.
  - 3 'The Composition and Revision of Evelyn Waugh's Sword of Honour Trilogy', unpublished dissertation, Warwick University, 1976, p. 16.
  - 4 Evelyn Waugh : A Biography (1975), 1977, p. 500.

of misproportion; the novel (or novels) is felt to be formally ill-balanced or to be dealing inefficiently with the 'dreadful . . . haunting' truths of war, or to be most interesting in its most incidental areas. Marcus's comment on 'events arranged and acted out' is suggestive of an internal fragmentation, of individual performances running against the larger design and in their vividness insisting upon undue attention, as they 'exist before the reader's eye'. Allen's adjectives 'brilliant' and 'splendid' register this vividness. Sykes' remarks are more particularly those of a companion in arms who wishes to read a war-novel and whose taste, even as he uses words like 'invention' and 'scene', is for the 'lifelike'. Sykes quotes Diana Cooper's amusing remark on Men at Arms, 'I thought you were going to give us a modern War and Peace, but its more like Mrs. Dale's Diary', and again there is the disappointment borne of a confusion of genres.<sup>1</sup> The novel frustrates attempts to categorise; J. F. Carens remarks that in the trilogy Waugh 'revealed that he was as ready and able as ever to modulate effectively from one key to another',<sup>2</sup> making the important point that this kind of modulation is not new in Waugh's fiction. However, the choice of subject here instituted strong preconceptions amongst Waugh's readers, and his treatment of it has bemused. Sykes complains that the hero Guy Crouchback 'is Paul Pennyfeather cast for the principal role in an enormous tragedy',<sup>3</sup> but later, despite locating in Men at Arms both 'high comedy' and 'inferior farce' he concludes that the whole is a 'tragi-comedy'. Sykes is speaking variously of the single novel and the trilogy, but it is evident that much of his unhappiness with the work stems from his need to place the writing in a secure tradition. It is my argument that this novel, like those of the thirties, achieves its effect by

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1 Ibid., p. 474.

2 The Satiric Art of Evelyn Waugh, Seattle, 1966, p. 157.

3 Op. Cit., p. 551.

exploiting such expectations. Prominent amongst critical requests has been that for a single, clearly-defined leading character, a hero, and here Men at Arms is found particularly wanting. Lynde's objection to Guy's secondary status is typical; Allen found him 'a wistful dream of the author's rather than a solid creation'<sup>1</sup>; the Times Literary Supplement discerned 'a slight tendency for the edges to be blurred'<sup>2</sup>; Sykes thought Guy an 'ineffectual hero' and worried that Apthorpe had 'threatened to become the protagonist of the story'.<sup>3</sup> But the Catholic writer DeVitis finds Guy 'the strongest of Waugh's male portraits'<sup>4</sup> so even here there is disagreement.

These various critical responses to Sword of Honour and particularly to Men at Arms isolate what seem to be the chief features of the reading experience of this work - briefly, fragmentation, misproportion and unexpected emphases. The effect of the organization of Men at Arms is evidently to prevent it from being the war-novel ostensibly promised, to prevent it from being a comfortable realist novel at all, in the same way that fragmentation and modulation make much of the thirties' writing unconventional. The case is less extreme, and several writers have testified to the authenticity of Waugh's war trilogy, but the larger confusion suggests that Men at Arms is concerned to be other than simply authentic.

Men at Arms is fractured in its physical organization. In purely mechanical terms, the novel falls into thirty-one numbered sections, grouped not quite evenly under the headings of 'Prologue' and the three 'Apthorpe . . .' books. In the edition to hand<sup>5</sup> each section averages seven and a half

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1 Op. Cit., p. 233.

2 Review of Men at Arms, 12.9.52.

3 Op Cit., p. 474.

4 Roman Holiday : the Catholic Novels of Evelyn Waugh, 1958, p. 70.

5 Men at Arms (1952), 1973.

pages in length. However almost two thirds of these sections are further divided into separate, unnumbered parts; the novel as a whole now falls into fifty-six separate blocks of writing, the average length reducing to just four pages. Such an organization clearly echoes that of the pre-war novels; Waugh's typical techniques of counterpoint, parallel and juxtaposition are not ones he can set aside and these impose a fragmentation of the narrative line. The averages referred to remain fairly true to the individual counts, but the points of marked deviation are interesting. The further into the novel one progresses the shorter become the sections; the average for the last two books is only three pages. The points of most sustained writing occur in the prologue (a numbered section of sixteen pages) and in the first book (three sections of over fifteen pages). The prologue details Guy's arrival in London and his meetings with his family - it is the setting up of his own story, his search for employment and purpose. The second burst of sustained narrative embraces the entries into the novel of Apthorpe and Ritchie -Hook, and Guy's debacle with Virginia at Claridge's. In these extended episodes the spectacle is that of Guy's story, his crusade, being subverted by the greater energies of Apthorpe and the brigadier; Stopp has well described how, in his attempt upon Virginia, Guy has taken on with his monocle and moustache the 'Apthorpean elements.'<sup>1</sup>

The narrative of Men at Arms is divided between a large number of physical locations. Chief amongst these are the Halberdier barracks, Kut-al-Imara House, London, Penkirk and Cornwall, but also significant in the action are Santa Dulcina, Matchet, the Box-Bender home in Gloucestershire, Mudshore, Garibaldi's restaurant, Brook Park, Dakar and 'a British port'. The outcome of this flightiness is not however a narrative various and mobile, but

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1 Op. Cit., p. 162.

one strangely inert. The characters are transferred without enthusiasm from one featureless camp to the next, the war always remote. The transfer itself is frequently achieved in a manner which contributes to the stagnation.

he had not long in which to face whatever shame attached to his decision. That night, a warning-order arrived and everyone was sent on forty-eight hours embarkation leave. (216)

Sudden acceleration and deceleration occur repeatedly in the novel; 'embarkation' is something long anticipated, but the impetus is immediately forfeited - leave is granted - and the next section begins 'Guy went for a day to Matchet. It was summer holidays for the school . . .'. When Ritchie-Hook arrives at Kut-al-Imara to revitalize the training course the tempo of the action increases to match Guy's own excitement, and by the section's end 'Guy felt full of meat, gorged like a lion on Ritchie-Hook's kill'. But then the officers are sent on leave and the novel turns to the story of Guy's rapprochement with Virginia (119). This kind of construction sets up a slow rhythm in the novel, with long periods of inactivity, moments of fevered anticipation and gentle slides back into torpor. Book Two closes on the resounding line, 'it appears, amongst other things, that the Germans took Boulogne yesterday'; Book Three opens, 'Nine weeks of 'flap', of alternating chaos and order'. Later in the third book the 'lightless concentration-camp which all Europe had suddenly become' is translated into 'Chaos in Liverpool . . .' (218). Always there is the reductive, dampening juxtaposition. The novel, through Guy, is given to passages of quiet reflection and recollection; on six separate occasions a section ends with Guy in bed, falling slowly asleep, turning over in his mind the events of the day. He is given to wistful self-questioning -

'Why couldn't I say "Here's how" to Major Tickeridge?' (42)

Was that the real 'Halberdier welcome' expected of him? (57)

Was it for this that the bugles sounded across the  
barrack square . . .? Was this the triumph . . .? (104-105)

Guy remained to wonder: was this the already advertised  
spirit of Dunkirk? (205)

This wondering disappointment becomes the characteristic tone of the novel, especially in those parts where Guy's ideals collide with the military realities. It is particularly prevalent in the early sections, where Waugh develops a number of metaphors to describe Guy's spiritual paralysis. Chief amongst these are images of light and darkness. The decline of the Crouchbacks is first described in terms of darkness - 'For fifty years, until the shadows closed on the Crouchback family . . .' (11) - while Guy's own plight is seen in essentially similar terms, as a 'void' -

Into that wasteland where his soul languished he need  
not, could not, enter. He had no words to describe  
it . . . There was nothing to describe, merely a void.  
(14)

After Guy's move to London, the war itself is described in terms of darkness and blindness, establishing a connection between the private and public illness. At Bellamy's

Guy and Box-Bender felt their way up in utter blindness  
. . . They spoke of incidents and crimes in the black-  
out . . . They sat on late, for no one relished the  
plunge into darkness. No one attempted to drive a car.  
Taxis were rare. They made up parties to walk homeward  
together . . . They stumbled down the steps together  
and set out into the baffling midnight void. (21-23)

The lack of direction and movement is figured in the short, stifled sentences, and the absence of transport adds to the sense of constriction; movement is always difficult and protracted.

'We can't meet people at Kemble any more. No petrol. You'll have to change and take the local train. Or else the bus from Stroud if it's still running. I rather think it isn't.' (26)

Leaving Penkirk, Guy's group are 'put into a lightless train'; after several long hours Guy 'raised a blind. They were still in Edinburgh station' (192). Inertia and blindness operate as metaphors of Guy's paralysis, itself placed in the larger context of a confused war. Guy can debate compromised notions of 'justice' at Bellamy's, but 'The conclusion of all these discussions was darkness, the baffling night that lay beyond the club doors' (25). The light/dark metaphor can be traced at length through the novel, for it is consistently applied. Guy and Virginia's colloquy at Claridge's is elaborately structured about the interplay of firelight and the electric lamps, with the war never very far away -

The light that had shone and waxed in their blackness suddenly snapped out as though at the order of an air-raid warden. (132)

Particularly interesting however are the moments at which this prevailing gloom is decisively pierced. The first of these occasions occurs in a Catholic reference and, though positive, is muted. At the close of the prologue Mr. Crouchback passes Guy Gervase's medal as he lies in bed; 'Guy stretched out in the darkness and felt the light disc of metal' (42). In the context of the continuing metaphor one reads 'light' here in both senses. Ultimately, the catholic values will be the only ones to truly illuminate matters for Guy and dispel his darkness. In Men at Arms however there is instead the coruscating nimbus that invests the figures of Apthorpe and Ritchie-Hook, throwing all else into shadow. Apthorpe is explicitly referred to by Guy as 'over-Technicoloured', as having 'an aura' (165). When he is promoted captain, his pips are a 'new constellation' (175); in



the tent at Penkirk Guy is 'fascinated' by the 'smoky luminous cocoon' Apthorpe occupies, reading by 'a patent incandescent oil lamp' (163). Ritchie-Hook's excesses are less lurid, but he too is distinctive for a glittering eye that dispenses 'a cyclopean flash' (118) and for eye-teeth that 'flashed like a questing tiger's' (139).

It is these two characters that, more than any other aspect of the novel, sabotage Men at Arms as a realistic novel of the war. The fragmented narrative, the constrictions and blindnesses of Guy's proper story all serve to clear a space in the novel's foreground for these looming figures, larger and brighter and more vigorous than life. The reader's memory of Men at Arms is of Apthorpe, the Thunder-Box and of Ritchie-Hook, and to dismiss these elements as incidental comedy while looking elsewhere for the novel's real significance is a critical perversity. Christopher Sykes has written that

Lavatory-jokes have their place in great comedy but as the most permissive must agree . . . the place is limited . . . Evelyn gave sixteen pages to the adventure of Apthorpe's Thunder-Box . . .

One's surprise here is probably that the episode is concluded in so few pages; it bulks much larger in recollection. One cannot suppose Waugh unaware of how strongly this 'adventure' was foregrounded. It becomes an alternative to the novel-proper, standing by itself at the heart of the book. Where the other action is touched it is subverted; Ritchie-Hook's training programme becomes focused on a search for the Thunder-Box; the Catholic context of Holy Week, during which the adventure occurs, becomes a framework for its development - 'The climax came in Holy Week.' A close reading of the episode reveals how deliberately 'incidental' is

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1 Op. Cit., p. 555.

the action here.

The second section of Book Two begins with a pastiche of newspaper clichés concerning the Finnish war, ending in a typical short deflection, 'Then quite suddenly it appeared that the Finns were beaten'. The war, as rendered into story, falls flat - much as Guy's ideals of a just war, similarly heroic and equally fictional, are devalued in the course of the trilogy. This is the apt introduction to another story, equally a parody and displacement of military action, that of Apthorpe's Thunder-Box campaign. Guy recognizes at once 'a new development in the tense personal drama', the facile phrase of the reviewer isolating the affair as efficiently as Waugh's one-line paragraph here - 'This adventure had begun on the first Sunday of the new regime'. It is further detached by being told in retrospect -

Guy was reading his weekly papers in the hall when he saw through the plate-glass window a taxi drive up and Apthorpe emerge carrying . . . a large square object . . . (142)

The framing window is a neat metaphor for the conscious isolation, as an exhibit, of the adventure. Guy is interrupted, moreover, in the act of reading; insofar as Men at Arms is a war-novel the reader is similarly interrupted. Guy's aid is at first refused, and he 'turned back to his weekly papers. Apthorpe sat opposite him gazing at his boots' (144). The boots reference is confirmation that whatever Guy tries to read of the war will be ineffective - Apthorpe was first encountered in closely similar terms; 'Apthorpe had no newspaper or book. He stared fixedly at his own feet for mile after mile' (44). Boots - 'porpoises' - are soon established within Apthorpe's mythology, a facet of his diversionary role. The war, facing such opposition, retreats to a parenthesis.

There was a pause during which Guy read an article  
about the inviolability of the Mikkeli Marshes.  
(These were the brave days before the fall of Finland.)  
Then Apthorpe said . . . (144)

Guy is trying to read The Tablet. His religion is as vulnerable as the Marshes to the pagan energies in Apthorpe; asking to see the Thunder-Box, he is soon speaking 'reverently'. As the story develops it assumes a pace and connectedness rarely present elsewhere in the novel - 'For two days . . . Next day . . . ten minutes before the evening lecture . . . On the third day . . .'. The terms used are taken from military procedures - 'Apthorpe posted himself in the bushes . . . spent every available minute on watch . . . pitted against a ruthless and resourceful enemy . . .'. The war-novel cannot provide opposition as steely. When Waugh writes 'It showed how much the thunder-box had occupied Guy's thoughts that he knew at once what Apthorpe meant' (147) he is making of Guy another reader of the story. As a figure in his own story he is now secondary and as he foresaw, these adventures

drained into a deep well of refreshment in his mind  
. . . the detail of alternate ruse and counter-ruse  
faded and grew legendary . . . (155)

An appreciative reader will respond similarly to this novel, even down to the vagueness in detail. The ingredients of this 'saga of the chemical closet' are grotesque and vivid; Apthorpe has 'a face of doom' (146), 'a face of horror', is 'red-nosed and blue-cheeked' until 'in the steam of minestrone (his) face became a healthier colour' (148) while his eyes 'goggled across the table' (149). The episode proliferates, spawns other and anomalous concerns. The scenes set at the 'most secret headquarters' might have been lifted unaltered out of Decline and Fall, rich as they are in a nonsensical causality which links the closet with Guy's brother-in-law

M.P..<sup>1</sup> This is the kind of modulation of which Carens was speaking.

Guy's obsessive curiosity about Apthorpe's tin helmet - 'I must know' - shows him contributing to the diversionary spirit of the adventure, also evident in the passing reference to the 'dead geranium' (153). Why a dead geranium if not to wantonly associate this 'Furibundus' with Eliot's grotesque and vivid simile, 'As a madman shakes a dead geranium'?<sup>2</sup> The Thunder-Box story moves to its climax, fittingly an explosion, the liberation of the lunatic energies focused in Apthorpe. The disaster is anticipated in the reference to Charles I's execution, another finely incongruous allusion. Guy is very aware of the 'story' aspect; he hurries out to 'the scene of the disaster' and savours the 'mot juste'. The saga finishes at a peak of organised storytelling -

On the steps (Apthorpe) paused once and looked back.  
There was more of high tragedy than of bitterness  
in the epitaph he spoke.  
'Biffed'. (157)

This last is the true mot juste, aptly closing this 'high tragedy' with an epitaph.

If the saga of the Thunder-Box thoroughly eclipses Guy's and the war's own stories, Apthorpe himself performs the same function in extension. His operation outside the normal bounds of reality is repeatedly suggested. Frederick Stopp has described his role as Guy's 'doppel-gänger', an embodiment of Guy's romantic illusions of the modern soldier, and it is an idea that deserves closer attention.<sup>3</sup> This sense in which Guy invents

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1 David Lodge comments, 'The absurd obsession of Colonel Grace-Groundling-Marchpole . . . parodies the author's own controlling vision.'

Evelyn Waugh, 1971, p. 45.

2 From 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night', 1911. Madness is an important theme in the novel.

3 Bradbury refers to him as Guy's 'farcical alter-ego'. Evelyn Waugh, 1964, p. 116, and there is a useful account of Apthorpe's role in Jeffrey Heath's study The Picturesque Prison : Evelyn Waugh and his writing, 1982, pp. 217-227.

Apthorpe parallels the invention by Adam of a host of figures in Vile Bodies, in his capacity as gossip-columnist. The manic society for which Adam writes demands and consumes avidly these projections of their shallow ideals, investing them with a 'reality' richer and more detailed than that which our own writer grants to Adam himself, or to Nina, Agatha or the drunken major. A similar subversion occurs in Men at Arms, although Guy himself discerns and relishes in Apthorpe 'a sort of fundamental implausibility'.

Guy treasured every nugget of Apthorpe but under assay he found them liable to fade like faery gold . . . Any firm passage between Apthorpe's seemingly dream-like universe and the world of common experience was a thing to cherish . . . (107-108)

Apthorpe's eminence is a product not of any richer reality, as was the case with the 'invented' Imogen Quest, but instead of a magical and vivid unreality - in both cases the ostensibly 'actual' characters of the novels (Guy, Adam) are diminished, eclipsed. Little enduring fact surrounds Apthorpe. In Southsand he and Guy fail to locate the hotel his aunts patronised; his old school, though real enough once, has now been demolished without trace. An important clue to Apthorpe's real position in the novel occurs early, in Guy's conversation with the chaplain -

'. . . Do you agree,' he asked earnestly, 'that the Supernatural Order is not something added to the Natural Order, like music or painting, to make everyday life more tolerable? It is everyday life. The supernatural is real; what we call "real" is a mere shadow, a passing fancy.' (77)

Guy's apprehension of the religious 'supernatural' is less immediate in this novel than his devotion to the projections of his own illusory ideals. Insofar as Apthorpe is Men at Arms - as the critics have lamented - then he is 'real', Guy himself the 'shadow'. Apthorpe, in his 'dreamlike'

universe is for Guy one of the 'Supernatural', not merely a contrivance of the same order as 'music or painting' by which life is made more tolerable. Apthorpe is consolation not only for Guy. He is a 'great comfort' to his fellows (181), everyone 'remembered Apthorpe well. He had been a joke . . .' (240). It is as a joke that his separate existence within the novel is sustained and his diversion effected. At the very beginning of his story, early in Book One, he appears before Guy slightly drunk, wearing 'flannel trousers and a tweed coat much patched and bound with leather' (58). One notes the harlequin hint, and again the detail of Guy being interrupted in his reading. Apthorpe's own story again assumes priority; on a later occasion so localized does this attention become that de Souza can refer to 'The Matter of the Captain's Salutation' (179-180). This naming parallels 'the saga of the chemical closet' and anticipates 'the heart of the Apthorpe country' (200), 'the Languishing of Leonard' (214) and other similar encapsulations. The effect is clearly to insert alternative chapter titles, small, distracting stories within the larger novel; the affair of the signaller's boots so occupies Dunn that even his one period of active service is overshadowed -

They had got to France and travelled in a great arc of insecurity behind the breaking lines . . . Sarum-Smith tried to induce to give a lecture on 'the lessons learned in combat' but Dunn explained that he had spent the journey in holding a Court of Inquiry . . . to examine the case of the carved boot. (207)

The novel enacts a similar journey 'behind the breaking lines', similarly preoccupied. Apthorpe performs in an arena independent of the war; being made a captain only permits a better prosecution of his feud, notions of military valour grossly parodied -

In Apthorpe's story that event corresponds to Alexander's visit to Siwa. It was an illumination that changed all the colours and shapes about him. Fiends like de Souza lurked in black shadow, but a shining path led upward to the conquest of Dunn.  
(183)

The references to blackness and colour here parody the terms in which the larger novel - Guy's 'story' - has been organized; this happens again later when the Cambridge scholar de Souza ironically pronounces that 'This war has begun in darkness and it will end in silence'. Apthorpe takes over and makes ridiculous Guy's medievalism when he 'penned a challenge to Dunn to meet him . . . for a Trial by Combat in proficiency in Morse' (184). Even the solid and finely-worked Edwardian craftsmanship of the doomed Thunder-Box can be seen as self-parody on Waugh's part.

Apthorpe, then, is not merely Guy's doppelgänger but that of the narrative itself, insofar as his personality and adventures are placed in opposition to the war that is Waugh's ostensible subject-matter. Stopp has noted how consistently serious events are juxtaposed with the ridiculous - 'On the day that Mr. Churchill became Prime Minister, Apthorpe was promoted Captain' (175). Stressing the parallel only emphasises the different orders. The fictions in which Guy requires his just war to be clothed create in Apthorpe a figure quite literally larger than life; Guy's own story is eclipsed behind the monstrous invention in a manner which enacts his willed avoidance of the sober realities. Apthorpe is finally displaced, not by some insistent truth-telling, but by a hardly less fabulous creature. Ritchie-Hook is his own creation, an 'enfant terrible' of such richly poetic attraction that the allegiance of Guy's hungry imagination is soon won. Stopp has written that 'the dispossession of Apthorpe by Ritchie-Hook in Crouchback's loyalties is the main theme of the book'.<sup>1</sup> This is certainly so, and this shuttling

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<sup>1</sup> Op. Cit., p. 160.

about of the novel's nominal hero can again be seen in terms of the eccentric energies perverting his story. Ritchie-Hook embodies Guy's romantic ideal, and the childishness in Guy's conception of leadership and heroism is massively inflated in the brigadier; he is approached by his officers 'with adolescent misgivings' (67) and substitutes 'six of the best with a cane' for company punishments (72). The school parallels are worked hard in Men at Arms, further reductive of an adult war. Ritchie-Hook is also the focus of much animal imagery; he is repeatedly found ferocious, a terror, glaring, baring his teeth. At one point he is discovered 'covered in red, glaring at the notice board'<sup>1</sup> (114), the colour of his uniform nicely suggestive of blood within this animal metaphor. It is pursued so insistently as to reduce Ritchie-Hook to caricature, as also does the text's obsession with his 'single eye'. The effect of grotesque inflation is that already noted of Apthorpe's looming face. At this novel's close, with the brigadier triumphant over Apthorpe, he sports 'one leg huge, as though from elephantiasis, in plaster' (244). The brigadier exists, then, in the story in terms as gross and vivid as does Apthorpe, and performs an equally diversionary function, leading attention out of the realistic novel. Guy's first sight of Ritchie-Hook is interesting -

There before them unmistakably, separated from them only by the plate glass of the drawing-room window, stood Lieutenant-Colonel, shortly to be gazetted Brigadier Ritchie-Hook glaring out at them balefully with a single, terrible eye. It was black as the brows above it, this eye, black as the patch which hung on the other side of the lean skew nose. It was set in a steel-rimmed monocle. Colonel Ritchie-Hook bared his teeth at the ladies, glanced at his huge wristwatch with studied pantomime and said something inaudible but plainly derisive. (67)

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Keily places the brigadier as a 'prehistoric hunter' within a system of animal and jungle metaphor he locates in Men at Arms. 'The Craft of Despondency', Daedalus, VIIIIC (1963), 220-237.



Like Apthorpe, Ritchie-Hook is placed behind plate glass, 'separated from them', framed for Guy as neatly as the oil painting in the mess he so admires and further formalised by the studied correctness of the ranking, the inscription on the frame. All the elements of the caricature are already present - the 'single, terrible eye', the 'bared' teeth; even his wrist-watch, in keeping with this enormity, is 'huge'. 'Eye' and 'black' are dwelt upon with the relish of the ballad-writer, whilst yet another art-form is adduced in the reference to 'pantomime', part of a thread of such running through Men at Arms. These consistently translate the action into theatrical terms, and are a response to Guy's initial belief that the 'enemy at last was plain in view . . . . . all disguise cast off' (12). The war in fact signals a taking on of disguise. Tony Box-Bender accuses Guy of 'masquerading as a young officer' (75), a charge he later admits, realizing that 'his whole uniform was a disguise, his whole new calling a masquerade' (124). On the morning he is to be blown up, Apthorpe 'tricked himself out as a lieutenant' (156) whilst after the delights of the regimental guest night Guy experiences 'anti-climax' in Gloucestershire; 'All the stage properties remained . . . but there was no drama' (78). Leading the game of bingo, Ritchie-Hook 'made a pantomime' of being unable to read the number (139). The tendency is always to stress the characters and actions as unreal, theatrical. Under the brigadier's guidance the officers

biffed imaginary defenders into the hills . . . biffed  
imaginary invaders from the hills into the sea . . .  
biffed imaginary hostile inhabitants . . . collided  
with imaginary rivals for the use of the main road  
and biffed them out of the way. (140)

With this large element of imagination it is not surprising that 'Guy found that he had an aptitude for this sort of warfare'. Imaginary warfare, we know, is Guy's forte and it is to his relief, that the

brigadier's energies burst among the staid and unromantic processes of training which are deadening the narrative. Ritchie-Hook's first yarn features all his own iconoclastic delight -

'I fixed up a flare-path right across rhino's drinking place, with a line of fuses, and touched it off right under his nose. I never saw a rhino move faster, smack through the camp lines.' (68-69)

Men at Arms is a novel the lines of which are repeatedly broken in this fashion, disrupted by the stampeding animals. The yarn contrasts with Guy's own typically unsensational bagging of 'an old lion . . . who wandered into the farm'; Ritchie-Hook's seizure of his imagination is subsequently signalled in the idea of Guy 'gorged like a lion on Ritchie-Hook's kill' (119). The rhino story is told at their first meeting, which yields further indications of the brigadier's distracting influence in the novel.

They went into luncheon. Two Halberdiers waited at table. Mrs. Green carved. Ritchie-Hook grasped his fork in his gloved fingers, impaled his meat, cut it rapidly into squares, laid down his knife, changed hands with the fork and ate fast and silently, plunging the pieces into horse-radish sauce and throwing them back to his molars. Then he began to talk . . . (69)

The formal and leisurely air of Sunday luncheon, enacted in the relaxed pace of the first three sentences, is disturbed by the incisive presence in the text of the brigadier. His sentence is long, piling up brief clauses, and his verbs hard and active - 'grasped', 'impaled', 'plunging', 'throwing'. When he leads Guy and Sarum-Smith in an after-dinner 'stretch' he employs 'a fast irregular lope, with which it was impossible to keep in step'. Ritchie-Hook is consistently out of step with this novel, entering it periodically to disturb and invigorate. His excursive influence is pictured in miniature here, as he takes the two officers on

a fast circular trip, a loop in the narrative line -

He led them to the railway beside which, separated from it by a fence of black, corrugated iron, ran a cinder path . . . Soon they came to an iron foot-bridge. On the farther side of the line was a similar cinder track, bounded by corrugated iron. They turned along it towards home. (72-73)

The looping walk is a digression emblematic of those into which Guy is drawn in Men at Arms by his fascinated attendance upon figures such as the brigadier. Pleased at having cut a minute off his usual time for this circuit, Ritchie-Hook roars away on his motor-cycle; the effect of speed is immediately played against Apthorpe's declaration that he is 'Going slow today . . . I've got to go slow', further establishing their competition. Like Apthorpe, the brigadier perverts the relation between church and military from which Guy draws his fallacious crusading faith; he consoles a dying man with imaginary football results, rather than the attentions of a chaplain. The latter's assurances, it is implied, are as baseless as the invented scores. A last detail from the luncheon episode confirms Ritchie-Hook as co-habitant of Apthorpe's 'dreamlike universe'. The tough, battered and aging brigadier is charmed by

a calendar on the chimney piece, rather shabby now in November and coming to the end of its usefulness. Its design was fanciful, gnomes, toadstools, hare-bells, pink bare babies and dragonflies. 'I say,' he said, 'That's a lovely thing. My word it is lovely. Isn't it lovely?' (71)

The parallels here are unmistakable, and underline the brigadier's fantastical lineage. One recalls the 'faery gold' of Apthorpe's commerce, and places the same question-mark against Ritchie-Hook's status as a realistic character.

Ritchie-Hook and Apthorpe, then, are identifiably supernatural - a

realistic war-novel struggles to contain them. There is something of the same resonance in other figures in the novel. Trimmer plays a small part in Men at Arms, but his subsequent magnification into a gross and unreal 'hero' is anticipated here. The early days of training are traced with exhaustive precision in reference to time, enacting the purposive structure Guy desires for the redefinition of his life - thus the first section of Book One includes 'before lunch . . . an hour and a half . . . twelve-thirty-five . . . a few minutes after one . . . half a minute in hand . . . at four . . . at six-thirty.' This timetable is disrupted by Trimmer's lateness on parade, and by the symbolic disorder of his uniform

Instead of buttoning his great-coat across the chest and clipping it tight at the throat, he had left it open . . . He had let one side-strap down at the back, the other in front with monstrous effect. (48)

Exact drill has become a substitute litany for Guy; Trimmer's infraction is a kind of blasphemy. Our suspicion that he will come to be another monster is heightened by the subsequent remark, 'While we wait for Mr. Trimmer, we'll just run through a little Corps history.'. Such history is usually confined to the interstices of Men at Arms, while one waits for the monsters to return. There is something supernatural, too, in the duplication of characters in Men at Arms. When joined by the Depot officers

It was as though in their advance the Barrack batch had turned a corner and suddenly been brought up sharp by a looking-glass in which they found themselves reflected. (93)

One effect of this exact parallel is to further impair the forward movement of the narrative; these are not fresh characters, but the same ones over

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1 Even before this Trimmer is duplicated; he is sometimes seen 'with a poor reflection of himself . . . Sarum-Smith.' (46)

again. 'They had their Trimmer . . . they had their Sarum-Smith . . . they even had their 'uncles''. The new relations are all negative; 'There was nothing obnoxious . . . There were no grounds . . . There was no enmity . . . there was little friendship.' The effect on the regimental order Guy relishes is adverse - 'They were diminished and caricatured by duplication, and the whole heirarchic structure of army life was affronted'. Here is the doppelgänger motif in extension, the real growth of a narrative larger than simply Guy's own balked and held back. Fittingly, these early experiences at the school take place in freezing weather, with everything 'hard and numb . . . The laurels round Kut-al-Imara were sheathed in ice, the drive rutted in crisp snow ' (113-114). The thaw begins only with the intervention of the brigadier, when the army story begins to move again. Another small but strange evasion of the simply realistic can be found in Major Erskine, who, like Trimmer, has trouble with his uniform -

His uniform was correct and clean but it never seemed to fit him . . . the major seemed to change shape from time to time during the day. (171)

Erskine as Proteus has a mythical quality more evident in Apthorpe and Ritchie-Hook; inevitably, 'he and Guy got on well together.'

Men at Arms ends with the Dakar fiasco, and the death of Apthorpe. Each of these episodes contributes to the central theme Stopp has identified, of Apthorpe's replacement in Guy's allegiance by the brigadier. The raid is ostensibly something of the real war entering the narrative, Guy at last on active service. However, several indicators undermine this apparent earnestness, by associating the episode with some of the novel's earlier and fantastic moments. The plan for the raid is hatched in the room labelled 'OUT OF BOUNDS TO ALL RANKS'; as Ritchie-Hook's accomplice Guy

gains entry here. When Apthorpe's, neither had gained entry to the shed at Kut-al-Imara labelled 'Out of Bounds to all ranks below Brigadier'. The nocturnal fooleries of that campaign anticipated those of the present; then as now Guy was sufficiently detached to reflect on 'the mot juste' (155/224). He explicitly relates his part here to his childhood tales, naming it 'Operation Truslove'. Even his superiors conceive of the plan in childlike terms, 'all looking gleeful and curiously naughty . . . 'We are going to have a little bit of very unofficial fun' (222) while later the wounded brigadier will be 'tenderly drawn up' in 'a kind of cradle'. The flavour of the episode is compounded of such references and parallels as these, placing it as another fanciful and fantastical adventure; Tickeridge 'can't think what possessed us last night' (230). The same air of enchanted lunacy hangs about the raid as pervaded the campaigns of 'Apthorpe Furibundus'. At his moment of peril Guy thinks 'what a preposterous way in which to get oneself killed!' The adjective is one more properly belonging to Apthorpe,<sup>1</sup> and also recalls Cedric Lyne's similar sentiment in Put Out More Flags as he goes into action in a spirit of cenobitic detachment.<sup>2</sup>

If the strict reality of the Dakar episode is hedged in this way, the death of Apthorpe is presented in a manner that still further conditions its literal reception. It is framed by a plethora of references to literary models and parallels, the most emphatic Guy's reflections on Greene's 'The Heart of the Matter'. That fiction becomes mingled with the 'fact' of the present narrative; the text puts 'Scobie' in inverted commas, but Father Rank escapes them (232-235). Guy's commitment to illusory ideals is neatly traced in this; 'later a few printed pages

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1 Viz. John Raymond, 'The preposterous Apthorpe and his more preposterous thunder-box.', New Statesman review, 20.9.52.

2 Page 124 below.

would create, not recall, the scene for him and make it forever memorable' but for now Guy is 'noticing nothing'. It is really he that lives in a 'dreamlike universe', and as the primary occupant of that sphere Apthorpe 'dies' in specifically literary and non-realistic terms. He had arrived at the port from up-country 'slung in a sheeted hammock between two bearers, looking like a Victorian woodcut from a book of exploration' (234). The camp has already been described as organized 'in neat lines on a stretch of sandy plain', recalling the earlier reference to 'the dressed lines which had given Penkirk the airs . . . of a Victorian colour-print' (213). At Apthorpe's funeral, Sarum-Smith, though 'genuinely moved', can only remark

'It was like the burial of Sir John Moore at Corunna.'  
'Sure you don't mean the Duke of Wellington at St.  
Paul's?' said de Souza. (245)

In each case the human immediacy of the occasion is surrendered. Apthorpe's illness can itself only recall the earlier comedy of his 'Bechuana tummy' and the 'old campaigner' stories. That earlier indisposition had been treated with medicine from a chest which seemed to Guy 'to contain only bottles labelled Poison'. Now Guy treats real Bechuana tummy with real poison, but the ironies are never other than comic. The last interview between the pair is one of the funniest in the book - Apthorpe is a joke to the last.

That he has been Guy's own creation, and that his death is correspondingly artificial, is constantly stressed. On Guy's arrival at the hospital

He found Apthorpe alone in his room, in a bed near the window. When Guy entered he was lying doing nothing, staring at the sun-blind with his hands empty on the counterpane. He immediately began to fill and light a pipe. (235)

Apthorpe comes to life only at Guy's arrival, a puppet taken up for a last performance. His feet, as ever, must play their large part, but now they are 'bereft of their porpoises, peeling with fever'. This is truly the wearing down of which Apthorpe complains, the devaluation of the motifs that have been his means of purchase upon the narrative. Guy

tried to interest Apthorpe in the new brigadier and in his own obscure position, but Apthorpe said fretfully :  
'Yes, yes, yes, yes. It's all another world to me, old man.' (236)

- as of course it always has been, Apthorpe's separate existence only more marked as he drifts out of the novel. His face, that has been so many things, is now 'colourless'. He tells Guy the truth about his aunt at Peterborough; she 'was an invention'. Apthorpe puts to death the invented aunt in an exact parallel and anticipation of Guy's putting to death of Apthorpe himself, similarly an invented figure: 'I suppose you might call it a little joke . . . It was a good joke, wasn't it?'. Apthorpe too has been a good joke, and in another literary reference he giggles 'at his cleverness like Mr. Toad in The Wind in the Willows' (237). This admission about the aunt is neatly juxtaposed with the 'real' death of Leonard in London; only the former has any importance for Apthorpe. His aunts, like his porpoises, have been an important part of his myth, which is further diminished by his confession. These motifs, however, will pursue him to the grave, forestalling any solemnity. Even the trauma of Guy's reprimand is leavened by the officer's comment that Apthorpe 'had two aunts who think the world of him' (242). The matter of a gravestone is left to 'his relations in England . . . High Church. They'd probably want something fancy' (245). Similarly, Dunn continues in his concern for the signaller's boot throughout the episode; as Apthorpe's mentor, Guy pays his debt. It is very difficult to imagine how Ronald Knox could find 'an



almost intolerable pathos' in Apthorpe's death.<sup>1</sup> His burial in 'The White Man's Grave' recalls too much of the 'old campaigner' and 'Apthorpe Country' silliness to be anything but comic itself.

Guy's own reaction to the event is the final proof of Apthorpe's intangibility. He realizes that his present 'sense of disaster . . . would pass and leave no mark,' and decides

It had been the heat . . . all the false emotions of the past twenty-four hours. In England . . . among the falling bombs, fire-gutted, shattered, where the bodies were nightly dragged half-clothed . . . from the rubble and glass splinters, - things would look very different . . . (244)

Apthorpe belonged to the sphere of 'false emotions', product of a fevered imagination; the true reality is that of a bombed London, one of the 'dreadful subjects' Christopher Sykes was looking for in Men at Arms. This is a direct statement of the opposition enacted by the whole of the novel, between the mythical creations of Guy's imagination and the reality consistently obscured, displaced by these fabulations. Guy flies off with Ritchie-Hook, of whom we have seen enough to suspect that, in his company, things might not after all seem very different in England. The novel closes but the same speculation that had dogged any definite movement continues -

Some said they were to spend the rest of the war here . . . others said they were bound for Libya, round the Cape; others that they were to forestall the German occupation of the Azores. (232)

Such positives as are left in the novel at its close are present in the figure of Ritchie-Hook. Guy's departure with him is the guarantee that

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1 'The Reader Suspended', Month, N.S. VIII (1952), 236-238.

Guy's own story will continue, and continue to be only obliquely attached to that of the war.

Gabriel Josipovici has written that 'The need for shape, for plot, for a forward movement of some kind, seems to be inseparable from the act of writing.'<sup>1</sup> That Men at Arms somehow fails to meet these needs has been the essential complaint of several critics, perhaps summarised in Sykes's description of the novel as 'pedestrian'.<sup>2</sup> My purpose in this paper has been to suggest that these disappointed readers have been looking for these staples of narrative in the wrong places. Such shape as Men at Arms has is that determined by recurrent emblems and motifs - Apthorpe's feet and High Church aunts, species of booby-trap, poison, the brigadier's glaring and single eye. The novel has not one but several plots, each titled neatly for our consumption and Guy's; 'the tense personal drama', 'the saga of the chemical closet', 'Operation Truslove' and the others. Even details and lesser movements are named, ruled off; 'the hulks' (206), 'the refugee ship' (220), 'when the brigade forms' (160). Men at Arms is a considerable technical achievement, manipulating an opposition between different narratives in order to enact the various responses to the experience of being at war. The story of which Guy Crouchback would be hero, featuring himself as new crusader, purged of sin in his re-dedication to state and perhaps faith, is subverted by the incursions of the fabulous, consistently parodying his beliefs, enacting them at their most literal, corrupting the materials that would have underpinned such a story. The

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1 The Modern English Novel, ed. G. Josipovici, 1976, p. 260.

2 Op. Cit., p. 553.

manner in which, for instance, the relation between church and military is perverted after its initial purity in the person of Sir Roger of Waybrooke, could bear extensive exploration. The critic A. J. Neame finds it 'a grave defect in the novelist's method' that the reader 'should be in doubt for a moment either way on anything so fundamental to the meaning of the book' as a value of Roman Catholicism.<sup>1</sup> Yet once the subversive trend of the narrative is recognised, this ambiguity is perceived to be a deliberate effect. Guy himself applies his Catholicism only incoherently, usually more entranced by other kinds of magic.

The purpose behind the novel's subversions is of course to dramatise the manner in which Guy's dangerously romantic vision adumbrates the true nature of modern warfare. The novel's evasions are as 'incidental' as Guy's romanticism, each being fanciful alternatives to less wholesome experiences. Men at Arms is a novel he himself writes - its absurdities, its caricatures and inflations are all inventions of his own. The truths of mass warfare for the individual are incoherence, disorganization, delay, boredom and futility - the story Guy is not prepared for. His novel overcomes these with technicolour and high adventure. John Lynde regrets that 'the factual accounts on which (Waugh) drew were unsuccessful in restraining the fictional elements'<sup>2</sup>, but this is to credit Waugh with little ingenuity, and to discount Stopp's perceptive remark that 'all Mr. Waugh's fantasies have a close bearing on the inner workings of his plots.'<sup>3</sup> The complaints variously voiced of a confusion in genres and of misproportion should be laid not at Waugh's door but at Guy's; it is he

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1 'Black and Blue; a study in the Catholic novel', The European, I (1953), 26-36.

2 Op. Cit., p. 14.

3 Op. Cit., p. 167.

who transmutes the experience of war into personal and idiosyncratic modes. Men at Arms is closer to Mrs. Dale's Diary than to War and Peace. John Raymond, reviewing the novel in 1952, likened Guy's evening with Virginia to 'a scene from some shabby and tasteless bedroom farce'.<sup>1</sup> Stopp has already shown that this is essentially the sort of scene it is meant to be, and the many similar complaints can be similarly answered. When Neame writes that 'battles are won by the brave and the strong who challenge the barbarian face to face with the weapons of moral power'<sup>2</sup> he is simply restating the ideal to which Guy himself trusts at the beginning of the trilogy, and in which he is to be so disappointed.

I have considered at length critical reactions to Men at Arms not to demonstrate their inadequacy; with the exception of the surprising remark last noted, the comments have all been accurate descriptions of the novel. Perplexity arises because what is seen is not what is expected, or thought appropriate. John Raymond again -

As a novel Men at Arms is not nearly as good as Put Out More Flags. As a 'novel of military life' it is uproariously and unflaggingly funny.'

The distinctions here are baffling, and indicate the sort of pigeon-holing that will always devalue novels of the kind Waugh consistently wrote. Comparison with Put Out More Flags is interesting, and very largely to that work's disadvantage, whether one views it as a 'novel' or a 'novel of military life'. The untransformed nature of much of the material of the earlier work is especially apparent when read alongside Men at Arms; jokes and ironies recur, but this time held within a secure and developing context. One is never really aware of Basil Seal as personally involved -

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1 New Statesman, 20.9.52.

2 Op. Cit., p. 36.

that for example he is not a young man; the irony of the army only taking older volunteers later on is better expressed by Guy, of whose immediate personal circumstances one is always more conscious. The privilege and ritual of the Halberdier guest-night dinner are an eloquent context in which to evoke the prison-trains in Poland, 'rolling east and west with their doomed loads' (76). The same phrase in Put Out More Flags lacks such a relation, is only one more event.<sup>1</sup> There are strong claims to be made, moreover, for Men at Arms being the funnier of the two books; all in all it is a novel which commentators, and in particular Waugh's biographer Christopher Sykes, have badly underestimated.

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<sup>1</sup> Put Out More Flags, (1942), 1982, p. 74.

## OFFICERS AND GENTLEMEN

In Men at Arms an opposition is enacted between Guy Crouchback's romanticized personal war, and the prosaic, less patterned experiences which the reader is encouraged to accept as reality. For the most part, the 'real' war exists on the fringes of that novel, occasionally intruding but generally unapprehended by Guy; the closing debacle induces in him a numbed 'sense of disaster' but no larger enlightenment.<sup>1</sup> Although some of his simpler ideals have been shaken in Men at Arms, the true nature of modern warfare is still unperceived. Officers and Gentlemen exposes it as something worse than merely boredom and incoherence, but the movement from the first volume to the second is not simply this. A. W. Friedman has described the complete trilogy as cyclical, the narrative drawing away from its initial association with Guy to consider 'radically contrasting perspectives', before returning to confirm the centrality of the hero's values. Officers and Gentlemen, he argues, gives an experience of the forces arrayed against Guy, independent for the first time of his coloured perceptions.<sup>2</sup> W. J. Cook, largely supporting this view of the second volume, finds a narrator who operates with a new independence of the hero.<sup>3</sup> The point can be overstated; the narrative freedom in Officers and Gentlemen is in fact very slight, and closely limited to the action set on Crete. Even there, the type of independence enjoyed is highly conditioned by the special nature of the earlier identification.

This relationship is very active in the opening of the novel -

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1 Men at Arms (1952), 1973, p. 242.

2 Multivalence, Louisiana S.U.P., 1978, p. 101.

3 Masks, modes and morals: The Art of Evelyn Waugh, New Jersey, 1971.

The sky over London was glorious, ochre and madder, as though a dozen tropic suns were simultaneously setting round the horizon; everywhere the searchlights clustered and hovered, then swept apart; here and there pitchy clouds drifted and billowed; now and then a huge flash momentarily froze the serene fireside glow. Everywhere the shells sparkled like Christmas baubles. 'Pure Turner,' said Guy Crouchback, enthusiastically; he came fresh to these delights. 'John Martin, surely?' said Ian Kilbannock. 'No,' said Guy firmly. He would not accept correction on matters of art from this former sporting-journalist. 'Not Martin. The sky-line is too low. The scale is less than Babylonian.' (9)<sup>1</sup>

Any idea that Guy may, with the dissolution of Apthorpeian fantasy, have become more clear-sighted is quickly overturned. His first words interpret the 'Blitz' - the real war at last - in purely artistic terms, as colour, scale and composition. His response is understandable; the narrative itself is recomposing the scene and baffling the reader's projected idea of an air-raid. Ochre and madder are palette shades, their combination only aesthetically 'glorious'. The similes pull away from London and warfare, to 'a dozen tropic suns', to 'Christmas baubles', to the comfort of a 'serene fireside'. The narrator is detached, imaginative; it is his delight, and Guy's enthusiasm, that impresses the reader - one feels this is not the blitz which killed Leonard, in Men at Arms. As the section continues, this revaluing of experience is maintained. Turtle's club burns 'briskly' - efficiently? cheerfully? - and the building facades are 'caricatured; the anti-aircraft guns are merely 'banging away in the neighbouring parks', the fire-fighters 'squirting a little jet of water into the morning-room'. It is an interesting exercise to rewrite these passages in the hard and realistic manner usually associated with such descriptions; the nature of Waugh's transpositions is made very clear. The reorganizing fancy we know Guy to possess is being extended to narrative proper. His exchange with Kilbannock very strongly recalls that between Sarum-Smith and de Souza over Apthorpe's grave, investing

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<sup>1</sup> Officers and Gentlemen (1955), 1973.

the bombing raid with some of that character's ephemerality.

This first brief section introduces the basic technique of Officers and Gentlemen. The action conforms to the idea of experience being re-interpreted in artistic terms. The conversation at Bellamy's is divided between three subjects. Guy gives an account of his Dakar experience; the matter of Men at Arms' ostensibly most earnest episode is recognised as simply 'a good story . . . his good story'. The election of Air Marshal Beech is deplored, having occurred 'during what the papers call "the Battle of Britain"'. Like the blitz proceeding outside, each of these two actions has been rendered into performance, good copy, good stories, glorious compositions. The third topic of conversation, and because untrue more literally a fiction, is Job's tale of the gutters running with wine. This is the most persistent of the three stories, its specious vitality further defining the other two as only rival tales. In the implicit relation of these stories the reader is being progressively denied the security of something to believe in. He may feel that the Battle of Britain really did occur, but the newspaperman Kilbannock would put it in inverted commas; he has read in Men at Arms of the Dakar adventure, which 'really happened' only within the confines of that fiction; he repeatedly encounters the gutters of wine, existing only in Job's own storytelling, but persistently distracting the present characters. The reader is encouraged to discard the newspaper's and Job's stories, and to surrender with Guy the 'reality' of Dakar. He will continue to believe in the present text, attributing the detached opening to Guy's colouring mind, but before this first section is finished, that security too has begun to be eroded.



As in a stage farce Ian Kilbannock's head emerged cautiously from the wash-room, where he had taken refuge from his chief. He withdrew hastily but too late. (14)

'Stage farce' belongs to the category of references to art forms and modes noted in Men at Arms - pantomime, masquerade, high drama - and greatly elaborated in this novel. Officers and Gentlemen is a novel acutely conscious of the possible modes of expression, and peopled by characters who exploit a similar awareness themselves. Prime amongst these is Kilbannock; it is ironic that the novel's first use of the pregnant phrase 'in the picture' should be in the shape of a rebuke to him here. Both 'stage farce' and 'in the picture' in this exchange announce and precipitate the small isolated performance with which the first chapter ends.

. . . at that moment there appeared from the outer hall the figure of Job, strangely illuminated. In some strictly private mood of his high drama Job had possessed himself of one of the six-branched silver candelabra from the dining-room; this he bore aloft, rigid but out of the straight so that six little dribbles of wax bespattered his livery. All in the back-hall fell silent and watched fascinated as this fantastic figure advanced upon the Air Marshal. A pace distant he bowed; wax splashed on the carpet before him.

'Sir,' he announced sonorously, 'your carriage awaits you.' Then he turned, and, moving with the confidence of a sleep-walker, retreated whence he had come. (15)

This, of course, is the 'stage farce'. Job has earlier been noted 'acting - grossly over-acting - the part of a stage butler' (10). Now we have his 'high drama', a small theatrical performance with all necessaries - exotic lighting, a 'fantastic figure', the classic lines. Since the last piece of extended narrative reporting - the blitz - there has been only dialogue; now again the text is transposing events into artistic patterns, presenting a comic tableau before an audience that is first the reader, but

also the other characters -

. . . The silence endured for a moment. Then: 'Really,' began the Air Marshal, 'that man -' but his voice was lost in the laughter . . .  
'Good old Job.'  
'One of his very best.'  
'Thank heaven I stayed on long enough to see that.'  
'What would Bellamy's be without him?' (15)

Job's little turn earns their applause, as connoisseurs of the art. The references to his 'fantastic' aspect, to his moving with the 'confidence of a sleep-walker', and the general enjoyment of his 'joke' recall Apthorpe and his 'dreamlike universe',<sup>1</sup> and confirm the histrionic nature of the incident. Even in his normal position, Job is on exhibition, 'hemmed in with plate glass' (10). With the end of the act comes the end of the chapter, emphatically closed by the lonely departure of Air Marshal Beech, who alone had not seen the joke. The reader is taken out of the club with Beech, an unsympathetic character, as if to further underline the end of the show; 'the doors, which . . . closed behind Air Marshal Beech' close as the falling of the curtain.

This small farce is only the first of several set-pieces in Officers and Gentlemen, episodes in the mode of both tableaux and light drama; this first chapter introduces a characteristic shaping of experience. Set in a club, it features a clubbish insularity, a tightly bound focus of attention. The members form a homogenous group, their conversation presented without attributions. They hope to be free of Turtle's members, and resent Beech, an obvious outsider. The club is both a refuge from the blitz and an alternative to it; the bridge players continue uninterrupted in the hallway. Beech leaves the club, but then 'sank into his motor-car' and moved on to another security; ''Home', he ordered. 'I think we can

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1 Men at Arms (1952), 1973, p. 107.

just make it''. These private bolt-holes define the shape of Officers and Gentlemen; other clubs and focuses form at Matchet ('Novels and knitting were left to mark the squatters' rights when they ventured out into the mist.' (22)), on Mugg, at Cape Town, at Mrs. Stitch's home, at the barracks, on Trimmer's 'island', in the Glasgow hotel, and ultimately - but ironically - on Crete. The novel is shaped by the islands it describes, by the isolated dramatic 'performances', the tableaux, and the stylized, self-conscious narrative voice - all extensions into form and language of the same shaping principle, noticed above in my discussion of Helena. In Men at Arms, Guy's idealized vision of the war predisposed him to recognize in experience the classic patterns and models of boyhood fiction. In Officers and Gentlemen the impulse is extended, despite the narrative's superficial freedom of Guy's interference. In 'Happy Warriors' Guy contributes an average of only two seven-word speeches per page, and there is now far less reporting of his private musings, of the 'Was this the spirit of Dunkirk . . .?' variety, yet despite this the narrative is contaminated by the manner of Guy's perceptions -

So Guy set out on the second stage of his pilgrimage, which had begun at the tomb of Sir Roger. Now, as then, an act of pietas was required of him; a spirit was to be placated. Apthorpe's gear must be retrieved and delivered before Guy was free to follow his fortunes in the King's service. His road lay backward for the next few days, to Southsand and Cornwall. 'Chatty' Corner, man of the trees, must be found, somewhere in the trackless forests of wartime England. (21)

One's enduring impression of this novel is of melodramatic, story-shaped phrasing such as this. The tale so far is recapitulated, its next steps projected. The cadences are those of Thackeray - 'before Guy was free to follow his fortunes in the King's service' - and the images exotic, Chatty as 'man of the trees', England a place of 'trackless forests'. There is a self-consciousness in all this which amounts to self-parody, on

Waugh's part, of his tale and its telling. The 'act of pietas' itself, as Stopp has noted, burlesques Guy's larger quest.<sup>1</sup> Such passages celebrate Guy's pattern-making instincts, though seemingly independent of his control; later in the novel scenes free of even his presence will be as coloured as this. 'Happy Warriors' is thoroughly pervaded by Guy's facility for gestalt formation, described by Philip Stevick as

the impulse to shape materials into intelligible and satisfying forms. In both the perception of experience and the response to art, one seeks to enclose, to perform the act which, at its simplest, is that basic gestalt formation by which an observer sees three dots and perceives the possibility that they may become corners of a triangle.<sup>2</sup>

The notion of Guy as writer, mooted in my description of aspects of Men at Arms, is even more persuasive in 'Happy Warriors'. It is Guy's impulse to enclose that dictates the island-structure of this book; the same impulse identifies the 'second stage of his pilgrimage', composes the blitz for Guy's delight, and places Job both behind plate glass and into his stage butler role.

The consequences of such an unreliable text are clearly manifold, but at this point it is useful to examine first further examples of the enclosing impulse. This novel has two beginnings; the second, with its fanfare description of Mugg, is instituted by Guy's joining of a new club, the commandos. Between the two he languishes after the manner of Men at Arms, using his suitcase as a 'defence' on the train (16), taking a taxi alone, being out of step with Standing Orders for gas-drill (17). His sense of displacement is as strong as ever; when he announces his name and unit the adjutant merely says 'Nonsense . . .', as if disputing his very

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1 Evelyn Waugh: Portrait of an Artist, 1958, p. 169.

2 The Chapter in Fiction, New York, 1970, p. 9-10.

identity. Guy drifts; the 'energizing wire between him and the army was cut' (40). His reintegration is however assured, for 'even at that moment, in the fullness of his time, 'Jumbo' Trotter was on the move to draw him back into the life of action' (41). Again there is a note of parody, of gross patterning. Jumbo is only sporadically awarded inverted commas. W. J. Cook has commented on the more obvious external manipulation of the material in this novel, and has pointed particularly to the ironic juxtapositions and less smooth connections between sections.<sup>1</sup> There is a tendency to work for exaggerated parallels, especially in timing; 'even at that moment' is one such, but elsewhere occur several prominent 'meanwhile's, including a particularly strained usage at the opening of chapter four - 'MEANWHILE the talk in Bellamy's had drifted irresistably upward'. The status of this 'meanwhile' is suspect; the two preceding chapters have not taken place at Bellamy's, and in the event neither does this one. The second sentence of this chapter pushes backwards fourteen pages, to Guy's arrival at the barracks - 'That very morning' implies a simultaneity which the reader can hardly appreciate, having been lately reading the slow-paced account of Mr. Crouchback's evening.

That very morning in a deep bed in a deep shelter a buoyant busy personage had lain, apportioning the day's work of an embattled Empire in a series of minutes. (30)

No part of the new chapter actually takes place during this same evening, as the 'Meanwhile . . .' had suggested - the action in fact moves quickly forward, twenty-four hours to the issuing of the P.M.'s ukase, and then on to its effect 'at length'. The first six lines, moreover, deliver a clutch of seeming time-references awkwardly distributed about the prefatory 'meanwhile' - 'That very morning . . . the day's work . . .

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<sup>1</sup> Op. Cit., p. 283.

a series of minutes . . . today . . . twenty-four hours later . . . almost to the minute . . .'. The timing, then, is needlessly obtuse, the mention of Bellamy's a red herring. A carefully precise writer, Waugh has chosen here to foreground a contortion in his narrative structure which plays a part in the novel's dissection of gestalt techniques.

The novel's third narrative focus is its first actual island, as Guy arrives at Mugg. The celebrated introduction of this isle opens chapter six; Guy and Jumbo simply arrive, isolating the new venue, the previous chapter having left them 'thirty miles north' of London (46). The description displays a fine rhetorical balance, especially in the reducing rhythms of the last three sentences -

. . . on certain rare occasions Mugg has been descried from the island of Rum in the form of two cones. The crofters of Muck know it as a single misty lump on their horizon. It has never been seen from Eigg. (47)

Relishing the 'absurdity' that had discouraged the Victorian ladies from rhyme, Waugh's narrative now ensures the island's 'fame in song' - such rhythms constitute precisely the prodigal enrichment formerly lacking. The whole has the self-conscious polish of a rhetorical set-piece, and as 'performance' belongs with other bravura passages, including that noted, beginning 'So Guy set out . . .'. Tommy Blackhouse's dictum, that in a long war 'The great thing is to spend it among friends' (47), has made of the commando base on Mugg another club. Guy first experiences this gathering as the observer of another staged comedy; he stands outside the action, which is nevertheless shaped and coloured by a habit of mind which seeks to impose the gestalt, and which, I am arguing, enacts Guy's own

disposition. The section opens with two vivid tableaux -

At three o'clock he found (the hotel) empty except for a Captain of the Blues who reclined upon a sofa, his head enveloped in a turban of lint, his feet shod in narrow velvet slippers embroidered in gold thread with his monogram. He was nursing a white pekinese; beside him stood a glass of white liqueur. The sofa was upholstered in Turkey carpet. The table which held the glass and bottle was octagonal, inlaid with mother-of-pearl. The pictorial effect was of a young prince of the Near East in his grand divan in the early years of the century. He did not look up on Guy's entry. (48)

The passage foregrounds the inanimate objects that both frame and inform the figure - the sofa, turban, slippers and table. On the table a glass and bottle form a still-life. The image is 'upholstered . . . inlaid', the man himself secondary, wholly expressed by the capitalized title, 'a Captain of the Blues'. His failure to look up underscores the rigid 'pictorial effect'. Guy's own memory of Claire takes the shape of a second tableau, 'Claire leaning slightly forward in the saddle with the intent face of a pianist, the horse precisely placing his feet in the tan, leaping easily, without scuffle or hesitation . . .'. Later in the novel the same image recurs to Guy; Claire attracts him, as J. W. Nicholls has described,<sup>1</sup> as a species of ideal, 'the very model of a foppish English gentleman . . . he recalls the whole tradition embodied in a hundred light novels', and it is therefore as a model, an icon, that we first encounter Claire. The second tableau concludes in a manner designed to recall to the reader that earlier tableau at the London club. Guy remembers Claire

completing a swift, faultless round, in dead silence which broke at last into a tumult of appreciation. Guy knew him, too, as a member of Bellamy's. (48)

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<sup>1</sup> Insinuation: the tactics of English satire, Paris, 1971, p. 57.

The burst of applause is clearly more of that which greeted Job. The rest of this section now develops as a stage performance, of which Guy is the detached, slightly bemused observer; his dialogue with Claire is fractured and dreamlike, until 'as in an old-fashioned, well-constructed comedy, other characters began to enter Left . . .'. From this point light comedy dominates, the action confined to this single set; characters enter, exit and return, whilst offstage there are boats to be held, harbour-masters to be telephoned and mountains to be 'slid down fast'. None of these are very believable. The actors deliver comic lines, neatly worked for - 'Then he noticed Guy. 'Oh,' he said. 'Damn.' . . . saw Guy for the first time and like Bertie said: 'Damn!' - while Claire supplies sardonic and inconsequential asides. The different figures are assigned parts rather than being described, in the manner already noted of Claire. Thus we have 'a medical officer', the 'manageress', 'an enormous Grenadier Captain in the tradition of comedy', 'another gasping officer' and 'Tommy the commanding officer'. These men will come to be important symbols to Guy, as the 'Flower of the Nation' in whom he will perceive a 'heroic simplicity' (114). In all this he is sadly wrong, and it is fitting that these men should first appear in the context of play-acting. The last entrant on the stage is subtly different, not this time a figure wholly expressed by his uniform. Trimmer is someone palpably in disguise.

The final entry was a man in the kilt and uniform of a highland regiment. He carried a tall shepherd's staff and said in a voice that had more of the Great West Road in it than of the Pass of Glencoe, 'Sorry to hear about Angus.' (52)

This phrasing ensures the prominence of the 'man'; Trimmer is a protean figure in Officers and Gentlemen, even here both soldier and shepherd, the perfect lead in Kilbannock's official and cynically staged dramas. Unlike Guy, he does not believe in the roles he and others play, but the



price is a loss of humanity - addressed by Guy, 'The figure, bonnet, sporran, staff and all, swung round.'

'Happy Warriors' continues to be organized on the island principle. Further tableaux are presented, notably of Chatty Corner in his lair, and of the Laird and his wife in their castle. The first of these is a particularly staged episode, with the narrator pondering a likeness to 'a set by Gordon Craig for a play of Maeterlinck's' and Guy himself contributing a reflection on 'Child Roland' (55). The shaping of the experience is made explicit, as 'its climax found Guy so confounded between truth and fantasy that he was prepared, as he entered the room, to find a tableau for some ethnographic museum . . .' (56). The narrative proper, as ever, is not immune to this spirit of fantasy; when Chatty signs the receipt for Apthorpe's gear, 'the wind dropped. It was a holy moment. Guy rose in silence and ritually received the book' (59). Guy and Tommy's visit to the Laird's castle provides another enclosed and eccentric portrait, with Guy's sense of unreality growing even stronger.

He had had a hard day. He was numb and choked and under-nourished. An endless procession marched across his mind, Carmichaels, Campbells, Meiklejohns, Dundases, in columns of seven, some kilted and bonneted, others in the sober, durable garb of the Edinburgh professions, all dead. (64)

Once again Guy is the nearly silent onlooker, relishing 'a brief knock-about turn such as Scots often provide for their English guests, between the laird and his butler' (66), and like Tommy an entertained member of the audience.

Tommy and Guy did not exchange a word on the road home. Instead they laughed, silently at first, then loud and louder. Their driver later reported that he had never seen the Colonel like it, and as for the new Copper Heel, he was 'well away'. (67-68)

The location switches briefly away from the island of Mugg midway through 'Happy Warriors', as the reader is taken with Trimmer to Glasgow, on leave. The narrative remains tightly focused however; the station hotel provides another island amid the gloom of the blacked-out city. Stress is laid on the fog, and on the massive besieging crowds.

Full, Dickensian fog enveloped the city. Day and night the streets were full of slow-moving, lighted trams and lorries and hustling coughing people . . . The hotel was always crowded . . . Upstairs the yellow lights burned by day against the whitish-yellow lace which shut out half the yellow-brown obscurity beyond; by night against a frame of black. This was the scene in which Trimmer's idyll was laid. (79)

The idyll is no less Virginia's, as she escapes for a time from the 'faint corroding mist' about her (74);

just now in this shuttered fog-bound place, surrounded by strangers in the bright little room, surrounded by strangers in the blackness outside, miles of them, millions of them, all blind and deaf, not 'significant people' . . . now, briefly, Virginia was happy to relive to see again from the farther side of the looking-glass, the ordered airy life aboard the great liner. (78)

The darkness and fog references in these passages develop the line of imagery noted in Men at Arms, symbolic of the obscure, ambiguous war, and of Guy's stumbling search for a just purpose. In Officers and Gentlemen the old ambiguities, still unresolved, are held for the moment at arm's length, forming an encircling 'frame of black' within which Guy and others savour the tableaux projected about them. They are repeatedly imaged as surrounded by mists and darkness, from the 'pitchy clouds' in the night sky above Bellamy's, to the mists noted around Mrs. Cuthbert's hotel and the 'lightless hall' of Chatty's lair. At the New Castle the 'aged lady and gentleman emerged through the smoke' (60), whilst on Mugg 'the nights lengthened until they seemed continuous' and the rare sun only 'cast long

shadows across the snow' (84). The vivid scenes are enacted within these frames, in a prose style itself stylized and self-conscious. Virginia was seduced by a man who had 'looked her up, looked her over, taken her out, taken her in' (77); the officers at Jumbo's club are 'afame with red tabs, gold braid, medal ribbons, and undisguised hunger' (44); Chatty 'stared and sipped and sneezed' (56); Tommy's sea-sick batman is the 'grey ghost of a guardsman' (98).

With the conclusion of 'Happy Warriors' some of the glib security of this style, and the dominant shaping influence of the island begin to be lost. Crete is an island of quite another kind. Guy's education there is however delayed; Officers and Gentlemen, so much concerned with the patterns of the gestalt, itself conforms to a highly formal structure. With the first act over, there is now an 'Interlude', Guy and Claire discovered sitting at a bar in a blaze of unaccustomed light.

Light shone out into the dusk unscreened to join the headlamps of the cars, passing, turning and stopping on the gravel, and the bright shop windows in the streets beyond. (107)

The house-lights, as it were, are now on, and we have moved out of the theatre of war. Cape Town is an unexpected setting, a long way from Mugg and from the war, allowing Guy the pause for reflection he rarely had during the successive adventures on the island. He ponders Ludovic, 'man of mystery' (112) and thinks 'with deep affection' (114) of X Commando, as he lies awake in his bunk - a chapter ending reminiscent of Men at Arms, and further expressive of pause, rumination.

The second book of Officers and Gentlemen is entitled 'In the Picture', a phrase Stopp refers to as 'finely ironic' but does not discuss further.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Op. Cit., p. 173.

In a novel so intimately concerned with the idea of picture-making and performance, such a phrase is provocative. It is used on nine occasions within the text, one usage (the Air Marshal's) having already been noted. In this second book of the novel Guy is finally to go to war, an event long anticipated by both himself and the reader - the war-story at last. The irony Stopp notes is in how utterly Guy's expectations founder; his experience, despite occurring on an island, is chaotic, beyond the powers of his gestalt - there is no picture, no frame. The fog and mists are dispelled, the Mediterranean sun is bright, and Guy's ideals, unframed, are seen to be incoherent, dangerously inadequate. Before this happens, however, Ian Kilbannock's 'Operation Popgun' intercedes, to finally make manifest the corrupt and irrelevant artificiality of Guy's story-telling. 'Heroes are in strong demand' (101), not only from Guy himself, and Ian's job is to supply one. During this episode the stylized narrative and prominent framing structures are continued, to enact the bogus nature of the operation - 'In this green pasture Trimmer and his section for a time lay down' (133). The rhetoric joins with repetition, paradox and allusion to express the detached cleverness of the narrator, the air of a neat trick well managed that is appropriate to Ian's smooth and cynical competence.

When Virginia . . . confided that she was hard up and homeless - though still trailing clouds of former wealth and male subservience - Kerstie took her into Eaton Terrace - 'Darling, don't breathe to Brenda and Zita that you aren't paying' - and into her canteen - 'Not a word, darling, that you're being paid.' (134)

Trimmer, as the manipulated star of the show, is narrated in a manner correspondingly smart.

'Good evening, beautiful,' he said in his fine, free manner. 'How about a packet of Players from under the counter?' and then, seeing Virginia, he fell suddenly silent, out of it, not up to it, on this evening of all evenings.

Fine and free, nosy and knowing, Trimmer had seemed, but it was all a brave show, for that afternoon the tortoise of total war had at last overtaken him . . .

(134)

This is acutely self-conscious in its rhythmic alliteration, and the tasting and turning of idiom recalls earlier locutions, Guy setting out on his pilgrimage, Virginia's seduction, Trimmer himself tramping 'into the unknown' with Dr. Glendenning-Rees, 'with no kind word to speed him' (97). A patching together of cliché and colloquialism, and reworkings of the narrative's own expressions, are techniques prominent in Waugh's writing, but especially so here: Guy's imagination ensures an allusive, collated narrative.<sup>1</sup> The occasion of Trimmer's visit to Ian's flat gives opportunity for another tableau and stage-scene.

At half past six all were at home. The black-out was up; the fire lighted. The first sirens had not yet sounded. Brenda and Zita were in dressing-gowns. Zita's hair was in curling-pins and a towel. Brenda was painting Kerstie's toe-nails. Virginia was still in her room. Ian intruded on the scene. (137)

All the actors assembled, the ensuing passage is almost wholly dialogue, with entrances and exits indicated and a neutral 'said' replacing all more

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1 This novel includes allusions to Bosch, Maeterlinck, Wagner, Rupert Brooke, Forster, Shelley, Graves, to Roland, King Kong, Achilles, Ali Baba, Widow Twankey, Cleopatra, Noah, Philoctetes, Helen, Menelaus, Carroll's Alice.

expressive attributions.

The raid itself recalls and parodies Guy's adventure at Dakar, and anticipates the action on another island; it bears an implicit relation to the manufactured excitements of 'Happy Warriors'. Trimmer's island is at first lost in fog, until, miraculously, 'We're in luck. Everything is clear as day and here's your island straight ahead' (144). Ian, true to his role as author of this little adventure, is a source of literary allusion, to Noel Coward ('Very flat, Norfolk.') and Conan-Doyle ('my dear Watson . . .'), concluding with Cranmer's last words to Ridley. He confesses that the raid is not 'serious' to him and refuses to believe Trimmer could possibly be injured, assuring him the dog bark was an 'hallucination' (144-149). The 'real' account of the operation is that given in the 'official citation'; this is the story which the public will believe, printed here in smaller type, an alternative text and archetypal gestalt, and the stuff of Guy's dreams.

In the brief third chapter Waugh resurrects a well-tried technique, registering different responses to an event, here 'Operation Popgun'. Mr. Crouchback's gullibility, after evidence of his own exact honesty on the cricket field, further condemns Ian's chicanery, but also shows how precisely the public's demand and taste had been gauged. Unconsciously echoing Ian's own adjective, Mr. Crouchback declares McTavish a 'splendid young fellow' (151) and proceeds to tell the story afresh to Mrs. Tickeridge, elaborating and shaping it into a tale even more suggestive than Ian's -

'There was this young fellow curling women's hair on a liner, calling himself by a French name; odd trade for a highlander, you might think. There he was. No one suspected what he had in him. Might never had had the chance to show it. Then war comes along. He downs his scissors and without any fuss carries out one of the most daring exploits in military history . . . I expect he's a very shy sort of fellow. Brave men often are . . . Well, he's shown them.' (152)

This is comically inappropriate, but demonstrates the impulse to pattern shared by father and son; both believe the Allied cause guaranteed by men for whom Hitler has not bargained. For Guy the man is Claire, for his father the paste-board McTavish. The two are repeatedly linked in this way, anticipating Claire's final exposure. For the reader, Claire is located within a 'pictorial effect' of princeliness, for Guy in the fixed image of the Borghese Gardens. Trimmer is now awarded a parallel commemoration -

'Oh, Mr. Crouchback, I've been waiting to ask you. Would you mind if I cut something out of your newspaper when you've quite finished with it? . . . It's the photograph of Captain McTavish. I've got a little frame that will just take it.'  
'He deserves a frame,' said Mr. Crouchback. (152)

Much of the rest of Officers and Gentlemen is concerned with the military collapse on Crete. This is chiefly presented in terms of the personal breakdown of Brigade Major Hound, the type of all regimental officers, but is more generally expressed in various failures of organization and system. It is at this point that the general heading 'In the Picture' becomes demonstrably ironic; the disaster on Crete is precisely generated by the absence of any controlling vision, of any body with the ability to fit events into a coherent whole and then effectively intervene. The phrase occurs eight times in this episode, as different authorities plead to be given the means of intervention. Great play is made with initials, as falsely suggestive of some secure system of command -

Inside a storm lantern and maps lay on the table. Two men were asleep, sitting on chairs, their heads in their arms on the table. Major Hound saluted. One of the men raised his head.

'Yes?'

'Brigade Headquarters, Hookforce, reporting, sir, with orders from C-in-C ME.'

'What? Who? The face of the BGS was blank with weariness. 'The GOC is not to be disturbed . . .'

(171)

Instead of an efficient military post, manned by 'BGS', 'GSO 1' and 'GOC', there is merely three tired men, asleep on their maps. Maps, like initials, come to be only spurious organizing symbols - 'That', he said, pointing blindly into the contours behind Suda, 'is assembly point. Rendezvous there forthwith. That is brigade headquarters . . .'. Major Hound, Waugh's portrait of the hollow man and surely not merely the second Apthorpe Stopp suggests,<sup>1</sup> places the whole of his faith in the issuing of orders and the reciting of map references. These are 'the correct sounds' (172) - ''Anyway, they have been given. One can't do more''. Hound's collapse occurs when these fragile procedures, the 'staff solution', prove inadequate. An early, comic insight into the brittle nature of his persona was given while Hookforce was still in Egypt;

He leaped to his looking-glass, buckled himself up, pulled himself together, crowned himself with a sun helmet, armed himself with a cane and broke into a double . . . (132)

Hound is the sum of these soldierly parts, the man 'himself' buckled and pulled together, crowned and armed for imminent action. In him founders Guy's initial fond belief in the security of military form; the Halberdiers may retain their courage and discipline, but with no controlling authority genuinely 'in the picture', nothing can be achieved. The disaster on Crete, the narrative implies, occurs because there is at the root of the Allied

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<sup>1</sup> Op. Cit., p. 173.



effort no sense of a common moral purpose, no established belief or faith in an agreed cause; orders are issued without a sense of responsibility - 'Guy, do you think the unit commanders will turn up at my conference? . . . It's their own fault if they don't . . . you'd better take the truck and distribute orders personally . . . Here . . . and here, and here. Or somewhere . . .' (181) - and trust placed in tired, confused men masquerading in fine initials. There is no reward for simple bravery such as Guy's at Dakar; the medals go instead to Trimmer, the right kind of hero, politically acceptable and good copy. The collapse here is the larger enactment of Guy's personal failure to close with the realities of his experience. The stories substituted, the phantasms and diversions, have erected an attractive but false screen about him; the extension of that falseness into public life, in the manipulations of the image-makers, is the background to Crete, the explanation of the collapse described in Officers and Gentlemen. There is no stable foundation to the Allied enterprise - nor, by the extension Waugh always encourages, to modern society. Instead there is only Hound's frail dogmas, Kilbannock's heroes, Colonel Grace-Groundling-Marchpole's 'private, undefined Plan'.

Somewhere in the ultimate curlicues of his mind, there was a Plan. Given time, given enough confidential material, he would succeed in knitting the entire quarrelsome world into a single net of conspiracy . . . 'It all ties in,' he said gently, sweetly rejoicing at the underlying harmony of a world in which duller minds discerned mere chaos. (79-141)

As with maps, orders and initials, the idea of a plan expresses some of the failures on the island; 'Early in May Tommy Blackhouse, Major Hound and Guy drove out with a Brigadier from Area Command to inspect the sandy ridge between Lake Mariout and the sea where they were expected to hold Rommel's armour . . . 'What's to stop him coming round the other side?' asked Tommy. 'According to the plan - the Gypos,' said the Brigadier.

He laughed, Tommy laughed, they laughed all four' (156). The last sentence captures the sense of sardonic disillusion the officers feel - the phrasing is as artificial as the laughter itself.<sup>1</sup> More generally, the narrative style used to describe the Crete episode differs from that in which 'Happy Warriors' and 'Operation Popgun' were delivered. The division is not an abrupt or absolute one, but that of the later passages is far less confident or bouyant, enacting instead the fracture and incoherence that is central to these scenes.

The captain had given up his cabin to Tommy and Major Hound and the second-in-command of B Commando. Valises and bedrolls had been left in camp. The army officers arranged themselves on chairs and benches and floor in the wardroom. Soon they were all asleep. (160)

The elements of the narrative here are organized in a manner which generates friction and discomfort. In the opening sentence, the first 'and' is superfluous, while the failure to assign a name to 'the second-in-command of B Commando' makes necessary his cumbersome title, one which recurs. Interposed between the two groups of officers is the detail of the luggage, perversely awarded a sentence to itself while the objects of the others are clumsily piling up. Another needless 'and' occurs in the third sentence. A similar awkwardness characterises other passages; 'They ate six birds each and drank a bottle of champagne. Then they had green artichokes and another bottle' (163). Again the exercise of rewriting in a grammatically more neutral manner illustrates the nature of the deviation, here yielding perhaps the more confident narrative, 'They shared a dozen birds, a dish of artichokes, and drank two bottles of champagne'. Waugh's preferred

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1 Cf. 'That was the rabble of the previous night,' Guy thought; . . . 'I have withdrawn them from the action' (180). Only Ludovic, in the boat, carries out an un-ironic 'plan' (229).

construction subordinates syntactic shapeliness to a literal reflection of the order of their meal, as if that alone were secure. The effect is one of sparseness, of the nullity of events and objects in themselves. It is a technique common in Waugh's pre-war novels and it has been well described by Brian Wicker, who notes 'purposeless, disconnected inconsequentialities in the world of things, especially of objects . . . in the world of Waugh objects left to their own devices are meaningless'.<sup>1</sup> One has seen how objects have earlier been invested with an excess of meaning - Claire, as Guy perceived him, was generated wholly by those around him at Mugg. Here in Crete the map references, plans, initials and rankings come to be objects suddenly without meaning -

He and Guy and Major Hound and the B Commando second-in-command stumbled among the pits and loose cobbles to a hut marked 'SNO'. Guy laid his map-case on the table and turned his torch on it. (169)

Guy spends much of his time on Crete stumbling between one set of initials and the next, taking a dry relish in keeping his maps correctly marked. The narrative vision during these scenes closes down, restricted to what the character involved apprehends himself, enacting a fragmentation which contrasts with earlier expansive narrative pronouncements. That kind of confidence was available to a narrator involved in the generation of private mythology; it is inappropriate in this moment of dissolution. The experience of Crete reduces and strips away; we learn of the real Hound, the real Claire, more positively of the real Sarum-Smith, while Guy himself is 'to resign an immeasurable piece of his manhood' (221). The stripping away is foreshadowed in the commando's first contact with Crete, through the demoralized naval officer.

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<sup>1</sup> The Story-Shaped World, 1975, pp. 159-160.

Guy found the captain in his cabin with Major Hound and a haggard, unshaven, shuddering Lieutenant-Commander wearing a naval greatcoat and white shorts. 'I've got my orders to pull out and by God I'm pulling out,' the sailor was saying. 'I got my orders this morning. I ought to have gone last night. I've been waiting all day on the quay. I had to leave all my gear behind. I've only got what I stand up in.'  
(165)

The constantly reiterated first-person illustrates the effect of Crete on this officer, reducing him to an obsessive self-concern, a blind trust in orders. For the moment the captain can counter this with a collective responsibility; 'Yes . . . so we see. What we want to know is whether a lighter is coming out for us . . . we don't seem to get any acknowledgement to our signals'', but his 'we . . . us . . . our' is soon overcome by the sailor's reasserted first-person -

'I shouldn't think so. The whole place is a shambles. I'm pulling out. I got my orders to pull out. Got them in writing . . . I could do with a cup of tea.'  
(165)

The tide of events is anticipated now, as the captain himself is infected by the pronoun - 'Well . . . I wait here two hours. Then I sail.' During the course of this exchange, the narrator too is paring away. The 'Lieutenant Commander' becomes by stages 'the sailor' and 'the man from Crete', before he himself admits to having forgotten the code-word, and, by inference, his own name.

One of the central figures in this later section of the novel is located within this failure of co-ordination, and the consequent retreat to purely personal measures. Critics of Officers and Gentlemen are divided on Ludovic's place in Waugh's argument. Stopp regards him as 'a principle of vitality, a mythical figure of the life-force, the antithesis of the

trumped-up People's hero, Trimmer',<sup>1</sup> but for Malcolm Bradbury he represents just that 'spirit of the latter days of the War, when the common cause with the Russians has turned it into a People's War'.<sup>2</sup> Walter Allen, rather oddly, places Ludovic alongside Apthorpe, as a provider of 'splendid incidental comedy'.<sup>3</sup> Yet he surely embodies a more sinister principle; he is certainly no Trimmer, no champion of the common cause, but neither is the life-force he represents one of vitality. His is the spirit of deathly anarchy, the grim self-regard that brings him, alone, unscathed out of the 'island of disillusion'. In his ability to produce the appropriate idiom, his eye for the most advantageous line, he is able to exploit the chaos about him. In a narrative becoming less secure Ludovic's journal emerges as a source of keen analysis and comments - 'Captain Crouchback despises Major Hound but Colonel Blackhouse finds him useful' (156) - and his diagnosis of Guy's ideal is especially acute; 'Captain Crouchback,' Corporal-Major Ludovic noted, 'is pleased because General Miltiades is a gentleman. He would like to believe that the war is being fought by such people. But all gentlemen are now very old'' (186). The reader recognises this as accurate, one of the novel's central statements, yet one which, by this point, the narrator-proper seems unable to formulate for himself. Ludovic's anarchic nature could scarcely be more deeply expressed than in this arrogating of authority in the text. Hound's complaint, that Ludovic is 'writing something unofficial' thus becomes subtly ironic, especially in view of the clearly distorted 'official' reports of both Popgun and the landings on Crete (168). Chapter four of 'In the Picture' looks forward to Ludovic as a future writer, and opens with an extract from his journal -

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1 Op. Cit., p. 174.

2 Evelyn Waugh, 1964, p. 110.

3 Tradition and Dream (1964), 1971, p. 233.

Major Hound is bald and both his face and scalp shine. Early in the morning after shaving there is a dry shine. After an hour he begins to sweat and there is a greasy shine . . . Does he use a cigarette-holder in order to protect his teeth and fingers from stain . . .? He often tells the orderly to empty his ash-tray. Captain Crouchback despises Major Hound but Colonel Blackhouse finds him useful . . . (156)

The manner of the extract is close to that of our own writer, in its attention to small and telling details, but here Hound is fixed for the reader as he had not been formerly. The nature of Guy's antipathy is not elsewhere analysed, the existence is a 'deadly private war' simply being noted (120). Ludovic's authority is then quickly exhibited in the ensuing short section, in the way it is directed and shaped by his opening reflections. The interest in Major Hound at all is of course one the novel takes up from this point - 'So the days passed until in the third week of May war came to Major Hound.' (157), but the extract's details are more immediately taken up -

Major Hound pretended to be busy at his desk. Then he sat back and fitted a cigarette into his holder . . . this was the witching hour, noted by Corporal-Major Ludovic, when the shine on the Brigade Major's face changed from dry to greasy . . . 'Why doesn't that orderly empty the ash-trays?' . . . (157-158)

The passage shows Guy actively despising Hound, and Tommy finding him useful - ''Well done''. Ludovic is demonstrably a reliable commentator; his reflections on 'the task of contemporary man' and the present 'Age of Purges and Evacuation' and his analysis of Guy as a man of ineffectual 'gravity' are all strikingly to the point. His superiority to and independence of the narrative proper are formal measures of his anarchism; it is shown less figuratively in the band of brigands he gathers about him, and in such details as his moving the truck 'without waiting for an order' (181). Ludovic is the antithesis of that sense of brotherhood and

the common cause which Guy brought to Crete. In the failure of that cause and of the Allied enterprise it is his immorality that will prosper. It does so explicitly in his overpowering of Major Hound.

In his breakdown Hound passes into a dazed, hallucinatory state which the narrative registers by brief reversions to the picturesque style of 'Happy Warriors'.

Fido watched. He craved . . . this was the moment of probation. Fido stood at the parting of the ways. Behind him lay a life of blameless professional progress; before him the proverbial alternatives; the steep path of duty and the heady precipice of sensual appetite. It was the first great temptation of Fido's life. He fell.  
(177)

In its use of controlled cliché and elegant rhetorical balance the text anticipates Hound's subsidence into the enclosed, dreamlike world inhabited for so long by Guy himself. The writing is once more performing, self-conscious, reacting against the collapse of larger military and narrative orderings. The 'doggy' imagery is similarly elaborated to fill the vacuum left by this collapse, as it has previously recorded Trimmer's more cheerful independence. Finally alone, Fido skulks in his culvert.

He could see at the far end a deliciously remote, framed picture of a green and dun valley; between him and it everything was dark and empty. Fido crept in. He went half-way until both bright landscapes were the same size. He unbuckled his equipment and put it beside him. (193)

Unbuckled now, Hound retreats from the tormenting reality which staff solutions have failed to master. Safely disengaged, the world is to him now 'landscapes' each a 'deliciously remote, framed picture', as comforting as his maps and procedures once were. It is Guy's position in extremis, palpably inadequate, a bolt-hole. Fido moves into a 'dreamland', a 'happy trance', the elements of his earlier confidence garbled as were Tony Last's

in his delirium -

'The situation is fluid,' he said; he hiccuped and continued. 'Out-flanked. Infiltrated. Patrol activity. Probing. Break through in strength. Element of surprise. Co-ordinated withdrawal. . . Sitrep . . . Every hour at the hour; orders . . . Information. Intention. Method,' he suddenly shouted. (195)

In all of this, as Friedman and Cook correctly note, Guy himself plays only a small active role; he observes and umpires. The orientation of the earlier narrative I have argued to have been determined by Guy's personal influence, and in this larger sense the signal contribution is naturally his. Here in Crete the narrative is conditioned chiefly by the absence of his authority. In comparison with Men at Arms there is, for much of this novel, little analysis of his state of mind beyond a tension between his desire for involvement, his wish to 'belong here' (53) (not merely to be 'a Hookforce body', a 'guest from the higher formation' (209), a 'guest' at the signaller's picnic (178)), and his older more wary instinct for disengagement -

Guy . . . was in good heart, almost buoyant, as he tramped alone, eased at last of the lead weight of human company. He had paddled in this lustral freedom on the preceding morning when he caught X Commando among the slit trenches and olive trees. Now he wallowed. (204)<sup>1</sup>

With the breaking up of order on Crete the latter impulse comes to dominate;

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Cedric Lyne's lone expedition in Norway (Put Out More Flags (1942), 1982, pp. 207-208). Guy's buoyancy is much more intelligible, largely because one knows more about him as a character.



the bathing images here anticipate the liberating swim he enjoys in the final moments of the collapse, prior to his surrender of responsibility to Ludovic. He cannot address Ludovic either as 'an officer . . . or as a theologian' by this point. Left standing 'between his friends, isolated' (210), Guy is interestingly juxtaposed by Waugh with Trimmer, dismissed by Ian at 'the moment of Guy's despair at Babali Hani' (218). Each is now alone, wandering into a crowd, displaced from the stories and pictures in which they have figured. Guy has however come to a degree of enlightenment by the close of his Cretan experience. As Waugh's precis will later put it, he at least retains 'Personal honour',<sup>1</sup> and can meet Claire's 'sauve qui peut' rationalisation of honour with the obstinate moral counter that 'men wouldn't take kindly to being trained by deserters' (221). All larger ambitions for a just war he is coming to see as his own quixotic visions - 'He saw himself dimly at a great distance. Weariness was all' (221). This new objectivity anticipates the awareness he achieves in his hospital bed, but with it the exaggerated urge to separate - he dwells on Ivo, and on the old silent lady of his boyhood. He feels he has lost the knack of being a social animal; the image recalls Tony Last at Brighton, in last-ditch resistance to the sense of dislocation around him, intent upon dressing for dinner.

He had repeated what seemed to be the habitual movements; each time the knot either fell apart or else produced a bow that stood rigidly to perpendicular . . . So now . . . he wished to speak and could not. (231)

In over-reaction Guy now distrusts all about him, fearful of his own instinct for the gestalt -

He heard them and understood and was as little tempted to answer as to join in the conversation of actors on a stage; there was an orchestra pit, footlights, a draped proscenium, between him and all these people. (226)

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<sup>1</sup> 'Synopsis of Preceding Volumes', Unconditional Surrender, (1961), 1971, p. 11.

The imagery is familiar but Guy, so often both impresario and audience, is now unmoved. His product now is a negation of these performances - 'Silence was all . . . This silence was Guy's private possession, all his own work' (226). Not to speak, not to write, is the only course to take once devised expression - notably 'Happy Warriors' - has proved distorting. He now appreciates the irony of being 'in the picture', but so extreme is his reaction that his very sanity is threatened, as he retreats into a private reverie scarcely less distorted - 'He could talk if he wished to. He must guard that secret from them. Once he spoke he would re-enter their world, he would be back in the picture'. In his illness he perceives the world he is resisting to be of someone's making, to be someone's picture, though not his own. The novel's reality is of course only that; the Cretan chapter closed with the short, detached line, 'So they sailed out of the picture'. These are dangerous conclusions, and safely ascribed to Guy's near-madness - but one has understood Officers and Gentlemen as a novel about fiction-makers; at the point where Guy is most remote from his experience in the novel, he comes closest to the reader's, of that novel.

Guy is tempted back into the novel by Julia Stitch. He responds automatically, as to a priest -

Quite suddenly one morning a new clear voice called  
Guy irresistibly to order.  
'C'e scappato il Capitano.'  
Mrs. Stitch, a radiant contrast to the starched and  
hooded nurses who had been Guy's only visitants, stood  
at his door. Without effort or deliberation Guy replied:  
'No Capitano oggi, signora, Tenente.' (232)

The language is Italian, not Latin, but the relationship is clear, especially among the 'starched and hooded' ladies. The Catholic parody is important; despite the security of the Catholic calendar which counterpoints

the events of war, Guy's faith is muted in this novel, subverted by a Dionysian spirit of delighted wonder, as here in Julia's 'radiant' visitation. Stopp has described her as 'the presiding deity of the world of ambiguity and unreason';<sup>1</sup> she is the pagan Cleopatra, a modern warrior-queen who in her disregard of moral principle is the antithesis to Guy. A pagan irresponsibility marked the island-fictions; at Mugg's castle Guy and Tommy had been 'caught up and bowled over by that sacred wind which once blew freely over the young world. Cymbals and flutes rang in their ears. The grim isle of Mugg was full of scented breezes, momentarily uplifted, swept away and set down under the stars of the Aegean' (68). In her idyll at the Glasgow station, Virginia saw Trimmer as 'the guide providentially sent on a gloomy evening to lead her back to the days of sun and sea-spray and wallowing dolphins' (78). The 'petulant north-west wind which long ago delayed Helen and Menelaus' and which stirs in Guy's hospital, is surely the same wind which suddenly dropped at the fulfilment of Guy's act of pietas, and is the 'great gust of wind' which scatters Katie Carmichael's treasonable papers. Julia Stitch is an agent of this immoral, diverting wind; she will lead Guy 'out of bounds' (128), will frustrate his one corporal work of charity, and ensure the safety of the dishonoured Claire. The last is unnecessary; with the German invasion of Russia Guy's 'pilgrimage in a Holy Land of illusion' (240) is over. The burning of his pocket-book is the ultimate betrayal of an official history, and corresponds closely to the destruction of Adam Fenwick-Sykes' autobiography in Vile Bodies. That too marked a cutting adrift of the hero, a concession to the disordered anarchy of experience. Guy is left only with the modest security of the piling-arms drill, his resignation articulated in silence, in his mind - 'All right, Halberdier Colour-Sergeant Oldenshaw. All right' (249).

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1 Op. Cit., p. 177.

In the work already referred to, Philip Stevick includes a quotation by Susanne Langer, in which she concludes that 'Life is incoherent unless we give it form' and that in order to do this we "put it into words", tell it to ourselves, compose it in terms of "scenes", so that in our minds we can enact all its important moments'.<sup>1</sup> Evelyn Waugh, by the evidence of his pre-war fiction, considered modern life particularly incoherent, and modern warfare a state in which the nature and consequences of that incoherence becomes overwhelmingly evident. In his drive to locate a kind of meaning in his experience, Guy makes much of Officers and Gentlemen a particularly composed, scenic novel. Once again the remark by Steven Marcus, that the worthy qualities of the first two volumes of the trilogy lie 'in the things that exist before the reader's eye, in events arranged and acted out', accurately registers the effect of this technique.<sup>2</sup> Guy produces his own variation on the mess-painting 'The Unbroken Square', failing to take heed that the original, at the beginning of serious hostilities, had gone 'underground' (18). By the close of Officers and Gentlemen Guy too has withdrawn from the battle, into a purely personal sense of humour, and into the silence in which he acknowledges Colour Sergeant Oldenshaw. If this is a diminishment it is because, as P. A. Doyle has said of Waugh's heroes, 'Twentieth century man has been trounced . . . things are out of his control'.<sup>3</sup> The first half of the novel enacts Guy's imagination briefly in control, self-consciously putting form 'into words'. The fragility of that form, of even the hold of words upon reality, is the subject of the rest of this novel. Ludovic's anarchy is that of words without form, orders without authority, an easy 'gift of tongues' (182); the countering of this was to be the matter of the concluding volume of the trilogy.

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1 Op. Cit., p. 19.

2 'Evelyn Waugh and the Art of Entertainment', Partisan Review, XXIII (1956), 348-357.

3 Letter to Critical Quarterly, II (1960), 269-270.

## UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDER

In his lengthy study of Waugh's fiction W. J. Cook suggests that Unconditional Surrender, the final volume of the war trilogy, is 'a more conventional novel than even the two immediate predecessors'. Although one would quarrel with 'even', this seems otherwise broadly true, but Cook's critical approach, through examination of narrative, tone and theme, fails thereafter to isolate the conventions to which the novel is newly, or more closely, adhering. Cook's approach is itself conventional, and not perhaps the most efficacious. The trilogy's themes are not in themselves particularly abstruse, and the tone of the writing, undeniably subtle, is nonetheless apprehended by the reader in a straightforward manner. Unconditional Surrender achieves its new effects, and its effective finality, through an emended narrative technique, and Cook's description of this as 'a counter-balanced attachment - detachment potential' does not seem immediately persuasive.<sup>1</sup>

The preceding discussions of Men at Arms and Officers and Gentlemen have identified in those novels an un-conventional narrative position. The eccentricity of Guy Crouchback's personal vision has been formally reproduced in a narrative that is recurrently private and unreliable; similar distortions are observed, larger and less unconscious, in the workings of official institutions. Guy's fascination by Apthorpe and Ritchie-Hook, his entranced love of the Halberdiers, of Ivor Claire and of the commandos betoken a naive, bookish idealism; the official equivalents, in the form of newspaper celebrations of brave little Finland and the 'Battle of Britain', the citation Kilbannock writes for Trimmer after 'Operation Popgun', or the 'official history' of the Hookforce

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1 Masks, Modes and Morals: The Art of Evelyn Waugh, New Jersey, 1971, pp. 297-335.

landings on Crete are versions - clearly less innocent - of the same tendency to rewrite. The reader's difficulty amid such storytelling lies in forming a confident relation to Guy, and to Guy's attitudes; this relationship is progressively under review as one reads. The opaque quality of the central figure, so often bewailed, serves to accommodate just such a relation.

When this aspect of the first two novels of the trilogy is considered it can seem that this is indeed very 'modern' writing; a concern with gestalt processes, with narrative rivalry and obliquely-perceived experience would all seem to invite criticism of a structuralist type. Unconditional Surrender, however, reorientates the whole by tendering and subsequently confirming a new authority - specifically, a Catholic authority. If the two previous novels approximate, in the variety and competition of their narrative positions, to the mode described by Roland Barthes as 'scriptible', then this third is, rather, 'lisible'.<sup>1</sup> It is an anticipated development, and although in Barthes' terms a regression, it guarantees for the trilogy an affirmative, yea-saying conclusion that is most satisfying. The competing stories, it was always implied, denote not some inevitable 'verum factum' principle in human kind but instead a modern sickness, an occlusion of reality. Kilbannock's manipulations were always perverse; Guy's crusading idealism will finally be revealed as not laudable high-mindedness, not even merely foolishness, but itself life-denying, destructive. Unconditional Surrender overthrows these stories and substitutes its Story. Its narrator is a Catholic narrator, invested with that authority to write a 'conventional' novel, in a mode that is essentially

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<sup>1</sup> See p. 32 above, footnote 2. David Lodge suggests that Barthes' distinction between 'lisible' and 'scriptible' texts may be 'one of degree rather than essence'. The Modes of Modern Writing, 1977, p. 68. Unconditional Surrender still demands one's imaginative participation: but the work's final meaning is made clear.

un-ironic.<sup>1</sup> Guy's clearing sight is announced in a finally reliable text, the obliquity, lingering in the episodes concerning Ludovic, understood now in the context of this stability. In the main body of the text, signifier is at last reconnected with signified and in something of this sense Brian Wicker has characterised Waugh's later fiction in terms of the restoration of the 'vertical thread' between fiction and the world.<sup>2</sup> He regrets this, yet it is truest in regard to Unconditional Surrender and the key to the novel's success. The reconnection of the thread is, for example, observable in Waugh's treatment of Virginia Troy. After her death the literary editor Spruce describes her as

'the last of twenty years' succession of heroines  
. . . The ghosts of romance who walked between the  
two wars.' (200)

and goes on to place her in the company of Arlen's Iris Storm, Hemingway's Bret and Huxley's Mrs. Viveash; 'the type persisted - in books and in life'. The danger, the perniciousness even, of interpreting life through a medium of fictional types has been the trilogy's most insistent idea. By this late point in Unconditional Surrender one's persuasion is that 'books' and 'life' must be terms of opposition. Spruce's melodramatic vocabulary - 'the exquisite, the doomed, and the damning, with expiring voices' - will recall only Ludovic's crazed verbal obsessions - 'Doom: irrevocable destiny . . .' (87). Spruce's account is insufficient; the reader has encountered Virginia in stiff despair, haggling with an abortionist, and as the divinely-chosen agent of Guy's rescue. 'Exquisite' Virginia,

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1 The T.L.S. review of 27.10.61 remarked that the volume was 'more aptly' to have been called Conventional Weapons.

2 The Story-Shaped World, 1975, pp. 151-168.

relished as a second Mrs. Viveash, celebrates the independent signifier. Bluntly figured as mother and bomb-victim, however, Virginia marks again that regression Barthes abhorred, into something unrepresentative, unambiguous. Moving out of type, she comes to have original and single meaning; something absolute is being signified.

Entry to Unconditional Surrender is by way of the double-doors of synopsis and prologue, exterior fittings that precede Book One proper. These two brief sections are alike in tone, the prologue's tendency to isolate phrases in inverted commas - 'Blotted his copybook', 'uncle', 'cheerish', 'I don't want to see you again ever', 'No can do' - echoing the quoted extracts which frame the synopsis. These last are striking in a way they would not be were this a genuine synopsis. Six years separated the first and third volumes of the trilogy, and in 1961 a synopsis was appropriate; nearly twenty years later its partiality is the more evident for its ingenuous *raison d'être* having lapsed. The 'Synopsis' was clearly always something more than that, a critical interpretation undertaken by an interested party. The inclusion of quotations from the previous two volumes suggests the detachment appropriate to the writer of a synopsis, but the hand which excises Apthorpe's name, reduces Claire to a 'dandy' and recalls Virginia's rejection of Guy as 'mild ridicule' has clearly intervened quite purposefully. One perceives in all of this the presence of a narrator figure larger than normal; the synopsis is today rightly retained for its adumbration of this voice. This super-narrator puts the reader 'in the picture' with none of the irony that phrase bore in the previous volume. The present tense of the synopsis, the block of summarized action presented in the prologue, are asserting the primacy of this story over those which have competed in the previous volumes - this is what happened . . . The prologue positions Guy for the last act and intimates



the courses that will shape this novel. Like Trimmer before him Guy will be launched from 'No. 6 Transit Camp, London District' into spurious adventure. Trimmer was the Press-hero of 'Popgun'; in the persistence of his dedication to Roger of Waybroke Guy will figure briefly to himself as a second Moses. His second course, eventually embraced, is embodied in his father's letter, foregrounded at the head of the novel in italic type, and announcing the propositions which will echo through the story.

The first book of Unconditional Surrender, so thoroughly prefaced, evinces in its narrative a security not found in the trilogy since the detailing of Guy's first days with the Halberdiers. One soon encounters the significant figures - Jumbo Trotter, Padfield, Box-Bender, Sir Ralph Brompton, Ludovic, Spruce, the Kilbannocks, Virginia. A single day is fully plotted, with the meeting and remeeting of these characters in a small and specified area of London. Addresses and circumstances are noted, the date, in full, twice remarked, the weather described, the items on the menu at Ruben's restaurant listed and accounted for. The narrative moves with the deliberation of a cinema script, and with the visual emphasis that suggests; interior of Westminster Abbey, Montague statue, Stalingrad Sword, Abbey exterior, queue (detail of queue); Guy in passing car, follow to restaurant . . . A 'voice-over' gives the history of the sword's construction, the Times' response. This, in its fullness of rendering, is suggestive of a tightly organized narrative and sets the characteristic tone of Unconditional Surrender, nowhere more striking than in a new attitude to character. Padfield is the first figure to be presented in this fresh way.

Everyone knew Lieutenant Padfield; even Guy who knew so few people. He was a portent of the Grand Alliance. London was full of American soldiers, tall, slouching, friendly, woefully homesick young men who seemed always in search of somewhere to sit down . . . (24)

The description continues for more than a page. Guy may know Padfield, but the information given here is not merely that which Guy might have. The narrator expands upon Americans in general, then passes on to Padfield's particular occupations. The completeness of reference is supported by a confident and balanced style -

Two or three widows survived from the years of hospitality and still tried meagrely to entertain. The Lieutenant was at all their little parties. Two or three young married women were staking claims to replace them as hostesses. The Loot knew them all. He was in every picture gallery, every bookshop, every club, every hotel. (25)

This kind of characterisation is new to the trilogy - compare it with what one will ever know of Ritchie-Hook or Apthorpe, of Tommy Blackhouse or 'Fido' Hound, figures all at least as 'significant' as Padfield. Later in Book One an equally finished portrait of Everard Spruce is given.

Spruce lived in a fine house in Cheyne Walk cared for by secretaries to the number of four . . . Spruce was in his middle thirties. Time was, he cultivated a proletarian, youthful aspect; not successfully; now, perhaps without design, he looked older than his years and presented the negligent elegance of a fashionable don . . . Tonight he wore a heavy silk, heavily striped shirt and a bow tie above noncommittal trousers. The secretaries were dressed rather like him . . . (40)

A figure new to the trilogy, Spruce, with all his appurtenances, is immediately as 'present' as any more established character, not excluding Guy himself. The reintroduction of the Kilbannocks in the third chapter of Book One provides the opportunity for a resumé; the effects of war on their house and furnishings are logged, and the couple's financial circumstances recorded. It is noted that 'Kerstie had had Ian's evening clothes cleverly adapted into a servicable coat and skirt' - the detail is interesting (43). Spruce's outfit was 'appropriated' when its owner was killed. Kerstie, already wearing adapted clothes, is now found rummaging

through Virginia's wardrobe, the two women spending 'all that evening like gypsy hucksters examining and pricing those few surviving trophies of a decade of desirable womanhood . . .' (47). The officer who assigns Guy to the Balkans wears a 'ready made uniform' with 'dull' buttons (also 'false teeth'); the clothing imagery has developed since Guy blithely took on Halberdier uniform in Men at Arms. At that point suggestions of masquerade, of play-acting, were dominant; now a generalized social decline is figured in the dismembering of some older, no longer valid order. There is left only that shoring with broken images, noticed in Love Among the Ruins.

The present novel resists this collapse, offering its own tightly bound thesis. This first part expounds its theme explicitly, investing the 'State Sword' with all the symptoms of moral bankruptcy. This directness allows the critic Andrew Rutherford scope for moral interpretation,<sup>1</sup> but other details of the account quickly lead back to less overt yet equally important concerns. The crowds who queued to see the sword

were suffused with gratitude to their remote allies  
and they venerated the sword as the symbol of their  
own generous and spontaneous emotion. (22)

The circularity in this reproduces in miniature the characteristic movement of the trilogy, whereby actions and intentions remain circumscribed within artificial terms of reference. The crowd venerates its own generosity, not some further object. Ian Kilbannock's 'Operation Popgun' was conceived, executed and reported to the public wholly in 'consumer' terms; the actual landing on Axis territory was a quite accidental influx of reality. The raid, strung with Ian's literary allusions, conformed almost perfectly to structuralist descriptions of fiction - Frederic Jameson

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1 The Literature of War, 1978.

speaks of stories telling only of their own 'coming into being'.<sup>1</sup>

The blockhouse attack of Unconditional Surrender repeats the reflexive movement, being a staged performance 'well placed for spectators' (206) and again insulated from the reality of a serious war. J. Fuller likens it to 'some impossibly talented Ealing film script'.<sup>2</sup> This type of reflexivity lies at the centre of the technique and theme of the trilogy - Ludovic's collapse into a world of lexicographical illusion is only the purest manifestation of its hazards. HOO HQ is the chief propagator of these reflexive enterprises and it is from here that Guy must first escape in Unconditional Surrender. The description of the headquarters provides several examples of circumscribed activity. Here

small bands of experts in untroubled privacy made researches into fortifying drugs, invisible maps, noiseless explosives, and other projects near to the heart of the healthy schoolboy. (26)

The idea of sequestered activity is carried further; Guy works in a 'compartment' (27), while next door 'there lived three RAF sergeants . . .'. The building as a whole is now a 'labyrinth of ply-board partitions with which the halls were divided'. Working in a similar way to the clothes imagery, these flimsy divisions express a modern collapse into schism and privacy, the original grand design in pieces. The HQ was formerly the 'Royal Victorian Institute', the walls still 'covered with ceramic portraits of Victorian rationalists, whiskered, hooded and gowned' (75). The noble ambitions of nineteenth century rational humanism, with its Mechanics Institutes and an ideal of Everyman's advancement, are seen to be quite

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1 The Prison House of Language, 1972, p. 89.

2 'Disenchantment', The Listener, 26.10.61, pp. 665-666.

overthrown.<sup>1</sup> That projected line of progress has been supplanted by these piecemeal and futile activities; the file Guy reads is clearly approached by those who append minutes only as an opportunity to demonstrate their own expertise. Again the reflexing line turns inwards, execution becomes only performance. 'Hoopla' is impractical, its reappearance 'greeted with ironic applause' (28).

Guy is himself inevitably drawn into the enclosed circle at HOO HQ.

(His) table carried three wire trays - 'In', 'Out', and 'Pending', all empty that afternoon - a telephone and a jig-saw puzzle. For the first few days of his occupancy he had had an AT secretary but she had been removed by a newly installed civilian efficiency-expert. Guy did not repine, but to fill his time prosecuted a controversy on the subject. Tommy had said he did not know what the liaison office was supposed to do; nor did Guy. (27)

The jigsaw puzzle expresses the limit imposed on Guy's vision by this point in his war; in Officers and Gentlemen he had naively seen his opportunity to act, finding that the war collected 'the scattered jigsaw of the past and (set) each piece back into its proper place'.<sup>2</sup> Now, those illusions of being 'in the picture' exploded, the jigsaw joins the novel's other games and toys, plainly inadequate - thus Operation Popgun and Hoopla, and the model-making in the 'studio' next door.

Here beaches were constructed in miniature, yards and yards of them, reproducing from air-photographs miles and miles of the coast of occupied Europe. The studio was full of tools and odd scraps of material, woods, metals, pastes, gums, pigments, feathers, fibres, plasters, and oils many of them strongly aromatic. The tone was egalitarian in an antiquated, folky way distantly derived from the disciples of William Morris. (28)

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- 1 Waugh is careful to infer that a merely humanist vision was always insufficient; like Hetton before it, the Institute is a 'Venetian-Gothic brick edifice' - a fatal dilution of the real thing.  
2 Officers and Gentlemen (1955), 1973, p. 71.

Here at HOO HQ, ironically the remotest point from the war, the trilogy's habitual transformation of reality is in full tide. The RAF sergeants are 'happy, industrious men' with no time for Brompton's 'Foreign Affairs Summary', complaining of interruption - 'You can never tell when they'll come asking for more beaches. There isn't the same satisfaction in beaches'. In another perfect microcosm of the reflexive impulse, 'these ingenious men were building a model of the Royal Victorian Institute' (28-30). Guy, inevitably, is full of admiration; the communist sergeant is dangerously more realistic, and in a remark immediately following the passage last cited suggests that 'a few machine guns would be more to the point' than the Stalingrad sword. Mere craftsmanship itself, as David Wykes notes,<sup>1</sup> is no longer any correlative of virtue or worth. As a communist and (probably) homosexual, 'Susie' is of the devil's party in the argument of this novel, and 'All the time he spoke he was concentrating on his small lathe, turning tiny spiral columns with exquisite precision'. The sword itself, for all that 'silver, gold, rock-crystal, and enamel had gone to its embellishment' (22), is a symbol of moral failure, political expediency. Its prototype, Trimmer's commando dagger, was similarly meaningless -

'To my certain knowledge none was ever used in action. A Glasgow policeman got a nasty poke with one. They were mostly given away to tarts. But they were beautifully made little things.' (44)

This emptying of craftsmanship of moral worth bears upon Brian Wicker's complaint that in his later fiction Waugh undermined the sense of modern insecurity of which he had been master in the early novels, and that through Mr. Crouchback 'things' are humanised, given meaning. Certainly the Catholic faith is now seen to guarantee meaning - and to underwrite

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<sup>1</sup> 'Evelyn Waugh's Sword of Volgograd', Dutch Quarterly Review, VII (2,1977), 82-97.

the narrative security of Unconditional Surrender - but its influence is seen to be extremely limited. In this modern world articles such as the 'Sword of Stalingrad' are still as meaningless as the canal debris Adam Symes surveyed in Vile Bodies - perhaps all the more empty of meaning for their vaunted significance.

The reflexivity concentrated at HOO HQ has formed the typical distortion of all the trilogy's episodes, and especially of Guy's personal failure to see things steady and whole. His ideals of Soldier and Officer have been located in Apthorpe, Claire, Ritchie-Hook - each in turn a projection of Guy's own. The self-venerating crowd before Westminster Abbey past which he grandly drives resembles the early Guy in important ways. They queue 'in a mood of devotion' (21), exchanging few words and no laughter; as Guy had naively embraced the ritual and silver of the Halberdier mess after his hollow years in Italy, so here the crowd 'took comfort at this evidence that ancient skills survived behind the shoddy improvisation of the present' (22). Their comfort, one learns, has no more real meaning than their veneration, and itself duplicates the reflexivity of Guy's crusade. This and the death-wish emerge as one and the same. Carens remarks that Guy's 'commitment to a public cause has only frustrated the impulse behind it',<sup>1</sup> but surely that impulse was always suspect - the crusade must be fulfilled, private honour vindicated, if not in honourable action then in death. Unconditional Surrender presents Guy's breaking out of this lethally circular reasoning.

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1 The Satiric Art of Evelyn Waugh, Seattle, 1966, p. 167.

His release is anticipated at the very opening of the novel proper, where the figure of Captain Montague stands. 'It was not his sword but another which on Friday, 29 October 1943, drew the column of fours . . .'; nevertheless it is his sword which is foregrounded in the present tense at this beginning, perversely deflecting the course of the narrative almost before it has commenced. This breaking-in is a reminder that the process of all storytelling is reflexive'; . . . Kilbannock's 'Popgun' may conform to Jameson's stricture, but Waugh's own narrative technique has always involved gross patternings and internalised structures. In the present novel the clearest example is that of the 'unknown major' being brother to the security chief - the absurd 'Plan' elaborated by Colonel Grace-Groundling-Marchpole is laid alongside the author's plan which has interwoven his brother's career with Guy's. In Unconditional Surrender however there is an insistence on something more than self-reference, an irreducible core of meaning symbolised in the statue of Captain Montague and his stand against Godless revolutionary France. The assertive stillness of that statue is reproduced quite early in the novel in the slow and detailed recounting of Mr. Crouchback's funeral. Here is the real counterpart of the illusory 'islands' - notably Mugg - of Officers and Gentlemen -

Most of the village of Broome is Catholic, an isolated community of the kind that is found in many parts of Lancashire and the outer islands of Scotland, but is very rare in the west of England. (60)

Broome Hall no longer stands on the 'main road', but on 'a lane which almost invisibly branches off the motor-road' (61). This lengthy narrative section itself represents a branching off from the main storyline, taking its pace from the measured rites of the funeral. It is juxtaposed with Guy's excited preparations for his posting and indicates the alternative



to that last illusory episode in his crusade - thus the prefatory headline here, 'IS YOUR JOURNEY REALLY NECESSARY?' (59).

It was barely light when they steamed out of the shuttered and patched station. The corridor was full of standing sailors travelling to Plymouth. The little bulbs over the seats had been disconnected. It was difficult to read the flimsy newspapers they carried. (59)

The imagery of darkness and obscurity that has operated throughout the trilogy as an index of uncertainty continues in this novel but is here reversed significantly. They travel to Broome in a gathering light; the ignorant Box-Bender falls asleep of course, but for once 'Guy remained open-eyed throughout the three hour journey'. Not merely 'awake', but open-eyed. The rail timetable supplements the ordering of the service; Broome village is first surveyed 'from the little station yard', the end of the line at its most literal. This overview is suggestive of the calm omniscience of a Hardy narrator, reinforced here by the use of the present tense -

The Catholic parish church is visible from the little station yard; a Puginesque structure erected by Guy's great-grand-father in the early 1860's at the nearer extremity of the village street. At the further end stands the medieval church of which the nave and chancel are in Anglican use while the north aisle and adjoining burying ground are the property of the lord of the manor. (60)

Such fixity, like all these effects, is working to infuse the text with a security that is the antithesis of the shifting ironies of the trilogy's earlier, reflexive manner. The present tense attempts to pluck the village churches, later the Hall itself, out of their fictional context, to persuade us of some more tangible existence in which they may be visited. The hierarchy of the community is expressed spatially; the Hall stands 'behind iron gates' but 'its drive (is) a continuation of the village street',

whilst the social structuring is itself contained by the framing churches, one at either end of the village. After the cliques and privacies of HOO HQ it is the inclusiveness of the Church that is emphasized. Even Padfield is accepted here; parts of the proceedings are recorded through Box-Bender's consciousness - there is comedy, but not satire, and the non-Catholic reader can identify without discomfort. Box-Bender 'wanted to do whatever was required of him. Across the aisle the Lord Lieutenant was equally undrilled, equally well disposed' (64).

The exact details of the service structure the narrative, the text for once unbroken by Waugh's one-line pauses.<sup>1</sup> At the centre of this stillness stands Guy's meditation, the most extended presentation of his thoughts in the trilogy and comparable only with the passage in Men at Arms in which he pondered the 'Army Training Memorandum'. That Halberdier security is now long lost; the italic headings of its memorandum are here superseded by the italic extracts from the Latin service. Through Guy's meditation are traced the elements of his experience, old orderings recalled and future opportunity anticipated. The words of his father's letter lie at the centre, but Guy's crusade is still before his eyes, and he fails to distinguish between his true role and the parody of that selection embodied in Mr. Oates' 'Electronic Personnel Selector'. The first will lead him to adopt Trimmer's child, the second to the death-wish. The two are mingled in his thoughts at this pivotal moment;

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1 In general these persist in Unconditional Surrender but with little of the aspect of self-conscious manipulation noted in, for example, 'Happy Warriors'. In the sections dealing with Virginia's search for a doctor, or Guy's days at the training centre or even the opening first day, the divisions are scarcely functional, and often seem quite needless. The narrative is however the lighter in tone, the more 'lisible', for these encouragements to swift reading, to concurrence with an unironic, 'straight' presentation.

His father had been a 'just man'; not particularly  
judicious, not at all judicial, but 'just' in the  
full sense of the psalmist . . . (64)

'Judicious' suggests Kilbannock and de Souza, coolly manouvering for current  
advantage, 'judicial' the corrupt partisan 'People's Court' where Gilpin  
is sure that 'justice was done' (236). 'Auditio mala' is a similarly  
pregnant phrase; 'the ears of the dead were closed to the discords of  
life' is an interpretation that anticipates the death-wish and retreat, but  
as the 'bad news' that his father suffered 'never fearfully' it bears  
rather upon Virginia's timely death and Guy's acceptance of it. He figures  
purgatory to himself as 'that mysterious transit camp through which he must  
pass on his way to rest and light' (66) - again the muted parallels are  
sinister. Guy yearns for his own release from No. 6 Transit Camp into  
crusading adventure, on the way to experience the illusory 'foretaste of  
paradise, locum refrigerii, lucis et pacis' (102). In reality 'he was  
falling fast' (103).

In these various ways the meditation here 'brings together the elements of  
Guy's position and shows his persisting illusions. In its allusiveness  
and ingenuity it expresses a confident, scheming narrator, unfolding a  
plan to supplant those which have failed in Crete and at MI5. A similar  
displacement occurs at the close of Guy's meditation -

It was a still day; the trees were dropping their leaves  
in ones and twos; they twisted and faltered in the  
descent as their crumpled brown shapes directed, but  
landed under the boughs on which they had once budded.  
Guy thought for a moment of Ludovic's note-book, of the  
'feather in the vacuum' to which he had been compared  
and, by contrast, remembered boisterous November days  
when he and his mother had tried to catch leaves in the  
avenue; each one caught ensured a happy day? week?  
month? which? in his wholly happy childhood. (67)

Watching the falling leaves, the depressed Guy recalls Ludovic's judgement

on him. The comparison with lost boyhood happiness persuades him of the truth of Ludovic's pensée, just as the reader was forced in the previous novel to recognize, at a point where all other ordering was compromised, Ludovic's anarchic assumption of narrative authority. But Guy, thinking of the feather in the vacuum, sees only the falling of the leaves; the new and powerful narrator of this novel has inserted a qualifying 'but' - the leaves 'landed under the boughs on which they had once budded'. The pathetic fallacy is firmly exploited. The narrator takes over the parallel Guy sadly observes and redirects it to a positive conclusion, predicting Guy's fulfilment of his father's words and his return to Broome. Guy's inclination to construct and believe misleading figures is seen in the moment of being superseded by a higher narrator, his metaphor rewritten. The authority of this narrator is underwritten by the figure of Mr. Crouchback, the passage cited ending 'Only his father had remained to watch the transformation of that merry little boy into the lonely captain of Halberdiers who followed the coffin'. This suggestion of his father watching over Guy, 'at that moment clearing the way for him' (66), is the source of the new assertiveness which dictates the supercession of Guy's own story-telling. A closing detail confirms the ascendancy of the present narrator.

On the way to the station Miss Vavasour came to Guy's side. 'I wonder,' she said, 'will you think it very impertinent to ask, but I should so much like to have a keepsake of your father; any little thing . . . do you think I could have his old tobacco-jar?' (72)

The same lady had requested Trimmer's photograph, which both she and Mr. Crouchback felt 'deserved a frame'. The two fictions, Trimmer's typically modern, media performance and the current Catholic narrative we are being persuaded to accept as truth, are juxtaposed. The latter

frames Guy's father in a long and formal episode detached from the main-stream of the narrative; he is invested as the trilogy's single true hero.

Before Guy enters on either of his alternative routes to redemption he passes through the hands of Ludovic, by this point in the trilogy representative of the fictional imagination in its purest and most absurd form. Ludovic was reintroduced in the novel's second chapter, accompanied by a wealth of detail to dwarf even that surrounding Padfield or Spruce.

Thirty-seven years old, six foot two in height, upright, powerful, heavier than he had been in the Middle East and paler, with a hint of flabbiness in the cheeks, wearing service dress, a well-kept Sam Browne belt, the ribbon of the MM and the badges of a Major in the Intelligence Corps; noticeable, if at all, for the pink-grey irises of his eyes; the man whom Hookforce had known as Corporal Major Ludovic paused reminiscently by the railings of St. Margaret's, Westminster. (32)

The name is saved until the close of the paragraph, ushering the new Ludovic into the story with a fanfare of secured information and making heavily ironic the phrase 'noticeable, if at all'. Several critics remarks how this character is transformed in Unconditional Surrender, and in effect Ludovic only becomes a 'character' at this point.<sup>1</sup> In Guy's eyes he has been a 'mystery man', and the completing of the figure now is a de-mythologizing undertaken by this novel's informed narrator. In Officers and Gentlemen Ludovic had emerged as the sole reliable interpreter, accurately diagnosing Guy's idealism; the anarchy of such authority being rooted in a vicious and - worse - peripheral figure is cancelled in Unconditional Surrender by the explication of Ludovic. Equipped with

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1 Viz. Kingsley Amis, 'Crouchback's Regress', The Spectator, 27.10.61, pp. 581-2; T.L.S. 27.10.61.

history and motives, he is suddenly narratable, brought within the scope of a storyteller. When he 'paused reminiscently' by the church railings it was for the reader's reminiscence - the task of 'filling in' was begun, in confident manner.

This was the place . . . twelve years and a few months ago . . . Ludovic was a corporal then . . . It was after that wedding . . . Sir Ralph was then doing a spell at the Foreign Office . . . Ludovic, as he now was, constituted the sole progeny of that union. (32-33)

Ludovic once accounted for, the next section returns us to the Abbey and current action with an air of 'Now read on . . .'. Already the once ambiguous figure is obedient to the narrator's baton. The punning allusion to marriage begins the development of elaborate parallels between the careers of Ludovic and Guy. The trooper Ludovic, we learn, was a romantic, fascinated by the techniques and beauty of the regimental sabre, the 'state swords' (37). This romanticism is now irrelevant; Sir Ralph dismisses his account as 'most picturesque'. Ludovic's decline, into the haunted, suicidal figure of Officers and Gentlemen, dates from his meeting with Sir Ralph and the education in modern mores he received from the politician. This was 'twelve years and a few months' before the present action, that is, the same year - 1931 - that Virginia's desertion plunged Guy into a similar atrophy. In each a compensating romanticism comes to insulate from reality; Guy narrowly escapes, but Ludovic is quite overwhelmed.

The further he removed from human society and the less he attended to human speech, the more did words, printed and written, occupy his mind. The books he read were books about words . . . He dreamed of words and woke repeating them as though memorizing a foreign vocabulary. Ludovic had become an addict of that potent intoxicant, the English language. (38-39)

This constitutes the purest form of that reflexive impulse already noted. Turning inwards on words themselves, 'Ludovic worked over his note-books, curtailings, expanding, polishing; often consulting Fowler, not disdaining Roget' (39). The publishing business shares this reflexivity; 'anything sold; the supply of paper alone determined a writer's popularity' (39). Ludovic, then, is employed by the narrator as a parallel 'case history'. Waugh's remark, that this third volume was necessary to 'explain Ludovic', is so far incomplete; Ludovic in turn explains Guy, taking his position to its logical, lunatic extreme. The climax is enacted in the novel's second Book, during Guy's sojourn at Ludovic's training camp. Briefly, the impulse to decline into pure story, to fictionalise, commands the narrative, and, uniquely, Guy is not the transforming agent.

The straying-out of reality to which Ludovic is prone is demonstrated early in the episode. The instructor's terse 'PT OK . . . nervous type. Got worse . . . NBG' modulates into Ludovic's elegant paraphrase - 'His excellent physique is not matched by psychological stamina' - and then propels him into the recesses of thesaurus and dictionary.

'Cowardice, pusillanimity, poltroonery, dastardness, abject fear, funk, dunghill-cock, coistril, nidget, Bob Acres, Jerry Sneak.' 'Nidget' was a new word. He moved to the dictionary . . . (85)

Led away on a line of synonyms, hypnotised by sound and shape, the 'happily browsing' Ludovic breaks the thread between word and experience, signifier and signified. His staff-captain can scarcely reach him - ''Can't understand half he says these days'' (86), while Ludovic himself repeats his guests' names 'as though he were reciting the titles of a shelf of books he had no intention of reading' (105). The news of Guy's imminent arrival might be a real threat to Ludovic, but

Even in the moment of horror his new vocabulary came pat. There was one fine word which exactly defined his condition: 'Colaphized'. It carried a subtle echo, unsupported by its etymology, of 'collapse'.  
(87)

The step back into reality has proved almost too great. At this crisis the narrative is picking up the colour of Ludovic's thought, as it had before registered Guy's.

. . . to be struck where he should have been most sheltered, in the ivory tower of avant garde letters, in the keep of his own seemingly impregnable fastness, was a disaster beyond human calculation. (87)

The clichés and melodramatic phrasing vie with bookish pedantry to insulate him from the facts; Guy suspects nothing, but Ludovic

had read enough of psychology to be familiar with the word 'trauma' . . . things had been done by him, which, the ancients believed, provoked a doom . . . Who was Ludovic, Ludovic questioned, to set his narrow, modern scepticism against the accumulated experience of the species? (87)

This is clearly the extreme comic equivalent of Guy's reliance upon Waybroke, Truslove, Ritchie-Hook, Claire, just as Ludovic's ivory tower is a distended version of the Castello Crouchback. In some measure Guy has been weaned from those by his father's example, but Ludovic's 'Religious mania' (86) is less effective.

He opened his dictionary and read: 'Doom: irrevocable destiny (usually of adverse fate)' . . . He turned to Roget and found 'Nemesis: Eumenides; keep the wound green . . . His sacred scriptures offered no comfort that morning. (87)

As the episode continues, Ludovic is divested of that 'reality' granted him on his reintroduction in Book One. The consequence of his retreat into a purely verbal environment is his own transformation into fiction -



He rose from his deep chair and at his desk entered on the first page of a new notebook a pensée: The penalty of sloth is longevity. Then he went to the window and gazed blankly through the plate glass . . . He faced, across half an acre of lawn, what the previous owners had called their 'arboretum'. Ludovic thought of it merely as 'the trees' . . . they afforded no pleasure to Ludovic. (91)

Perceiving the world through the frame of 'plate glass', Ludovic reduces the exterior reality of the view, 'holm oaks, yews, and conifers in carefully contrived patterns, glaucous, golden . . .', to the banal but correct collective, 'trees' - serving to suggest only 'the saw': 'The place to hide a leaf is in a tree'. But Ludovic is also himself framed, stiffly, inert from his 'near stupor' like Apthorpe, Ritchie-Hook and Job before him, and like Claire in his oriental tableau. All those images were perceived by Guy; the framed Ludovic is a product of the narrative itself, but in response to his own dehumanising vision. This Ludovic has no need of human comforts; he 'gazed' at his dinner, 'wondering what to do . . . waiting to see what would become of it' (93), and when pressed tackles the problem of food like an automaton, 'with a peculiar precision and intent care in the handling of knife and fork' (106). In reaction to the danger Guy seems to represent, Ludovic occludes himself, has his name removed from notices, goes 'as it were, 'under-ground'' (93), as have the mess-painting, Air Marshal Beech beneath the billiard table, Fido in his culvert, the soldiers on Crete in their slit trenches, the Spaniards in their caves, Tito in his, General Whale in his bunker. As a complex image of loss and insufficiency it operates throughout the trilogy. Ludovic loses reality as Apthorpe once did. On Guy's arrival at his hospital room, Apthorpe had become oddly reanimated, fumbling automatically for his pipe. Now Ludovic sits immobile in his darkened room, 'empty-handed, staring' (93), and on Freemantle's entry wonders

'Perhaps if I smoked a pipe, it would seem more normal. Do you think I should buy a pipe? . . . I will buy a pipe, if it would make you easier in your mind about me.' (93-94)

Ludovic moves further into fantasy when de Souza begins to cast him in various fabulous stories - 'The commandant, does he exist?' (98). As the tales multiply Ludovic's reality is increasingly undermined, the reader aware that the 'truth' about him is scarcely less fantastic. De Souza casts him variously as priest-king, drunk, lunatic, Gestapo prisoner, Gestapo agent, Dracula, zombie. The projections are comic in themselves, but their bearing upon the narrative proper is not as simple as this. Even before de Souza has mooted to Freemantle his idea of Ludovic as zombie, the text has indulged in the appropriate imagery; Ludovic entered 'like the angel of death', has the pallor of 'the tomb' and a 'clammy hand' to confirm the 'aura of mystery and dread' to which de Souza's stories have given rise. He speaks 'from the depths of his invisible sarcophagus' to a 'hushed circle' - the references accumulate (pp. 104-105) to validate de Souza's notions. The fantastic stories he told begin to encroach in a bizarre manner upon that of the novel itself. Ludovic does indeed prowl about the camp after dark - did de Souza see a pallid 'face at the window'? He ponders an enemy agent repacking the parachutes by night to ensure a 'Roman Candle' - and Ludovic instantly assumes Guy has suffered such a fate. Together with Freemantle, the reader begins to lose a sense of what is actually happening. Jokes and tales casually thrown off seem to bear directly on the matter of the trilogy. In a sense, Ludovic the trooper, the romantic, was 'killed in Crete' (109); de Souza muses not altogether idly on Guy -

. . . a man clearly far too old for fooling about with parachutes. I should have been suspicious but I was thinking of the simple, zealous officer I knew in 1939. Four years of total war can change a man. They have changed me. I left an unimportant but conspicuous part of my left ear in Crete. Uncle Crouchback was sent here with a purpose. (111-112)

De Souza's injured ear triggers the idea of Guy's own loss in Crete, by contrast inconspicuous but important - 'he was that day to resign an immeasurable piece of his manhood'.<sup>1</sup> Within the larger fiction of Unconditional Surrender Guy is indeed here with a purpose, specifically to be injured once again and made accessible to Virginia's healing. The central themes of the trilogy are burlesqued and distorted in this episode in a manner which contrasts sharply with the otherwise 'straight', newly conventional narrative of the rest of the novel. Ludovic represents the purest fictionalizing imagination, a mind fully in retreat; his own reflexive obsessions with word and expression pass into the surrounding narrative, as did Guy's in 'Happy Warriors'. But Ludovic's case is the more extreme, and the narrative is suddenly anticipating the stories - de Souza recognizes the 'necrophilic details' (106) rather than invents them. At last an extreme fictionalizing point is reached, as it was reached in Vile Bodies when the reader confused 'real' characters with those Adam Symes created for his gossip column. The distinction, between what is really happening and what is story, is blurred, while at the same time the central themes of the novel proper are toyed with irresponsibly. Again anarchic, Ludovic has escaped from the character granted him briefly in 'State Sword', and declined quite literally into a type - the type 'from antiquated farce, 'caught bending', inviting the boot' (114).

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1 Officers and Gentlemen (1955), 1973, p. 221.

There is a moment immediately prior to the adventures of the training camp when Kerstie Kilbannock, fearing her husband's intentions, tries to speak to Guy at HOO HQ,

. . . but a strange voice answered from the shade of the megalosaurus saying that Captain Crouchback had been posted to another department and was inaccessible.  
(91)

There the section closes, and in a muted way something unique has happened. From being the ever-frustrated outsider, hovering on the fringes of action, on the brink of involvement, Guy is suddenly inaccessible himself, the object of search - he is somewhere else, doing something else, at last taken up by the story. The detail anticipates Guy's moving, at the physical centre of this last novel, to the narrative centre of attention. As the medium through which much previous fiction has emerged he has been an occluded quasi-narrator, 'indirectly responsible'<sup>1</sup> for Apthorpe's death, loosely attached to the Mugg commando, uselessly peripheral to the Cretan operation. At this mid-point of the final novel the story becomes Guy's own. He becomes the narrated, and, free of the neutralising influence of his fictional ideals, he 'comes alive'.<sup>2</sup> Bedridden by his injury, Guy entertains singly a number of visitors, in sum a succession of interviews which in its formal shapeliness and steady concentration upon the still, central figure, is strongly opposed to the restless, wide-ranging character of the previous volumes.

The first of Guy's visitors fail, in fact to reach him. As camp commandant it is Ludovic's part to visit his injured 'client', but for Ludovic Guy is the agent of 'destiny . . . final fate, destruction, ruin, death' (87).

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1 'Synopsis of Preceding Volumes', p. 10.

2 Walter Allen, Tradition and Dream (1964), 1971, p. 233.

Visiting, Ludovic might have realized that nothing was suspected - but the retreat has been too complete, Ludovic is already the zombie. The Guy that de Souza seeks is a British agent, or a fascist agent, or a compromised homosexual - some figure spawned by 'a 'story-conference' of jaded script-writers' (111). Unsurprisingly, Guy is not found; de Souza is quite content to enjoy a blackmarket dinner and a 'little outing' (113). Guy was 'the source of invention to beguile a wet day' (118); he has no more concern for the man himself than had Kilbannock for Trimmer.

The first person to actually find the patient is Padfield, but he brings nothing Guy needs; the magazine 'Survival' is the brainchild of an editor who believes 'that the human race was destined to dissolve in chaos' (39), while the Staffordshire figure of Gladstone unites the equally jeopardised optimisms of craftsmanship and democratic parliament. The disillusioned Guy has 'nowhere to put him' (123). These gifts, and Padfield himself, represent that modern, corrupted mingling of art and politics which has confounded Guy's simple view of the world, and which he has learnt, bitterly, to recognise. However, the simplicity of his former outlook is then itself embodied for the reader. Peregrine Crouchback is ushered into the narrative on the short, isolated line, 'His next caller was his uncle, Peregrine', ensuring an awareness of formal succession. Peregrine's first words indicate his sole concern.

He sat holding his umbrella and soft, shabby hat  
and looked at his nephew reproachfully.  
'You should take more care of yourself,' he said,  
'now that you are head of the family.' (124)

The values with which Peregrine has equipped himself to tackle the modern world are precisely those Guy is surrendering, ultimately in the

sacrificing of the pure Crouchback lineage. The portrait of Guy's uncle is necessarily finely balanced; he must represent a virtuous, unchanging standard which is nevertheless obsolete and which must be relinquished. His loyalty and steadfastness are also an inertness; he

exemplified the indefinable numbness which Guy recognized intermittently in himself; the saturnine strain which in Ivo had swollen to madness, terror of which haunted Box-Bender when he studied his son's letters from prison-camp.  
(124)

The details of the portrait add up to another projection of Guy's own possible future; like Gervase in France and Waybroke in Italy, Peregrine never, finally, accomplished; he contracted 'a complicated form of dysentery on his first day in the Dardanalles' (124). Like Guy he suffered the symbolic knee injury - 'It's never been quite the same since' (126) - and is a collector, a bibliophile; 'well travelled, well read, well informed, he was a stranger in the world' (131). Like the antique-dealing Tietjens of Ford Madox Ford's Last Post, Peregrine picks up the pieces of a broken order, sifting through the books about to be pulped for 'Survival'.<sup>1</sup> He can comprehend Virginia only as

a Scarlet Woman; the fatal woman who had brought about the fall of the house of Crouchback; and, what was more, to Uncle Peregrine she fully looked the part. . . . Uncle Peregrine was fascinated . . . he hung about the scene fascinated . . . played the part of duenna . . . (131-133)

All the keywords that registered Guy's hypnotism in earlier volumes recur. Peregrine is too old to make the adjustment forced upon Guy. Christmases with the Scrope-Welds are already losing their feudal stability, the

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. the metaphors of dismemberment noted in clothing, and in the partitioning of HOO HQ.

idealised harmony of Christmas at Doubting Hall; the faithful retainers are now 'paid 'helpers'' (144). His hostess remarks that Peregrine is "the only link with Christmas as it used to be . . . Do you think things will ever be normal again?" (145). The answer, of course, is no; Peregrine knows this, though Virginia does not,<sup>1</sup> and his death, like hers, is inevitable; neither could have survived the change.

After his transfer to Peregrine's flat Guy receives as his third visitor Ian Kilbannock. Thinking inevitably in terms of image, Ian is surprised that Ivor Claire, 'his little faux pas in Crete' forgotten, should go 'charging off to be a hero now' (127). This tells us nothing new of Kilbannock, but provides the occasion for Guy's reflection on the trilogy's central opposition, the 'acceptance of sacrifices and the will to win'. Guy will eventually learn that the true antithesis is a will to war, but this, and Mme Kanyi, are still to come.

Guy's fourth and prime visitor is Virginia, through whom the vital sacrifice is made. This development is of course the chief subject of criticism explicating the moral significance of the trilogy, and needs no detailed examination here. In the decisive exchange, Guy and Virginia emerge completely as narrated 'real people', Guy at last aware of his limitations, of the Halberdier spirit which misled him, and Virginia furthest from the type imagined by Peregrine and Spruce. The overthrow of that distorting fictional medium is registered openly during the passage, 'It was all as light as the heaviest drawing-room comedy and each had a dread at heart' (146). The episode does not conform to its

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<sup>1</sup> For her war is 'a malevolent suspension of 'normality' . . . The interruption had been prolonged beyond all reason. The balance would soon come right . . .' (147)

model, just as the sinister Sir Ralph Brompton was quite evidently not the 'figure of obsolescent light comedy' he outwardly resembled (29). Ludovic, in contrast, has reverted swiftly to the type already noted, the 'figure from antiquated farce' (114). The movement towards life, and the real, and towards death, and the unreal, is repeatedly expressed in these terms of a word/world opposition.

The last visitor provokes Guy's longest speech and the trilogy's definite statement of the possibilities of action in an unjust war, as he justifies himself to Kerstie Kilbannock. His decision is a practical application of his father's principles, an acceptance of 'loss of face' before Kerstie's ridicule. It is above all a Catholic solution, baffling her mere propriety.

The second part of the novel ends here, Guy firmly established at the conclusion of the debate which his succession of visitors has constituted. Each has been representative of attitudes and issues raised by his forlorn crusade, and as each is considered and dismissed Guy's slow advance to the position of accepting Virginia is recalled. The complete episode represents a narrative tour de force, a fully executed movement undertaken by a complete narrator, and it is typical of the sureness with which Unconditional Surrender sweeps even the non-Catholic reader towards acceptance of its argument.

Of all the titles Waugh gave to the individual 'Books' into which each volume of the trilogy is divided, only that of the very last, 'The Death Wish', is not ironic; the third book of Unconditional Surrender is about the death-wishes of several characters, above all Guy's own. His political



education in Yugoslavia, and the final collapse of his crusade in the face of Mme Kanyi's diagnosis are the matters of this last book, and these events are dealt with in a narrative style now at its most direct; there is an irreducible quality in the argument and presentation alike. It is inevitable that one should ascribe this quality to the degree of autobiography present here. A large part of this section, concerning Guy's dealings with the Jews, has been transferred almost verbatim from Waugh's 1949 short story 'Compassion'.<sup>1</sup> In that story 'Major Gordon' was a slight sketch, the Guy, perhaps, of Men at Arms, though without the troubled past. The tale, shorn of its perfunctory introduction and conclusion, is otherwise fitted into Unconditional Surrender without emendation; Waugh clearly felt that matter, rather than any niceties of manner, was paramount here. That there should be no rewriting is surely remarkable; no concession is made to the immediate shape of the complex narrative of some eleven years later. There is an abruptness in this that is allied to the directness of presentation here of historical and geographical detail.

Few tourists, even the most assiduous, explored the Apulian coast. Bari contains much that should have attracted them; the old town full of Norman building, the bones of St. Nicholas enshrined in silver; the new town spacious and commodious. But for centuries it lay neglected by all save native businessmen . . . Near by was a small, ancient town where an Italian family had set up an illicit restaurant. They did not deal in paper currency but accepted petrol, cigarettes, and medical supplies in exchange for dishes of fresh fish cooked with olive oil and white truffles and garlic.  
. . . Bridges were down and the rails up on the little single-track railway-line that had once led from Begoy to Zagreb. The trunk road to the Balkans ran east. There the German lorries streamed night and day without interruption . . . (167-169-171)

On occasion this kind of matter-of-fact omniscience sits rather uneasily

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<sup>1</sup> Month, II (Aug. 1949) pp. 79-98.

alongside detail clearly less factual; to the excerpt first quoted 'Guy had never before set foot there' is weakly appended, before the next paragraph launches again into an account of how Bari was 'the only place in the Second World War to suffer from gas'. The following paragraph then struggles to return to our present, 'Now, early in 1944 . . .', after the patent hindsight of that grand title.

The effect of such disjunctions - one might also cite the narrator's stepping-in to aid General Whale with his simile<sup>1</sup> - is to suggest in this last book that certain impatience with the business of contrivance, of transposing into 'art', noted in some of the earlier post-war fiction. This is clearly a most appropriate way in which to express Guy's own final emancipation, his escape from the bonds of a fictionalizing imagination, and is here a wholly positive development. Ludovic, on a reciprocal course, has spawned his death wish; 'All words were right . . . He barely applied his mind to his task. He was possessed, the mere amanuensis of some power, not himself, making for - what?' (160). This impatience is apparent in several details, and generally in a directness of narrative; the destruction of Monte Cassino is without question 'sacrilege' (168). Guy has encountered various figures he suspects of being spies during the trilogy. Rarely was he sure enough to act; now he can be certain, for Bakic is 'the spy' (176). Arguing with Gilpin in the hallway of Bari HQ, Guy is finally admitted at the command of 'a voice from above'. As he climbs the stairs 'The voice became a man on the landing; a lame, lean man, wearing the badges of a regiment of lancers . . .' (161). This would be normal enough as an example of Guy's meetings, were it not for the

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1 'He felt (and had he known the passage might so have expressed it) like a beautiful and ineffectual angel beating in the void his luminous wings in vain' (191).

sentence which precedes the mounting of the stairs - 'This was Brigadier Cape'. The narrator, and thus the reader, is ahead of Guy, of whose faulty impressions we are at last free. The same kind of briskness was in evidence a little earlier. As Guy meets Major Marchpole, 'as though symbolically, the bulb hanging from the ceiling glowed, flickered, and shone brilliantly' (155). Within five lines the same bulb 'as though symbolically, flickered, glowed, and went out'. The imagery that has persistently linked darkness with uncertainty and ambiguity is being openly parodied; two pages later we are told that

The exhilaration which Guy had experienced at finding himself abroad after two years of war-time England flickered and died like the bulb at Headquarters.  
(157)

The reader is, as it were, gripped by the arm and trotted briskly from one 'significant' image or episode to the next. Guy's lingering belief that it is possible to be 'a military liaison officer, nothing more' (178) spawns the elaborately metaphorical spa gardens, with their 'graded paths, each with a 'view-point'' (172). Here Guy walks, enjoying the artificial and orderly harmony of the 'specimen trees, statuary, a bandstand, a pond with carp and exotic ducks, the ornamental cages . . . (with) rabbits in one, fowls in another, a red squirrel in a third' (178). This kind of categorising, of animals or liaison officers, is defied by the political manoeuvring all about Guy; things are not that simple. By the time Mme Kanyi has enlightened him, Guy appreciates this. He cannot extricate the Jews, only secure for them boots and clothing; he 'daily took a handful of broken biscuits to the squirrel' (230), but it remains caged. The harmony of the garden is finally obscured by snow - 'From fence to fence the snow-obliterated lawns and beds lay open; the paths were only traceable by boot-prints' (230).

The insistence and overtness of this metaphor are a part of the overall earnestness which pervades the narrative now. Critics have complained of the irrelevance of the air-crash Kilbannock experiences (and again one knows Waugh had the experience himself) but in effect that irrelevance contributes to this earnestness. As an incident, it simply exists within the narrative, confounding the notion of a 'modern', foxily active text working through covert symbol and parody. The parallels with Alice in Wonderland, so often drawn in Waugh's fiction to undermine narrative security, are being at last neutralised here. Ian likens the scene to 'the croquet match in Alice in Wonderland' and senses 'Another great space of time, two minutes by a watch' (212-214); but such distortions are caused merely by concussion, their effect only something like an 'alcoholic hangover' (215). Fantastic performances like that given by Job - to whom the dazed journalist alludes - in Officers and Gentlemen are thus deflated, demythologized as Ludovic was; Job was merely drunk, the 'scene' at Bellamy's the product of Guy's own mental aberration. The crash will only be converted into story by Sneiffel and Kilbannock - 'Lovely pictures . . . Sensational if they come out . . . My, but you've got a story' (215-216).

Guy is never able to bring his serious purpose, the vestiges of his crusade, to bear on events at Begoy, lacking as he is in either the blind commitment of Cattermole or de Souza's more plastic talents. The former's zeal is in many ways a counterpart of Guy's own early fervour; the two were at Balliol together, where neither were prepared for the type of history there are making now. Cattermole believes there are 'no politics in war-time; just love of country and love of race' (164), and his account of the situation in Jugoslavia is consequently vitiated. His shapely exposition anticipates the harmony of the spa gardens -

He unrolled a wall-map. 'The position is fluid,' he said, a curious official insincerity masking his easier, earlier manner. 'This is as up to date as we can make it.'

And for twenty minutes he delivered what was plainly a set exposition. Here were the 'liberated areas'; this was the route of one brigade, that of another; here was the headquarters of a division, there of a corps. A huge, intricately involved campaign of encirclements and counter-attacks took shape in Cattermole's precise, donnish phrases. (162-3)

The phrases and trappings of the Cretan disaster are evident; the map, the 'fluid' position, the ideal plan are credible only in Cattermole's 'precise, donnish phrases', mimicked in the elegant balance of 'this . . . that . . . here . . . there . . .'. He is still the theorist, the academic delivering his 'little lecture', 'my tutorial' (163, 165), witness to courage 'of which I should have been sceptical in the best authenticated classical text' (165). His concept of 'the enemy' is as simplistic as once was Guy's, his concept of 'comrades in arms' the equal of Guy's feeling for the Halberdiers. Cattermole speaks with

something keener than loyalty, equally impersonal, a counterfeit almost of mystical love as portrayed by the sensual artists of the high baroque. (165)

Cattermole's antithesis, but the man with the task of accomplishing the heroic mission, is Frank de Souza, clearly Waugh's portrait of the Modern Political Animal, with commitment to no cause but himself. Cattermole had put Guy 'in the picture' (161), the wearied Cape had offered 'the other side of the picture' (166); de Souza, like Kilbannock, knows that the picture has first to be painted, and intends that his should be 'a very pretty picture - an oil painting' (203). De Souza will raise a clenched fist for the partisans, and generally wield the appropriate 'leader' phrases; his conversation is clipped, slick, a collage of tag-word and cliché -

'I'm afraid in the whirligig of war I've now become your commanding officer, uncle . . . We shall make history here, uncle. I must find a present I've got for the general in my valise. It may help cement anti-fascist solidarity . . . Officially, it is temporary, de facto, ad hoc, and so forth pending ratification by plebiscite . . . The Praesidium is strictly for foreign consumption . . . Now's the time to forget we're Jews and simply remember we are anti-fascist . . . I suggest . . . the brigadiers should keep their rank and their units be called "a striking force". I think that could be made impressive. "The survivors of the Sixth Offensive".'  
(193-194-203-204-207)

Guy has consistently erred in placing too much faith in lightweight ideals, but de Souza is a grim portrait of the opposite case, exploiting as he does any and all convenient standpoints. Raked together by his eclectic mind, the ideals and principles he juggles are robbed of worth or serious meaning, becoming merely worn phrases, appropriated to his own cynical ends. It is the less humorous side of Kilbannock's gaudy journalism - the blockhouse raid is a more sombre version of 'Operation Popgun', in which people are actually killed. Guy's at times bizarre drive to link signified to signifier has to be seen, finally, in the light of this terrible emptying of ideals of their meaning he finds about him.

This account of the war trilogy has described how the obstacles which prevent Guy Crouchback from responding with maturity and realism to his experiences are symptomatic, in Waugh's analysis, of a larger social failure. The honourable private man is increasingly forced to reconstruct his experience in a form which will enable him to participate in modern society - the alternative, a surrendering of principle, would be destructive of the man himself. He is abetted in his reworking by those

who will pick over the ruins of the destroyed orders while he is thus engaged - the politicians, the journalists, image-wielders. A description of Paris from Waugh's first travel-book supplies an appropriate image of the resultant society.

It has been so overlaid with successive plasterings of paste and proclamation that it has come to resemble those rotten old houses one sometimes sees during their demolition, whose crumbling frame is only held together by the solid strata of wall-papers.

A feeling for the fallibility of story was clearly Waugh's from the very beginning of his career.

Guy contrives a kind of escape from the illusion that seems his inevitable lot under this system. If the images, stories and ideals of the two preceding volumes were to be effectively overthrown, Waugh had to construct in this final novel some narrative position evidently firmer in foundation than those which variously recorded Guy's troubled crusade. The position adopted is Catholic - the trilogy, though not about Catholicism, is a fully Catholic fiction; in Patricia Corr's words, 'The Faith as a way of life is the core of the war novels.'<sup>2</sup> Waugh's thesis, by the beginning of Unconditional Surrender, is broadly speaking one which equates story-telling/ role-playing/ image-making with untruth/ error/ delusion. His task was therefore not an easy one, if Guy was to be extricated from this reflexive dilemma - he is after all a fictional character, Unconditional Surrender a novel. Waugh's method is to insinuate a kind of denial of the story impulse. The omniscience of the super-narrator is working to this end. Much apparently incidental detail

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1 Labels, 1930, pp. 16-17.

2 'Evelyn Waugh: Sanity and Catholicism', Studies: an Irish Quarterly Review, LI (1962), 388-399.

is supplied, from Kilbannock's air-crash to Spruce's address. The neatly exploited impatience with 'artistic' techniques has been noted. A kind of information which straddles the boundary between fact and fiction is offered to the reader - the Germans needed Yugoslavia as a means of retreat; Bari was rarely visited by pre-war tourists; American bomber-crews wasted aircraft; the Sword of Stalingrad was based on a commando dagger; Broome Hall stands just off the Exeter Road; Guy was at Balliol in 1921-24. Only when thus arranged do such items allow of simple distinctions. The effect, in all of this, is to persuade the reader of the reliability of this narrative, and of this narrator. Ultimately, of course, one does not forget that this is only another novel - detail is only apparently incidental - but as one reads a barrage of signals is encouraging acceptance of the narrative as somehow more 'authentic', in a literary-historical sense more 'conventional', than those preceding. The formal care taken over Guy's reverie at Broome, or his days at Peregrine's flat, palpably that of an arch storyteller, are conventional in this sense. Waugh has equated a modern sickness with experimental narrative form; his cure for the first is formulated in terms of the latter's repudiation. His solution is specifically Catholic, but nonetheless an artistically complete and persuasive one. The terms of the equation, as it were, are private, but the algebra with which they are balanced is public property. One certainly need not, in recognising the success of Unconditional Surrender, subscribe to Caroline Gordon's dictum, that 'only a Christian . . . can be a complete novelist',<sup>1</sup> but it remains true that Waugh exploits the emotional and institutional presence of 'creed' in itself, in bringing the war trilogy to a satisfying conclusion.

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1 'Some Readings and Misreadings', Sewanee Review, LXI (1953), 384-407.



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- (a) Texts
- (b) Book-length studies
- (c) Primary Criticism - general
  - of novels up to Put Out More Flags
  - of novels from Brideshead Revisited onward
- (d) Secondary Criticism - studies which include discussion of  
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- (e) Other Reading

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