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Claremont McKenna College

**The Value of Attending University: An Analysis on the Novels of Evelyn Waugh and
their Adaptations**

submitted to
Professor Kathryn Stergiopoulos

by
Evan Molineux

for
Senior Thesis
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I. Introduction

On the 21st of June 1930 Evelyn Waugh wrote a piece for the Daily Mail. The title of the piece asked the simple question, *Was Oxford Worth While?* The first half of the article places the question of worth in terms of money. Waugh asks: “Is the money spent on university education a sound capital investment?” (*A Little Order* 15). He questions the pragmatism of his investment and whether the return made was worth the £1000 it cost him to earn a degree from Oxford in the early 1920s. He then asks, whether he could have placed his money in an even more worthwhile venture. The simple answer Waugh gives in regard to the pragmatic value of his investment, is no. Oxford was not worth it. Instead, “as far as direct monetary returns are considered, our parents would have done far better to have packed us off to Monte Carlo to try our luck at the tables” (*A Little Order* 16). However, according to Waugh analyzing an education in terms of monetary yield from a university degree is “a narrow and silly way to regard education” (*A Little Order* 16).

The true value of receiving a university education is not the job or salary resulting from the degree, but instead lies in the culture of the institution. Waugh admits that in terms of an academic education, Oxford “is not up to date in the latest theories of aesthetics and psychology...the undergraduates express the heartiest contempt for everything to do with art or intellect.” (*A Little Order* 16) The institution should no longer simply be regarded for its academic superiority. Waugh explains how the value of Oxford extends far beyond the degree received. Instead, the true value is found in the process of receiving it.

Waugh states that an education at an institution like Oxford was and is worthwhile because it provides students with “another four years in which to grow up gradually. It puts them out of the way of their fellow-citizens while they are making fools of themselves.” The practical learning comes not through books or lectures, but because students “can learn to get drunk or not to get drunk; they can edit their own papers and air their opinions; they can learn how to give parties; they can find out, before they are too busy, what really amuses and excites them; and they can do all this in a town by themselves.” Oxford allows students essential time for which to prolong having to enter the working world. Waugh notes the absurdity to the fact that a society would “pretend that a boy of eighteen, however sound he has been as a school prefect, is a fully grown man.” Regardless of a boy’s aptitude or maturity, a university experience is essential because it provides a unique, exploratory experience that will temporarily prevent students from “the dreary and futile jobs that wait for most of them” and give them a chance at “keeping their sense of humour and self-respect.” (*A Little Order* 17)

In his novels *Brideshead Revisited* and *Decline and Fall* Waugh shows the positive effects of providing young men with the appropriate period of time, setting, and culture to grow up within. In *Brideshead Revisited* going to Oxford allows both Charles Ryder and Sebastian Flyte the opportunity to separate from their families and engage in a unique world that fosters their development. In the world of Oxford the boys drink alcohol, collect art, throw parties, and fraternize with other students currently engaged in the same experience. The boys hardly attend class and struggle academically, but their experience at Oxford is entirely positive because they are immersed in a culture that promotes their constant growth. The lives of the boys do not derail until they are

prematurely removed from their educational oasis or when exterior forces impose on their lifestyles. Waugh shows how once removed from Oxford, Charles and Sebastian still try to engage in their same juvenile behavior, yet how outside of Oxford their growth is no longer facilitated. Especially with Sebastian, Waugh shows the extreme consequences that arise once his family restricts his experience at Oxford and eventually try to remove him completely from the college. Sebastian experiences an intense and rapid decline until he removes himself from normal society and becomes an alcoholic, which eventually leads to his sickness and death.

Charles is able to learn from the contrast between his positive and negative experiences growing up as a student both inside and outside of Oxford. However, in Waugh's other novel *Decline and Fall* Paul Pennyfeather is only given a brief taste of Oxford, before he is quickly thrown into a chaotic universe. Paul's descent in the novel is helpless because he has no experience to reflect back upon or an appropriate environment of support. Unlike Charles, Paul is unable to return to Oxford until the novel's Epilogue. Charles is able to draw on his experiences as a student within the narrative and grow; Paul is never afforded this opportunity and his growth is restricted.

Waugh creates a division between spaces in order to reinforce why attending an institution like Oxford is worthwhile for his protagonists. When Charles drinks alcohol at Oxford, his experiences are positive and become associated with moments like his first encounter with Sebastian: "I might well have spent my three or four years in the University and never have met him, but for the chance of his getting drunk one evening in my college" (*Brideshead Revisited* 25). However, in situations like when Charles and Sebastian leave Oxford and go to London, their drunkenness is not rewarded and instead

the consequence is that they are thrown into prison. Since Paul is removed from Oxford at the start of the novel, when he drinks in *Decline and Fall*, the alcohol serves primarily as fuel for the novel's chaos. For example, when his colleague Captain Grimes laments over the failure of his marriage (which happens because he forgot to mention to his new fiancée that he is already married), the fact that they were "drinking cocktails in the Palm Court before dinner" (*Decline and Fall* 128) precedes the actual scene. Their constant drinking sporadically breaks up their conversation. This scene eventually devolves into Grimes getting so drunk that he exclaims in front of a crowd: "I can juggle with a whacking great bottle and a lump of ice and two knives. Look!" (*Decline and Fall* 136). The next instance that he is referred to in the text is in regard to his perceived suicide. Paul is unable to achieve any real growth throughout the novel, until the very end when he is finally allowed to return to Oxford.

Waugh's sophomore novel, *Vile Bodies*, provides a completely antithetical setting to Oxford. The novel catalogues the experiences of a group similar in age to Charles, Sebastian, and Paul, but their world denies education and promotes a society that has devolved into complete chaos. The novel's central figure Adam Fenwick-Symes is sucked into this world and becomes trapped within the riotous universe of the aristocratic youth's that Waugh ironically refers to as "The Bright Young Things". Waugh uses the novel to show a world where everyone is denied the educational experience he cites as a necessity in his article. The result for Adam is that he is tossed around through a series of discordant action and like Paul is never afforded any opportunity for growth. However, unlike Paul, Adam is hardly the center of the novel's action and instead is used as a way to transition between action and nonsensical situations for other characters. Waugh shows

through the other characters in his novel how without a proper, formative education they are doomed to act idiotic, spoiled, and foster a meaningless world of simple comforts. Aside from Adam, The Bright Young Things are seemingly flushed with money, yet their wealth is unable to correct the issues of their universe and instead magnifies it. Their senseless behavior cries out for the corrective, formative education they would receive at an institution like Oxford. It is not until the end of the novel when The Bright Young Things are confronted with the intense realism of war that the truth of their characters as entirely incompetent is unapologetically revealed.

These three novels all work to back up Waugh's claim as to the true necessity of sending young people to university. The film and television adaptations of these works also work to similar effects. *Brideshead Revisited*, *Decline and Fall*, and *Vile Bodies* were all used as the source material for either films or television series. In 1981 *Brideshead Revisited* was turned into an eleven episode miniseries, directed by Charles Sturridge and Michael Lindsay-Hogg. The series was notable for sticking closely to its source material and transferring the images of the novel in an almost identical fashion to television. The series gave a modern audience a clear view into the world of Oxford and England during the 1920s. It utilized expansive shots of the actual university through location shooting and color patterns to show a nostalgic image of Oxford. Stephen Fry's 2004 film adaptation of *Vile Bodies*, *Bright Young Things*, worked to a similar effect as it adhered closely to its subject matter. It also used on screen techniques like quick crosscuts and cluttered frames to illustrate the chaotic world of the novel. The film roots its characters distinctly within the time period of the novel, with set designs, costumes, and music that all echo 1920s London. The primary effect of these two adaptations is to

reinforce the points made in Waugh's novels through the added visual effects, which film and television can achieve that a novel does not have the advantage of utilizing.

Therefore the *Brideshead Revisited* television series and *Bright Young Things* reinforce Waugh's point on the value of education.

The film adaptation of *Decline and Fall* takes a slightly different approach in the treatment of its source material compared to the other aforementioned adaptations. Instead of sticking directly to the novel, *Decline and Fall of a Birdwatcher* (Goodwin, 1969) places the narrative of its story in a contemporary universe to the year in which the film was made. Unlike *Brideshead Revisited* and *Bright Young Things*, Goodwin does not make a film which reflects the world of Waugh, but instead reflects his own. The film possesses images and a score that are definitive of the late 1960s. The film also takes greater liberty with changing the course of its narrative, with a major shift away from the novel taken during the film's ending. However, despite these changes the film still shows the chaotic world of Waugh's novel and uses it to show the transformative effects of a positive educational environment and the degradation, which occurs in a more unholy environment. The film's shift in time period simply proves the timeless truth to the point made in Waugh's article *Was Oxford Worth While?*

Despite having been made across the span of nearly eight decades since Waugh first published his novels, the adaptations of his work reflect the constant relevance of his themes to the English audience. The liberties that Goodwin takes in modernizing his film and moving away from the world of Waugh reinforce the power of these themes. The adaptations use a variety of points to back up the fact that an education is valuable because it allows students "another four years in which to grow up gradually" and teaches

them things like how “They can learn to get drunk or not to get drunk” (*A Little Learning* 17).

II. The Transformative Effects of Oxford in *Brideshead Revisited*

Oxford is the main setting of *Brideshead Revisited's* Book One. The formative experiences had at Oxford prove vital for the characters. The university becomes a romanticized space characterized by a sense of openness. Oxford embodies the practical function of school described by Waugh in his piece *Was Oxford Worth While?* It gives Charles and Sebastian “another four years in which to grow up gradually.” Waugh titles book one of the novel “Et in Arcadia Ego”, which translates from Latin into the phrase “And in Arcadia I Am”. In 42 B.C. Virgil established Arcadia as an “imaginative creation...it is the land of shepherds and shepherdesses, the land of poetry and love.” (Wooden 36) Warren Wooden describes the nature of the Utopia as coming from “a growing humanistic dissatisfaction with the corruptions of the civilized world and a longing for a simple, rational and humane style of life.” (36) This definition foreshadows the effect of book one’s setting.

A straightforward reading of “Et in Arcadia Ego” shows Oxford as the novel’s Utopia. The quote highlights the transformative effects of the university. The declarative statement of “I am” reflects the actions of the students. For Charles and Sebastian, Oxford will serve as a setting that facilitates their ability to exist and live properly. The phrase establishes Waugh’s idea that Oxford will serve as a fantastical setting that will allow for intense development of his characters. In his essay on Waugh, David Lodge describes a similar sensation in *Brideshead Revisited* and notes how “By 1922, the sober veterans of the war had departed, and the University was ‘re-possessed by the young.’” The manner of their repossession – the drinking, the ragging, the dandyism, the defiance

of authority, the experimentation with every style of life and art-is unforgettably evoked, for all its nostalgic idealization, in the long first section of *Brideshead Revisited*.” (13)

In the novel’s first section, the depiction of Oxford is characterized by Charles’s unique perspective of innocence and interest. He moves into Oxford with a sense of amazement that highlights both the idealization of the space and foreshadows the experiences he will have. Charles’ narration establishes Oxford as a fantastical setting. He blends ideas of mythology with an acute sense of his surrounding nature and further recognizes the significance of coming to Oxford by connecting it to his present:

That day, too, I had come not knowing my destination. It was Eights Week. Oxford – submerged now and obliterated, irrecoverable as Lyonesse, so quickly have the waters come flooding in – Oxford, in those days, was still a city of aquatint. In her spacious and quiet streets men walked and spoke as they had done in Newman’s day; her autumnal mists, her gray 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. (*Brideshead Revisited* 21)

Charles connects his arrival in the novel’s preface at Brideshead to his earlier arrival at Oxford. The connection comes through the word “too”. Like his arrival in the prologue at Brideshead, Charles “had come not knowing my destination.” This is the first sentence Waugh provides about Oxford and it is strongly characterized by an overwhelming nostalgia. Oxford is both positively associated with Brideshead and with the sense of adventure that comes with arriving at an unknown destination.

Through his introduction, Charles also brings in a contemporary perspective of the university. His nostalgia is interrupted by the realization that Oxford is now “submerged and obliterated, irrecoverable as Lyonesse, so quickly have the waters come flooding in.” The “submerged” is most obviously a reference to the Second World War. World War II curtailed time for students at Oxford and a major military presence became present on the campus. Oxford, like the rest of England was literally submerged by the country’s involvement in the war. However, using the comparison of the lost quality to “Lyonesse” extends Charles’ sense of nostalgia. In an essay titled “Lyonesse: The Evolution of a Fable”, A.D.H. Bivar discusses how the mythic land of Arthurian legend was referenced heavily throughout English literature from the 17th to 19th centuries. As a result of unregulated mythology the facts became distended and the name “Lyonesse” lost meaning. Like Bivar’s point, the university has lost the meaning it once held for Charles and it is now “irrecoverable”. Charles specifies the quality that Oxford has lost because it used to be “a city of aquatint.” Describing Oxford as a city of aquatint is peculiar given the singular definition related to printmaking¹. This definition relates to a number of aspects in the life of Charles given the novel’s later contexts. Removing those future contexts, the aquatint most likely refers to the inspirational effects of the city. On the most basic level of the word’s definition, the artistic process reflects Charles eventual profession as a painter, which was developed at Oxford. A more in depth reading of the

¹ Aquatint - a variety of etching widely used by printmakers to achieve a broad range of tonal values. The process is called aquatint because finished prints often resemble watercolor drawings or wash drawings. The technique consists of exposing a copperplate to acid through a layer of melted granulated resin.

word alludes to Charles' exposure to potentially dangerous influences. Just as copper and acid mix in the process of aquatint, Charles was forced into relationships with the human equivalents of acid, which came together to shape his adult character.

“Aquatint” also works to separate the past from the present and associate a negative emotion with contemporary Oxford. A sharp contrast is established with the waters, which “quickly have...come flooding in”. The tense places the flooding waters in the present, which is contrasted with the “city of aquatint”, which is no longer part of the present, but existed “in those days”. Aquatint is an art form, which has colors and a surface aesthetic that resembles watercolor painting, but does not actually use a water-based paint. Therefore when water is incorporated, as represented by the incoming floodwaters, it completely changes the art form. The classic quality of Oxford, represented by the aquatint is gone and replaced quickly by an overwhelming normalcy of the new form, which can be assumed to be art based in watercolor paint. This notion of the genuine, uniqueness of the university being lost is reflected in the final line of the passage, which in summation states that “exhaled the soft airs of centuries of youth.” “Exhaled” presents an action of transition and abandonment. Just as air is exhaled from the human body, the “soft airs of centuries of youth” exuded from Oxford. However, again denoted by the tense of the passage, this air of youth is no longer being “exhaled” and like the quality of “aquatint”, Charles's reflection shows how Oxford has changed and its current state is a negative one.

Charles' unknown destination is however not Oxford. At the point of this introduction, Charles is well established within the university. He introduces Oxford not on his first day, but on a day during his “third term since matriculation” (*Brideshead*

Revisited 25). The in media res introduction to Oxford is characteristic of the setting's effect. The space is defined by the experiences it fostered. Waugh immediately establishes the value in attending Oxford. Charles' initial reflection does not provide a physical description of the university, but recounts an adventure with Sebastian.

Waugh particularly places the order of events in his first chapter through the voice of his narrator. He moves from an introduction of Oxford into an account of Sebastian Flyte and then finally into his first day at university. After Charles' introduction, the novel's first book is rich with the characteristics Lodge gives Oxford: "the drinking, the ragging, the dandyism, the defiance of authority, the experimentation with every style of life and art". However, Sebastian has to be placed as the focus of the introduction because without his influence Charles' life would not have matured in the same way. Starting the book with "I have been here before," I said; I had been there before; first with Sebastian more than twenty years ago on a cloudless day in June" (*Brideshead Revisited* 21) gives immediate attention to the novel's most significant relationship. Sebastian literally comes first both in Charles' memory and in the chronology of Book One. This first memory of Sebastian is also defined as "cloudless," which reflects the quality of Charles's narration. However, the negative influence of Sebastian is present even if it is not fully realized by Charles as the narrator. Early in the text he comments "I sometimes wonder whether, had it not been for Sebastian, I might have trodden the same path as Collins round the cultural water-wheel." (*Brideshead Revisited* 47) This sense of doubt occasionally creeps into the narration, but is often explicated through external voices.

An example of the type of exterior influence that affects Charles is his cousin Jasper. Charles is told by Jasper that "I expected you to make mistakes your first year.

We all do...But you, my dear Charles, whether you realize it or not, have gone straight, hook, line and sinker, into the *very worst set in the University.*" (*Brideshead Revisited* 44)

This remonstrance is definitive of Charles's time at Oxford and his relationship with Sebastian. He is told off for his social circles, drinking habits, lack of attendance in class, physical appearance, and most significantly his lavish quality of living. Jasper makes the point that "I don't know what allowance my uncle makes you, but I don't mind betting you're spending double. All *this.*" (*Brideshead Revisited* 45) This expensive quality of life is a feature Charles has adopted chiefly from Sebastian. In this passage, the italicization of "this" provides significance through emphasis. The "this" turns into a much larger and exaggerated image of all Charles' unnecessary possessions. Following the "this" is "a wide sweep of his hand the evidence of profligacy about him." A series of items are then explained having been encompassed by the sweep of the hand, including "the box of a hundred cabinet Partagas" and "a dozen frivolous, new books." (*Brideshead Revisited* 45) The language shows Charles' awareness in how ludicrous his purchases are. He describes the books as "frivolous", which connects directly back to the first description of the room before he had met Sebastian. At that point at the start of his education, "My books were meager and commonplace...and my earliest friends fitted well into this background" (*Brideshead Revisited* 28). Now that his relationship with Sebastian has been established he has abandoned any sense of modesty in place of such items as the one hundred "Partagas", a type of cigar that would probably go misunderstood by the average reader. The most significant item comes last in the list, when Jasper acknowledges "*that peculiarly noisome object*" (*Brideshead Revisited* 45). Waugh again uses italics to heighten the weight of the speech, adding special attention to

the description of “a human skull lately purchased from the School of Medicine, which, resting in a bowl of roses, formed, at the moment, the chief decoration of my table. It bore the motto ‘*Et in Arcadia ego*’ inscribed on its forehead.” (*Brideshead Revisited* 45)

The skull bearing the motto, which is shared with the title of the novel’s first book, is definitive of the formative, early years of Charles’ times at Oxford. The motto itself presents the same aforementioned meaning and significance, as it represents Oxford as the Arcadian utopia where the students are allowed to grow and learn in an unadulterated environment. The Utopian metaphor contrasts Jasper’s remonstrance and reveals how despite his misbehavior, the value of his time at Oxford is because of his experiences. The descriptive language surrounding the skull works in agreement with this idea of free unrestricted growth. Charles purchased the skull using the allowance from his uncle, showing the value of money in the Utopian Oxford. Money is never a concern for Charles; instead of focusing on dollar amounts, he shows a blatant disregard for economy in search of happiness through material possessions. The skull was also purchased from the “School of Medicine”, a specifically mentioned part of the University’s prestigious, educational institutions that Charles has almost definitely neglected other than to purchase this skull. In doing so it again reveals the idea that his education is not facilitating him to study medicine, but allowing him access to a facility that will foster his inordinate spending and behavior. The final detail of the skull is that it’s “resting in a bowl of roses”. The placement of this detail is significant given how it immediately follows that it was purchased at the “School of Medicine”. The order of the objects shows that the purpose of the skull is to be “the chief decoration of [Charles’s] table.” There is no deep, intellectual meaning Charles has applied to its placement in the room, which is

why its origins are presented as an aside to the point that it is simply an expensive decoration. The fact that the skull is placed in a “bowl of roses” also reflects the meaningless to Charles’s excess. In her essay “Just Roses”, H.J. Taylor describes the timeless style of the flower and the way that they “seem to speak as no other flower can.” (155) Taylor notes how there is not a single type of rose and therefore there is no singular symbol when the flower is included in literature. “The rose is a favorite flower but it cannot be said that every one loves and admires roses” (159), Charles roses are undefined and are therefore devoid of a specified meaning. The fact that his skull is placed in a generic “bowl of roses” again shows the way his possessions provide style without significance.

Going to Oxford allows students to purchase ornate and frivolous items and display them for their social circles. This idea of life at the university is not one inherent to an idea of a classical education, but falls in line with Waugh’s idea that a significant university education is one, which provides the students with a unique experience. The type of secluded experience that avoids the reality of dealing with money and pushes adult life aside so “After...they can begin on the dreary and futile jobs that wait for most of them, with a great deal more chance of keeping their sense of humour and self-respect.” (*A Little Order* 17) Despite not receiving money from his father, Charles spends endlessly throughout his time at university. Allan Hepburn describes the negative quality to the excessive lifestyle Charles and the rest of the students take on, as it “creates class divisions within families and pushes people to constitute new families” (243). Mr. Ryder withholds money from Charles, which is why he becomes reliant on the allowance given to him from his uncle. It is also why he becomes so attached to Sebastian and the rest of

the Flyte family. “The narrative of *Brideshead Revisited* concentrates on acts of exchange, scrimping, and prodigality.” (Hepburn 244) For Hepburn, the atmosphere created by forcing an aristocratic lifestyle on students that cannot afford it, paired with the extreme levels of spending creates a disturbing comedy. Charles is forced to “enumerate items of décor and delicacies that he has not paid for in his Oxford rooms.” (Hepburn 244) He spends money on “frivolous, new books” (*Brideshead Revisited* 45) yet in order “To cover end-of-term expenses I had sold my Omega screen to Collins for ten pounds, of which I now kept four.” (*Brideshead Revisited* 67) Charles struggles to pay for his education: “I had started the term with my battels paid and over a hundred pounds in hand. All that had gone, and not a penny paid out where I could get credit.” (*Brideshead Revisited* 67) Charles admits how “Sebastian used to tease me – ‘You spend money like a bookie’ – but all of it went on and with him. His own finances were perpetually, vaguely distressed.” (*Brideshead Revisited* 67) The relaxed attitude wealthy students have with money and the social divide it creates at the university such as with students like Sebastian facilitates this debt for Charles, yet it also gives him a more complete understanding to the value of money.

Hepburn presents a largely critical reading of the world at Oxford. He views the novel’s ideas of debt and exchange as detrimental to the average student, while accentuating the economic position of an affluent student like Sebastian. Although the spending habits that Charles falls into are largely negative and at times detrimental, they extend beyond his time at university, to where his experiences with debt can be seen both comically as Hepburn states, but extremely formative and valuable. Had it not been for his time at Oxford, Charles would not have had intimate experiences with students whose

own finances were “perpetually, vaguely distressed.” He would not have been introduced to a mentality like Sebastian’s which allows him to speak of money casually and put it aside with remarks like, “‘It’s all done by lawyers,’ he said helplessly, ‘and I suppose they embezzle a lot. Anyway, I never seem to get much. Of course, mummy would give me anything I asked for.’” (*Brideshead Revisited* 67) Sebastian is willfully ignorant and unapologetic about his wealth. Waugh uses the reference to “lawyers” and speculative language like “I suppose” and “I never seem to” in order to accentuate Sebastian’s condescension. This heightened tone increases the flawed nature of his relationship to money, adding the comic elements discussed by Hepburn. However, Waugh also interjects the word “helplessly” to show how Charles is reading the situation as the narrator. Charles sees Sebastian as helpless and although he has been manipulated into adopting a culture of lavish spending, he starts to see the obvious flaws in this culture and the effects it has on Sebastian. These instances and interactions provide Charles with the real value in attending Oxford. He is able to learn from Sebastian’s ignorance and apply it to his life beyond the university.

Following this interaction with Sebastian, Charles returns home to spend a period of his vacation from school with his father. In a conversation at the dinner table Charles admits that “Well, father, as I told you, I haven’t much money to spare for theatre-going.” (*Brideshead Revisited* 72) Mr. Ryder’s response creates a positive juxtaposition with Sebastian’s reaction to personal finance from earlier in the chapter.

My dear boy, you must not let money become your master in this way.

Why, at your age, your cousin Melchior was part-owner of a musical piece. It was one of his few happy ventures. You should go to the play as

part of your education. If you read the lives of eminent men you will find that quite half of them made their first acquaintance with drama from the gallery...The expense is nugatory, and even while you wait for admission in the street you are diverted by 'buskers.' We will sit with the gods together one night. (*Brideshead Revisited* 73)

Mr. Ryder's speech shows the transition, which occurs for Charles when he exits Oxford. His father is able to break down his adopted idea of the value of money as being an indicator of happiness and possessions reflecting status and replaces it with a practical idea of spending. Compared to the thoughts of Sebastian, there is a similar disregard for accounting for money, but Mr. Ryder is not concerned with spending frivolously or for decorative purposes. Instead money should not be an issue because it should be saved and spent on "happy ventures" that will "play as part of your education." Furthermore it should facilitate an experience that is not reliant on money, such as their diversion by the buskers. The buskers² represent a nontraditional art form that although motivated by money, does not require wealth to experience nor is there any discrimination based on social status. Waugh uses this to show the obviously hollow quality to the life Charles leads with Sebastian and although he constantly digresses back into it, moments like this allow for a clear insight into the legitimate value of money and education. If he were not forced into financial restriction at Oxford then he never would be able to make this connection with his father.

² A person who performs music or some other entertainment in a public place (now esp. in the street) for monetary donations; an itinerant entertainer or musician. (OED)

Immediately after Mr. Ryder's speech to Charles, the scene is amplified to reflect the plain nature of Charles' time away from Oxford. For example Charles describes the food he shares with his father:

Dinner that evening consisted of a white, tasteless soup, over-fried fillets of sole with a pink sauce, lamb cutlets propped against a cone of mashed potato, stewed pears in jelly standing on a kind of sponge cake.
(Brideshead Revisited 73)

The language used in this description of the meal is obvious in the way it uses the mundane. The core of the meal is standard, just meat, potatoes, and cake, but the descriptive words surrounding the food amplify the ordinary quality of the meal. The food is "white" and "tasteless" and served with a "pink sauce". All of these words are extremely basic and obvious in the way that they avoid being vibrant or particularly special. The language purposely falls flat, which is reflected by the way the lamb cutlets cannot stand up, but must be "propped against a cone of mashed potato". This type of scene works to create a sharp contrast once Charles leaves his home and returns to Oxford.

The contrast between life at Oxford and life outside is apparent throughout the novel. Charles and Sebastian's fortunes are far different when they leave their established bubbles at Oxford and Brideshead. This is perhaps most evident through the boy's drinking habits while they are enrolled at Oxford. The first interaction between Charles and Sebastian comes after a night of heavy drinking. Charles recounts the situation, as "when at last we met, were the circumstances propitious." (*Brideshead Revisited* 30) The details of the encounter are then given as Charles recounts how "there appeared at my

window the face I knew to be Sebastian's, but not, as I had formerly seen it, alive and alight with gaiety; he looked at me for a moment with unfocused eyes and then, leaning forward well into the room, he was sick." (*Brideshead Revisited* 30) Despite public drunkenness and vomiting through a window into an unknown room, the consequence of Sebastian's actions is minimal. The results are the frustration of Charles's housing attendant who has to clean up Sebastian's vomit and an apology from Sebastian, which quickly buds into the characters' lasting relationship.

Charles and Sebastian's drinking habits are facilitated in this way until they are put in more realistic social situations beyond Oxford and Brideshead. One of the first moments when the novel shows Sebastian struggle with his alcoholism against societal restrictions is on a trip to London. After being invited to dine in the city, the boys devolve into their university habits as "Sebastian and I found ourselves drinking alone together as we always did." (*Brideshead Revisited* 127) The boys then find themselves with "Rex Mottram [who] ordered more wine; presently the three of us were together on the pavement." Being on the pavement in this context relates to the extreme drunken state of the three boys, exaggerating their inebriation to a point where they have lost motor skills and now reside on the pavement. Their drunkenness is obvious, yet the next course of action is to drive their car to meet up with another friend. Sebastian provides the logic for driving because it is "Always better to have one's own car on an occasion like this." Charles has become so used to the distorted reality of Oxford that he is unable to apply any logic to this situation.

Sebastian's life has been uniform in the way that both Brideshead and Oxford have allowed him to live in worlds that neither hold him accountable for his actions nor

question his logic. He has been allowed to explore a world that has never hit back, but instead has promoted his bad habits leading to social irresponsibility and alcoholism. Charles has fallen into the world of Sebastian, which is why when Sebastian tells his friends that he is going to drive drunk out of convenience sake, there is no rebuttal. Instead Charles remembers how “We did not question this reasoning, and there lay our mistake.” (*Brideshead Revisited* 128) Sebastian finds himself at the wheel accompanied by a girl that does not attend Oxford and stands for a sense of external reason. When she tells Sebastian “It isn’t safe the way you’re driving...Besides, we ought to be on the other side of the road...Here, stop. I’d sooner walk.” (*Brideshead Revisited* 131) he stops the car abruptly and is confronted by two police officers that throw the group of boys in prison.

The true value of the Oxford education is that it facilitates an environment described by Waugh, which allows the students to either avoid moments such as these or use them as lessons. The fundamental difference between Charles and Sebastian is that while both boys are stalled in a pompous, aristocratic way of life, Charles eventually emerges from it, learns from his experiences, and becomes a well-rounded adult. Lodge suggests that “the myth of decline has become more rigid and polemical here – but at the very end, the narrator recognizes that the disfigurement of Brideshead by its military occupants and the dispersal of the aristocratic family that once occupied it matter less than the fact that the sanctuary lamp continues to burn in the ugly little art nouveau chapel.” (10-11) Lodge’s suggestion proves true given Charles’s concluding realization upon his return to Brideshead that “the place was desolate and the work all brought to nothing...Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.” (*Brideshead Revisited* 402) Charles makes

this statement at the end of the novel to denote the transition he has made away from the errors of his youth. Sebastian never makes this realization and his character remains flat up until his death. This scene where he is thrown in prison for driving drunk is a major turning point because it reveals this unchanging, singular dimension to Sebastian's character.

In his recollection of the group's night in prison, Charles separates himself from his friends who "Somewhere to the left of me Sebastian and Mulcaster were raising Cain. Sebastian had been steady on his legs and fairly composed on the way to the station; now, shut in, he seemed in a frenzy and was pounding the door, and shouting." (*Brideshead Revisited* 132) This moment is Sebastian's first real conflict. Until now, the narration has been extremely positive and the language revealed in a style that was "exceedingly lush, both the romanticism and the preoccupation with the appeal of aristocratic manners and accouterments" which showed the "languid and idyllic Oxford years of the early 1920's." (Doyle 29) The style and narration does not abruptly shift through this exposition of Sebastian's character, but it slowly begins to turn until Charles is able to make what Lodge describes appropriately as his realization that "the aristocratic family...matter less than the fact that the sanctuary lamp continues to burn in the ugly little art nouveau chapel." (Lodge 10) It is however this moment in jail that Sebastian stops being just the "flamboyant, teddy bear-owning aristocrat" (Copping *The Telegraph*)

After Charles is released, Sebastian tells his friend, "'I suppose mummy's got to hear about it,' he said. 'Damn, damn, damn! It's cold. I won't go home. I've nowhere to go. Let's just slip back to Oxford and wait for *them* to bother *us*.'" (*Brideshead Revisited* 136) Sebastian is no longer the calm pillar of swagger he embodied and was known for at

Oxford. His speech becomes manic as is denoted by the repetitive “damn”. The concern for his mother sees a further shift from his former self, which constantly tried to separate from his family. For example, before returning to Oxford the semester of this incident, Sebastian dissuades Charles from joining him in his mother’s London home under the pretense that “the place is probably full of my family.” (*Brideshead Revisited* 115)

Sebastian upheld an air of disregard for his family, which is why he constantly and casually separated them from Charles. Now however as the veil around his personality breaks down, he calls out with concern over the opinion of his mother in front of his friends. This shift reiterates the significance of Oxford and also provides a clear separation of the university from Brideshead. Oxford is still a sanctuary for Sebastian, especially from his home at Brideshead but the value in being there is far less significant because he refuses to grow or learn from his experiences. Given Charles’ narration and his infatuation with the Ryder family the descriptions given about Brideshead are positive. Yet, through the subtle language of Waugh and moments such as these, which break Charles’ narration and express the feelings of Sebastian, there becomes a clear division in the spaces.

Physical descriptions of the university are sparse, occasionally negative, and extremely insignificant compared to Brideshead. Upon arriving at Brideshead, Charles is struck speechless, finally expressing himself as he tells Sebastian, “What a place to live in!” The elements of the setting at Brideshead are neither simple nor limited to what is of significance to the action. Instead, Waugh “conveys his sharp criticism of Brideshead House through subtly charged language.” (Heath 167) Charles and Sebastian don’t simply enter the house and proceed immediately with action. They “entered through the

fortress-like, stone-flagged, stone-vaulted passages of the servants' quarters...and climbed uncarpeted, scrubbed elm stairs, followed more passages of wide boards covered in the center by a thin strip of drugget, through passages covered by linoleum..." (*Brideshead Revisited* 37) This description continues for another three lines and is characteristic of the treatment Brideshead receives in the novel.

Brideshead is a "sequestered place" (*Brideshead Revisited* 18) that rejects any legitimate sense of intellect and growth as a result of its focus on the wealth of the Flyte family. "While appearing to praise the house, Waugh condemns it, for its joys are illusions." (Heath 167) In the aforementioned passage, the language is repetitive and descriptive without being overtly flattering. Instead of creating a grandiose entrance, the boys enter through the "fortress-like, stone-flagged, stone vaulted passages of the servants' quarters". This provides a clear sense of the building's size with the word "fortress", but it is followed up plainly by the repetition of the "stone". Stone is not a fancy element of construction, but represents a practicality and even a plain quality to the building. Waugh elicits a sensation of underwhelming by following up "fortress" with this extremely plain language. Furthermore, entering through the "servants' quarters" creates an awkward contrast and again takes the focus of the reader away from the overwhelming grandeur of the home and places it again onto a more practical element of the estate. Bringing out elements like the stone and the servants, which exist at the core of Brideshead work to Heath's point on Waugh's condemnation and how he is exposing the joys of the estate as illusions.

In the scene where Charles and Sebastian enter Brideshead together for the first time, Sebastian comments that "You must see the garden front and the fountain...It's

where my family live.” Charles reveals how Sebastian’s introduction left “an ominous chill at the words he used – not, that ‘that is my house,’ but ‘it’s where my family live.’” (*Brideshead Revisited* 36) Charles’ revelation shows the hallow quality to Brideshead, the wealth it represents, and the decadent aristocratic culture it embodies. Charles provides a constant stream of praise on Brideshead, which places a thin veil over the criticism in Waugh’s language.

On a later trip Charles says that he is “very near heaven, during those languid days at Brideshead.” (*Brideshead Revisited* 87) On that same trip, the Brideshead fountain becomes a focal point when Sebastian requests that Charles draw it. It was “such a fountain as one might expect to find in a piazza of southern Italy; such a fountain as was, indeed, found there a century ago by one of Sebastian’s ancestors; found, purchased, imported and re-erected in an alien but welcoming climate.” (*Brideshead Revisited* 89) Waugh uses the semicolons of this sentence to create a parallelism in describing the fountain. The initial thought is the quality of the fountain, which is as beautiful as those of southern Italy. Waugh then repeats “such a fountain as” after his semicolon. This repetition places the two following thoughts next to each other. Although the fountain is Italian, it was “found there a century ago by one of Sebastian’s ancestors;” Waugh does not finish the sentence here, but instead extends the thought through another semicolon. The fountain is Italian, but was found by one of Sebastian’s ancestors, and finally he concludes his impression about the fountain with language Waugh uses to denote the true quality of the items at Brideshead. The genuine quality of the Italian fountain is removed because it was “found, purchased, imported and re-erected”. Starting this series of thoughts with “found” connects it to the second part of the sentence, removing the initial

correlation to Italy. Waugh uses this sentence to make clear that the overriding quality of the fountain is that it was “found, purchased, imported, and re-erected in an alien but welcoming climate.” The language Waugh uses to describe Brideshead is heavy with words that subtly reveal the negative qualities of the estate. This again falls under Heath’s point that Waugh condemns Brideshead because “its joys are illusions.” The fountain is not simply a beautiful piece of architecture within the garden of the estate, but instead serves as a symbol for the unfiltered wealth of the Flyte family and their power to manipulate a cultural artifact for the shallow purpose of making their garden look nicer.

Oxford revels in a modestly beautiful city and campus that although described, is never made the focal point of conversation. Instead the university is described through the ornate qualities of its students and faculty. Not praising Oxford serves an opposite effect to the descriptions of Brideshead. Instead of superfluous features that reveal the negative quality of the wealth Brideshead embodies, Waugh’s description of Oxford are understated. The physical qualities of the university and town do not mask negative undercurrents, but instead allow legitimate emotions and interactions to reveal themselves. Waugh does not hide anything beneath Charles’s language and instead “The Oxford scenes, so romantic in tone, are recreated exactly as one might look back in nostalgic remembrance, and especially as Ryder tries to recall precisely how he felt and acted at the time” (Lane 100).

Charles provides a lavish description of the University on his return and at the start of his second term.

“‘It is typical of Oxford,’ I said, ‘to start the new year in autumn.’

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 gray walls; the flags were oily underfoot and as, one by one, the lamps were lit in the windows round the quad, the golden lights were diffuse and remote, new figures in new gowns wandered through the twilight under the arches and the familiar bells now spoke of a year's memories. The autumnal mood possessed us both as though the riotous exuberance of June had died with the gillyflowers, whose scent at my windows now yielded to the damp leaves, smoldering in a corner of the quad." (*Brideshead Revisited* 117)

This description pays particular attention to the natural elements of the campus and directly relates them to their influence over the narration. Charles does not denote the change in season or describe the way "leaves were falling" anywhere else in the novel.

The change in season parallels the transition in space as Charles returns to Oxford. Just as he has left London and his vacation behind to start again at university, autumn has also returned. The language of the passage is obvious in the way it provides significance to the arrival of autumn, the leaves fall and Waugh even uses the phrase "autumnal mood". Autumn is a season of transition, the leaves fall and the weather begins to take a dramatic change, which causes the smoke of the bonfires to join the wet river mist. The sensation possesses a duality of being familiar, yet strange given the amount of time that has passed since the last autumn. The lamps around the quad are "diffuse and remote", which creates a paradox. The lamps are not situated to illuminate the maximum amount of space, just as Charles is not fully cognizant of his surroundings on his return to school. There are elements of the school that despite being beautiful are distant. The lights are still "golden" they have just taken unfamiliar space. This idea of an

unfamiliar return is extended to the “new figures in new gowns”. The first line of the chapter, “It is typical” establishes the sense of familiarity upon the return to Oxford. Acknowledging how typical the quality of Oxford is shows both the confidence and sense of comfort for Charles as he returns for his second year. However, the school also possesses obvious differences. The repetition of the word “new” shows that despite his initial sentiment, Charles’s return to Oxford has subverted expectation. These differences eventually become an aside to what is familiar. The “new figures in new gowns wandered through the twilight”, yet the paragraph is closed by the “familiar bells [which] now spoke of a year’s memories.” Ending the passage with this idea of the bells instills the idea that for Charles’s the space he returns to evokes an overall familiarity.

Moving into the next passage, Waugh continues to build on the familiarity of the space, but establishes a more somber mood, which contrasts the sense of unknown and naive excitement Charles exuded on the first day of his inaugural term at Oxford. At that moment he absorbed his environment and noted how outside his room “there were gillyflowers growing below the windows which on summer evenings filled them with fragrance.” (*Brideshead Revisited* 28) Now upon his return to Oxford, the excitement has waned and “the riotous exuberance of June had died with the gillyflowers” (*Brideshead Revisited* 117). In his new state of maturity Oxford has become a familiar world that no longer has the same exciting effects as it did during Charles’s first term. Sebastian reflects this sense of perceived maturity with the chapter’s first dialogue as he exclaims, “I feel precisely one hundred years old.” (*Brideshead Revisited* 117) This transition into maturity shows the appropriate effects of the University, which Waugh posits in his essay. As the excitement begins to fade, the exploratory phases of the boy’s lives is

satisfied. They got drunk and acted foolish through their first semester and have started the process of “four years in which to grow up gradually” (*A Little Order* 17).

Brideshead Revisited shows how Waugh’s practical definition of sending boys to university is correct because of the growth and decline endured by his two main characters. Through the beginning of their time at Oxford Charles and Sebastian act like fools, but their foolish habits are facilitated in the environment of the university. They live within the Arcadian Utopia and they show slight signs of growth through their shenanigans. However, their development is derailed when they are pushed into secondary environments beyond Oxford, like Brideshead and the city. In these environments, their juvenile behavior is not facilitated, but instead is punished and the boys are not afforded the opportunity to learn from their mistakes. When Sebastian is ultimately pushed completely away from Oxford, his character sees a complete decline. In a moment, which sums up this theme in the novel, Charles describes the significance of being allowed to explore, act foolishly, and drink alcohol:

I might well have spent my three or four years in the University and never have met him, but for the chance of his getting drunk one evening in my college and of my having ground-floor rooms in the front quadrangle. (*Brideshead Revisited* 25)

Had Charles listened to his law abiding cousin and changed his room from the ground floor of the front quadrangle or had Sebastian avoided the advice of Waugh and not gotten drunk at university, then the entire course of action for the novel would have been avoided. If Charles had not attended a university, which dissuaded him from drinking or

acting strictly within the rules then he would never as Waugh puts it, have been able to “grow up gradually”.

III. Paul Pennyfeather's Chaotic Journey through *Decline and Fall*

In a moment of self-reflexivity, Waugh tells his readers what *Decline and Fall* is about: "In fact, the whole of this book is really an account of the mysterious disappearance of Paul Pennyfeather." (*Decline and Fall* 163) Waugh is not describing a literal disappearance of his novel's main character; he remains the central figure throughout the text. Instead, this passage refers to the disappearance of Pennyfeather's sensibility and the loss of the character's innocence, as he is placed into an ever-changing chaotic world after he is expelled from Oxford. The world of *Decline and Fall* is one where "madness, mismatch, and misalliance flourish: incompatibles marry, the guilty go unscathed, innocents bear the blame, incompetents hold positions of power." (Meckier 51) The book is endowed with a purpose, although it is admittedly a negative one. Waugh shows through the hapless Paul Pennyfeather, innocence set adrift in a corrupt world. After being released from Oxford, Pennyfeather begins to move through the social hierarchy of education moving from his university to a public school in Wales. He eventually ends up as the private tutor of a wealthy family, and then finally back to Oxford. As he moves through these institutions his character begins to change and the characters he interacts with become increasingly strange. Had Pennyfeather been given the opportunity to remain at Oxford, his character would have been afforded the opportunity to grow and develop instead of having his innocence manipulated in the corrupt world beyond his university.

Jeffrey Heath writes in *The Picturesque Prison: Evelyn Waugh and His Writing* "the motif of intoxicated and irresponsible authority recurs in *Decline and Fall*...it forms the novel's central theme." (Heath 64) This motif is played out across the characters in

the book and its development parallels the decline of Pennyfeather's character. As Pennyfeather begins to move further away from Oxford and is forced into a more open and public sphere, his character breaks down and the consequences of his actions intensify. As Waugh states in his article *Was Oxford Worth While?*, the value of attending Oxford is not simply the degree, but because it provides an environment that facilitates unrestricted growth for its pupils. The effect of Oxford is obvious in the novel given the fate of Pennyfeather, which David Lodge describes as the way the characters "fortunes follow a circular rather than a vertical trajectory" (7). The circular quality of his fortune refers to the fact that he eventually ends up at Oxford in a position identical to the one he held before being expelled. There is a sharp contrast between Oxford and the public school Llanabba and an even greater distinction between the settings outside of the schools, when Pennyfeather begins as a private tutor for the Beste-Chetwynde family and is then put in prison. The novel's satire and absurdity grows as Pennyfeather's character degenerates, while Waugh simultaneously "astringently satirizes what Paul encounters: the Establishment's education system." (Heath 65)

Waugh satirizes the value of education and criticizes the system in Britain. The satire is obvious even through the novel's title. *Decline and Fall* does not simply refer to the degradation of Pennyfeather's character, but also to a book of history written by British historian Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Lodge conjectures that it was "a work which Waugh perhaps read as a student of History at Oxford, and with which he seems to have had a kind of negative identification." (7) The title is not inherently negative, but instead serves a satirical purpose of marking the collapse of two main figures within the novel. Just as the Roman

Empire fell, so too does Pennyfeather; the other figure which falls is the education system. Waugh uses his title ironically to denote the contemporary state of education, both private and public. His title purposely mimics the title of the history book so that it can play on the nature of the book and use the metaphor of the fall of the Roman Empire. As Lodge states, the text was commonly read in classrooms and was notorious for being dry and long across its six volumes. Waugh uses this image to reflect the current state of education. Oxford is moving away from his idea of an environment conducive to getting drunk and exploring the world and further towards an institution run by an old aristocracy that implements a seemingly practical way of learning through texts such as *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Oxford is consequently placed next to Rome through this title. This again satirizes the hyper-serious, Victorian attitude of the University's elites. Oxford is not a great empire, but merely an educational institution, which according to Waugh is starting to become ridiculous through its practices.

The novel's prelude provides a series of interactions among the educational elites of Oxford. The prelude shows the negative effects of the institution's elite, older class, which override the disciplinary system at the university. The novel starts as "Mr. Sniggs, the Junior Dean, and Mr. Postlethwaite, the Domestic Bursar, sat alone in Mr. Sniggs's room overlooking the garden quad at Scone College." (*Decline and Fall* 1) The introduction of these two figures establishes the nature of authority at the university. The power is in the hands of ridiculous, old men who are definitive of a corrupt and outdated aristocracy. Waugh uses the names of these two fictitious characters as a means of mocking their authority. In a statement from Oxford's University College the primary responsibility of the Junior Dean is "to help to maintain an appropriate environment in

the College by upholding college regulations, especially in the evenings, overnight and at weekends.” The position of “Domestic Bursar” is similarly defined as “the person responsible for the administration of the domestic establishment of a college or university.” (OED) Mr. Sniggs’s name is significant simply because it sounds ridiculous and elicits an image without requiring further description. It shares a clear relation to the word “snigger”, which is defined by the OED as “a slight or half-suppressed laugh”. This effect of Mr. Sniggs’s name parallels the effect of the fictitious “Scone College” he is employed by. Waugh’s reason for naming a fictitious college at Oxford “Scone” serves no other reason than to be ridiculous and it makes a connection to something completely unrelated (the fluffy breakfast pastry, which is its namesake). Sniggs however also finds its roots and earliest use in *Phillips’s New World of Words*, which was a text, first published in London in 1658 and served as the first folio English dictionary. Relating the name of Mr. Sniggs to *Phillips’s New World of Words* again brings in Waugh’s idea of an improper strictly regulated system of education. Just as the word snigger appeared in the dictionary with a prescribed definition for the English language, the authoritative figures at Oxford are imposing ill-founded meanings on their students. Mr. Postlethwaite’s name also relates directly to a popular educational text. Postlethwaite appears on the publisher information for the aforementioned text *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* by Edward Gibbon. The publishers of the book were Postlethwaite, Taylor & Knowles, Limited, 1909. Using the name from the publisher makes a clear connection to this education text and accomplishes a similar function. The name of Scone College’s Domestic Bursar shows the overriding idea that at Oxford a structured education based on historical texts is the desired system.

Sniggs and Postlethwaite engage in a discussion that reveals another major flaw, which contrasts Waugh's ideology of education. Their concern is not to provide for their students. They focus on economic interests and self benefits. This way of thinking moves in the opposite direction from an environment that provides students with "another four years in which to grow up gradually" and does not place students "out of the way of their fellow-citizens while they are making fools of themselves." (*A Little Order* 17) Instead it brings the aristocratic ideologies of the world into the university and presses it onto their students, which is eventually why Pennyfeather is kicked out of the school. The novel's first dialogue comes through an exclamation from Mr. Sniggs: "'The fines!' said Mr. Sniggs, gently rubbing his pipe long the side of his nose. 'Oh, my! The fines there'll be after the evening!'" (*Decline and Fall* 2) This is followed by an expository statement and a response from Mr. Postlethwaite: "There is some highly prized port in the senior common-room cellars that is only brought up when the College fines have reached £50. 'We shall have a week of it at least,' said Mr. Postlethwaite, 'a week of Founder's port.'" (*Decline and Fall* 2) This conversation relates to the fact that this night of the novel's introduction is "the annual dinner of the Bollinger Club," an event for which "all over Europe old members had rallied for the occasion. For two days they had been pouring into Oxford: epileptic royalty from their villas of exile; uncouth peers from crumbling country seats; smooth young men of uncertain tastes from embassies and legations..." (*Decline and Fall* 1-2) Waugh continues this passage and describes a variety of guests that will be invading the college. All of the guests share the same characteristics of being young, vibrant, and somewhat ridiculous. Waugh provides an initial sense of these traits

through the aforementioned description when he describes their royalty as “epileptic”, their peers as “uncouth”, and how they are “smooth young men”.

The chief concern of the college officials on call while this event occurs is not to facilitate an environment that will accommodate the students, but to make the greatest financial gains. Instead of protecting their students, Mr. Sniggs and Mr. Postlethwaite sit back in darkness and allow the drunken destruction of the university to ensue so that they can collect the fines from the students. There are now two invasive elements at Scone College: first the selfish economic attitudes of Mr. Sniggs and Mr. Postlethwaite are being imposed. And now simultaneously, the physical presence of the drunken attendees of the annual dinner of the Bollinger Club also presents a more literal invasion of the space. Both of these elements break down the educational realm of the university and work to an extremely negative effect for the college’s residents.

The night is described as “a lovely evening”:

They broke up Mr. Austen’s grand piano, and stamped Lord Reading’s cigars into his carpet, and smashed his china, and tore up Mr. Partridge’s sheets, and threw the Matisse into his water jug; Mr. Sanders had nothing to break except his windows, but they found the manuscripts at which he had been working for the Newdigate Prize Poem, and had great fun with that. Sir Alastair Digby-Vaine-Trumpington felt quite ill with excitement” (*Decline and Fall* 3-4).

The power of this invasive group is obvious; especially in the way their destruction targets educational objects at the college. The phrase with which the passage begins with “a lovely evening” again reflects the mentality for the college’s officials who want as much destruction as possible. These wealthy figures, with satirized names like “Sir

Alastair Digby-Vaine-Trumpington” invade the college and destroy various elements of creative culture, like a “grand piano” and a painting by “Matisse”. When they run out of things to destroy the group finds a manuscript of poetry, which has little value other than to the author who is still working on it, which they “had great fun with” destroying.

The destruction moves beyond objects around the college when the group catches Pennyfeather. Mr. Sniggs and Mr. Postlethwaite continue to watch and describe the action from their room above the college. Upon their realization and assessment of the situation, the two men maintain the same self-important attitude. The scene begins with a rare moment of concern when Mr. Postlethwaite states ““They appear to have caught somebody...I hope they don’t do him any serious harm.”” Mr. Sniggs responds asking, “can it be Lord Rending?” (*Decline and Fall* 6) Lord Rending represents an insignificant figure whose only quality is the title ahead of his name. The concern that Mr. Sniggs has over the safety of this character is simply because of the stature given by the “Lord” preceding his name. This is evident, when they realize the real identity of the individual being harassed. “Mr. Sniggs [had] a sigh of relief. ‘But it’s quite all right. It isn’t Rending. It’s Pennyfeather-some one of no importance.’” (*Decline and Fall* 6) Again the presiding officials of the college present the idea that the only concern is for the maintenance of high society and the continued accumulation of wealth. When a common student like Pennyfeather, without a “Lord” before their name, is haplessly thrown into the situation, there is a complete disregard for his well-being. Instead, after he is accosted and his clothes are stolen, the college responds by putting Pennyfeather on trial for indecent exposure on the campus. At his trial, one potential conclusion is to “fine him really heavily”, but instead it is decided that since “I very much doubt whether he could

pay. I understand he is not well off. *Without trousers*, indeed! And at that time of night! I think we should do far better to get rid of him altogether. That sort of young man does the College no good.” (*Decline and Fall* 7) The college’s headmaster with language that condescends Pennyfeather gives the verdict. The facts of the situation are completely overlooked and instead there is an emphasis on Pennyfeather’s financial situation. The headmaster expresses a low opinion of his finances because of Paul’s unconventional physical appearance and because he was up late at night at the time of his incident.

Under the pretense that he does not serve a beneficial purpose to his college, Paul Pennyfeather is expelled from Oxford. This moral code of the university serves as the heart for the “social decay and cultural decline”, which Bernard Schweizer describes as the main theme for Waugh’s early novels, especially *Decline and Fall*. Waugh characterizes the role of an educational space in his essay *Was Oxford Worth While?* as a world where boys are allowed to grow unrestricted from the outside world. However, when this space becomes completely corrupt, as is the case with Scone College in *Decline and Fall*, Pennyfeather is forced from a corrupt educational space into a ludicrous world he is unable to handle and which constantly takes advantage of his innocence. If Oxford were to abide by the ideals of Waugh, then Pennyfeather would have continued to grow under the guidance of his education and never would have entered into the world of decline in a state of extreme innocence. Pennyfeather is forced into a series of spaces, which highlight the necessity for a formative space such as Oxford.

Pennyfeather’s expulsion from Oxford presents Waugh’s lack of faith in the system of education. This lack of faith continues to manifest as he moves away from life

at university. Upon being released from school, Pennyfeather is disowned by his “guardian” in a brief scene that concludes when Pennyfeather is told: “I think you ought to find some work...Just work, good healthy toil. You have led too sheltered a life, Paul. Perhaps I am to blame. It will do you the world of good to face facts for a bit – look at life in the raw.” (*Decline and Fall* 12) This scene also reveals that Pennyfeather is twenty years old, with eleven months until his twenty-first birthday. His age is a short separation away from the point Waugh makes that “It is absurd to pretend that a boy of eighteen, however sound he has been as a school prefect, is a fully grown man.” (*A Little Order* 17) His age and the chastisement of his guardian foreshadow the chaos of the action that will occur. Pennyfeather is again in a position where his fortune is being misguided by an “irresponsible and hypocritical authority [that] feathers its own nest by encouraging the disorder it should be suppressing.” (Heath 67) His “guardian” takes on this position because he forces Paul away from his own home under the pretense, which Waugh expresses clear disagreement with in his article, *Was Oxford Worth While?* that he is too old to rely on others to nurture his development. Mr. Sniggs and Mr. Postlethwaite stood as the novel’s first irresponsible authority figures, but they will not be the last to influence the fate of Pennyfeather. Once he leaves Oxford the seminal figures in Pennyfeather’s life all hold positions of authority and all become increasingly corrupt. Even tertiary characters like his “guardian” impose onto Paul and represent some form of misguided authority and influence.

After being disowned, Pennyfeather is assigned a job by “Mr. Levy, of Church and Gargoyle, scholastic agents.” (*Decline and Fall* 12) Mr. Levy is yet another corrupt authority figure. Mr. Levy presents Pennyfeather with a job at Llanabba Castle as a

“junior assistant master to teach Classics and English to University Standard with Subsidiary Mathematics, German, and French. Experience essential; first-class games essential.” (*Decline and Fall* 13) He describes the position to Pennyfeather as it “Might have been made for you” to which Pennyfeather gives the sensible response that “I don’t know a word of German, I’ve had no experience, I’ve got no testimonials, and I can’t play cricket.” (*Decline and Fall* 13)

The commonsense Pennyfeather brings to situations is disregarded until the nonsense of his universe begins to shape his character. Despite not having the required experience to teach at an elementary school, Pennyfeather concedes and gets the job under the reasoning that “It doesn’t do to be too modest... Why, only last term we sent a man who had never been in a laboratory in his life as senior Science Master to one of our leading public schools.” (*Decline and Fall* 13-14) Again the world of education is degraded to a world that is not founded in reason, but in superfluously filling a position. Waugh satirizes the quality of teachers, by showing that Pennyfeather is hired under no pretense and his lack of experience is excused because the school’s headmaster cannot expect “*all that for the salary he’s offering.*” (*Decline and Fall* 14) He is then placed into “Llanabba Castle, which aspires to all the conventions of the English preparatory school... the quintessence of sham.” (Carens 72) His mentors, peers, and his own ability to teach at Llanabba in this system increasingly disillusion Pennyfeather.

The two main figures Pennyfeather interacts with at Llanabba are Captain Grimes and Mr. Prendergast. As Paul struggles to strike a balance and establish some sort of order in his life, his two fellow teachers exist on opposite sides of a spectrum of reason. Their polarizing sense of life confuses Pennyfeather so that he again refuses growth and

his character remains static. The introduction of these two characters provides a general characterization of the men. Captain Grimes interrupts his introduction to Paul because he has to punish a student who was “whistling when I told you to stop.” The student responds to Captain Grimes telling him that ““Every one else was whistling... ‘What’s that got to do with it?’ said Grimes.” (*Decline and Fall* 21) Although brief, this introduction to Grimes shows off a major part of his character because he not only turns away from Pennyfeather, but he does so in order to punish a student, not simply for disobedience, but because that disobedience existed in tandem with conformity. In his book *The Picturesque Prison: Evelyn Waugh and His Writing* Jeffrey Heath describes Captain Grimes as a man “who makes it a rule to do exactly what he pleases” (Heath 67). The novel’s introduction to Grimes therefore proves Heath’s definition to be true as he punishes the boy for the main reason that he decided to conform.

Grimes’s unfiltered and headstrong qualities manifest themselves through his constant resurrection. Many of the characters in *Decline and Fall* end up taking on other identities, “Philbrick has at least three identities in the novel, Dr. Fagan has two, and Paul is eventually resurrected as his own cousin, all of which proves that Waugh’s characters have learned the fundamental rules of modern secular life: disaster, escape, metamorphosis, and reappearance.” (Meckier 56) However, Grimes is unique in that his return to the story is typically characterized by pessimism. He is a “life-force without a reason for living.” (Meckier 57) Captain Grimes first exits the novel at the end of Part One when a pile of his clothes are found by the seashore with a note in the pocket inscribed with the words “Those that live by the flesh shall perish by the flesh.” (*Decline and Fall* 148) This suicide comes after his life at Llanabba is ruined when his wife finds

him at the school as he is arranged to marry the headmaster's daughter. It is an inevitable end to his character and highlighted by the note he leaves, which makes no sense on its own, but makes an important classical reference. Taken literally the message is nonsensical because living and dying by the flesh describes the natural process of life. A person lives in his/her body and then dies in his/her body. However, Waugh's satire comes forth when the phrase is placed next to one of two potential references. The first is the line from Aeschylus's *Agamemnon* "By the sword you did your work, and by the sword you die." The second is a Biblical reference, "Return your sword to its place, for all who will take up the sword, will die by the sword" (Matthew 26:52). Both of these quotations have a similar message of justice: those who live a life of violence will die at the hand of violence. Placing these in relation to the quote left by Captain Grimes plays out the satire. The note makes a clear reference to two of history's most dramatic text, but Waugh changes the language so that the statement is now simply a fact of life. This nonsensical quality is inherent to Grimes, who although characterized by his sense of indignation, does not make a lot of sense with his actions. His character is never given a conclusion or a linear narrative to follow through the novel, but instead arrives constantly at random situations. This attitude can be chiefly attributed to the mentality that he doesn't care about his own life.

Grimes returns to the novel after Paul has left Llanabba. His return is characterized by chance and coincidence. Paul has left Llanabba and now serves as the private tutor for Peter Beste-Chetwynde at his family's estate King's Thursday. His encounter with the allegedly dead Captain Grimes is written extremely casually: "Crossing the hall one afternoon a few days later, Paul met a short man with a long red

beard stumping along behind the footman towards Margot's study." (*Decline and Fall* 184) Captain Grimes has been absent from the novel so that it is no longer obvious that he is the unnamed character Paul runs into in his new home. Paul recognizes Grimes as he exclaims, "Good lord!" upon seeing him, but to the reader it is not explicit that it is Grimes until the end of the page when the action is described, "A little later they ambushed him in the drive, and Grimes told them." (*Decline and Fall* 184) The resurrection of Captain Grimes is anticlimactic and he seems to just float back into the story. Once he, Pennyfeather, and Peter are all alone, Grimes describes the course of action, which has led him back to this point in the narrative. His story is characteristically outlandish highlights his relaxed and uncaring nature. He begins his recollection with the lines "It's the old story...Grimes has fallen on his feet again." (*Decline and Fall* 185) There is nothing familiar about the content of the story Grimes tells, which means it does not fall under the idea that it is just the same old story. The only familiarity of the story is that Grimes has again survived and "fallen on his feet again." The content of Grimes's story is not necessarily important. The significant quality is that he fills his language with phrases like the two aforementioned. In the midst of telling how he got a job because he was recognized in a bar, he adds that it was "just good fortune" and that "it was a pure act of God, our meeting." (*Decline and Fall* 185-187) Grimes constantly shows how there is no sensibility to his character, yet despite this he is always able to land on his feet. Meckier describes Grimes as a "parodic Christ" (Meckier 57) because despite sharing the fact of Jesus' life of death and return, unlike Jesus there was no reason or moral to his death and resurrection. This quality serves as a negative, recurring example for Paul who is constantly being knocked down.

Heath also describes Llanabba's other main character with the definition he gives Captain Grimes. He writes that in relation to Grimes, "Mr. Prendergast, maintains the reverse" (67). Prendergast is a man that is guided by his role within his institution. The distinction between himself and Grimes in that regard is given by their tenure at Llanabba as "I've been here ten years. Grimes only came this term." (*Decline and Fall* 22) This creates the basic distinction that Captain Grimes is less tied to the school and system, while despite his expressed hatred for the school, Prendergast is fine with his position. Prendergast's introduction to Pennyfeather is also much more formal. After telling Pennyfeather his name, Prendergast immediately offers him a drink, "'I'm Prendergast,' said the newcomer. 'Have some port?'" (*Decline and Fall* 21) This again heightens the distinction between Prendergast and Grimes, who ignored all formality after his brief introduction. Prendergast's introduction continues to reveal the overriding negative quality to his institutionalized behavior. Pennyfeather accepts the invitation to drink, but "there's only one glass." (*Decline and Fall* 22) Prendergast exudes formality, but becomes disorganized and his actions always end up being meaningless. In this situation he offers Paul a drink out of formality sake, yet is not able to fulfill his intention. The lack of a second glass provides an obstacle, but there is a simple suggestion to solve it, which is overlooked and reveals the negative side his content character. This quality of his personality is most closely related to his former role as a church official.

Mr. Prendergast reveals to Paul, "Ten years ago I was a clergyman of the Church of England." (*Decline and Fall* 36) This aspect of his character is described, as "Prendy is a parody of spiritual man, an example of fervor without faith." (Meckier 57) Prendergast's faith embodies the reality of his character. Just as he engaged in the

formality of offering Paul a drink upon their introduction without a true intent to his action, he is a character that comically lacks substance. He describes his faith as “very pleasant until my *Doubts* began.” (*Decline and Fall* 37) The italicization and capitalization of the word “doubts” provides emphasis, yet when he explains what his doubts were his character again falls comically flat. “For no real reason at all” Prendergast began to doubt, not “the ordinary sort of Doubt about Cain’s wife or the Old Testament miracles or the consecration of Archbishop Parker. I’d been taught how to explain all those while I was at college. No, it was something deeper than all that. *I couldn’t understand why God had made the world at all.*” (*Decline and Fall* 38) Waugh creates two different categories of religious doubt for Prendergast. First, there are the doubts he describes as “ordinary” like “the Old Testament miracles” or a “consecration”. Waugh uses this first category to mock the legitimacy of religion, by casting doubts over things that are so seriously ingrained in the protestant faith. Prendergast’s second category of doubts are a result of the question “why God had made the world”. The answer to this question is equally ingrained in the protestant faith, but through Waugh’s separation, and Prendergast’s ignorance, his loss of faith is ridiculed and its significance is diminished. As a result of this second category of doubts, which for some reason was not explained to him while at college, Prendergast abandons his parish and has “not known an hour’s real happiness since.”

Despite their roles as opposites, Dr. Grimes and Prendergast both serve a negative role in the life of Paul. However, because they are such polarizing, yet equally absurd figures their effects on Pennyfeather become neutral. Paul never reaches any sort of epiphany or salvation while at Llanabba because he is stuck in a world of extremes.

Nothing is subtle at the school and he is never allowed to experience independent growth. He is trapped between a character that unwillingly succeeds and a character that constantly fails despite feigned intention. He “wavers between Grimes and Prendergast, disorder and wrong order; he never glimpses the right order.” (Heath 68) Paul permanently exists in a state of extreme susceptibility, which is why he is so vulnerable in the chaotic world. Waugh heavily satirizes Paul’s innocence to bring forth the static nature of his character.

In his book on *The Satiric Art of Evelyn Waugh* James Carens defines ingénu satire as the way that “the innocent provides the satirist with a particularly effective means of exposing vice and folly. Paul Pennyfeather is, in large part, a kind of dummy.” (Carens 36) Because of the world he is placed in and the people he is surrounded by, Paul is never able to be anything other than a clueless idiot. Both Captain Grimes and Mr. Prendergast had this effect on Paul. This type of satire becomes again even more obvious when Paul leaves Llanabba for King’s Thursday. Aside from forming another space that surrounds Paul with outlandish and radical figures, restricting his character development, King’s Thursday provides a clear illustration of a contrasting space to both Oxford and Llanabba. While Oxford and Castle Llanabba are rooted in a rich, corrupt tradition, the estate King’s Thursday shows a new, hideously remodeled Tudor as Paul moves further away from Waugh’s ideal university education.

According to Waugh, “The truth is that Oxford is simply a very beautiful city in which it is convenient to segregate a certain number of the young of the nation while they are growing up.” (*A Little Order* 16-17) King’s Thursday is a complete separation from Waugh’s idea of Oxford. The house is introduced first through a contrast with Margot

Beste-Chetwynde's other home: "Her London house, built in the reign of William and Mary, was, by universal consent, the most beautiful building between Bond Street and Park Lane" (*Decline and Fall* 151) This brief introduction reflects the class and distinction of the home by placing her other home in a renowned district of London and describing how it was built during "the reign of William and Mary". This provides an obvious contrast to King's Thursday. The novel provides a third party's opinion of the home with the brief note that: "opinion was divided on the subject of her country house." (*Decline and Fall* 151) The building process of her country home is then described as "No single act in Mrs. Beste-Chetwynde's eventful and in many ways disgraceful career had excited quite so much hostile comments as the building, or rather the rebuilding, of this remarkable house." (*Decline and Fall* 151) Finally, another contrast is established between the houses before and after Mrs. Beste-Chetwynde purchased it: "For three centuries the poverty and inertia of this noble family had preserved its home unmodified by any of the succeeding fashions that fell upon domestic architecture. No wing had been added, no window filled in." (*Decline and Fall* 151) This passage refers to the original owners of the home before Margot Beste-Chetwynde purchased it. Those owners were righteous in their maintenance of the estate. However, now that Margot Beste-Chetwynde has bought it, she removes all of the history in place of obscure modernity and the house becomes a "new-born monster to whose birth ageless and forgotten cultures had been in travail." (*Decline and Fall* 155)

This initial introduction presents an obviously negative portrayal that already hints towards the resounding lavish and modern features of the house. In *Decline and Fall* Waugh does not revel in the setting of Scone College at Oxford or at Castle

Llanabba; instead he focuses on the interactions of his characters and the action that follows. Part Two of the novel begins with the introduction to King's Thursday and takes on an obvious shift as Waugh pays particular attention to the various features of the home. However, after this initial introduction, the description given once the characters finally reach the house is not as encompassing or sweeping as expected. Instead of going through a detailed overview of the home, when Paul enters it for the first time he does not revel in his surroundings, but instead "notice[s] nothing in the room except Mrs. Beste-Chetwynde." (*Decline and Fall* 166) Despite the buildup and attention paid to the refurbishment of the house, Waugh does not make it the immediate focus. Instead the details of the house are provided sporadically and subtly. They come forth casually in moments that allow the frivolous and the ornate to ring out. For example, when during a conversation the detail is dropped that "The half-finished mosaics at their feet were covered with planks and sacking; moonlight beyond the polished aluminum balustrade the park stretched silent and illimitable." (*Decline and Fall* 168) Waugh uses this moment to highlight and ridicule the modernity of the home, especially through the "half-finished mosaics at their feet". The mosaic is a modern art technique and both the fact that it is unfinished and on the floor of the home instead of hanging on the wall reflects the extreme wealth and natural arrogance of the family. Mrs. Beste-Chetwynde disregards the actual art and only recognizes its significance in filling space in her home. This passage is also used to show the power of Mrs. Beste-Chetwynde over Paul. She becomes another polarizing authority figure and provides a negative influence in his life. Her character "violates the qualities of endurance and serenity" she is "the novel's chaos

merchant.” (Meckier 58) She is not only responsible for refurbishing a gaudy estate, but her own beauty supersedes that of the home she has created.

Through the entirety of his time at King’s Thursday, Paul’s attention is on Mrs. Beste-Chetwynde. She is the first woman he comes in contact with and her beauty quickly manipulates him. Even before moving to King’s Thursday, the moment Paul first saw Mrs. Beste-Chetwynde at Llanabba Castle is described as he is head over heels and smitten upon his first sight of her: “like the first breath of spring in the Champs Élysées came Mrs. Beste-Chetwynde – two lizard-skin feet, silk legs, chinchilla body” (*Decline and Fall* 95). She eventually takes him on a journey that lands him in prison and forces him to fake his own death to escape. Her beauty is able to take effect because she provides a sensation Paul is not used to. Through his transition from Oxford to Llanabba to King’s Thursday, Paul did not come in contact with any beautiful women except for Mrs. Beste-Chetwynde and again he finds himself floundering in a situation he is not prepared for. Waugh’s ingénu comes forth in Pennyfeather’s relationship with Mrs. Beste-Chetwynde. His inexperience and innocence blossoms in situations like the scene in which he sits with Margot Beste-Chetwynde as she hires new girls for her business in South America. Paul observes from the background and again his attention is focused on Margot’s beauty, as he gets lost in her prowess.

Paul sat in the corner – on a chair made in the shape of an inflated Channel swimmer – enraptured at her business ability. All her vagueness had left her; she sat upright at the table, which was covered with Balmoral tartan, her pen poised over an inkpot, which was set in a stuffed grouse, the very embodiment of the Feminist movement. One by one the girls were shown in. (*Decline and Fall* 192)

Carens notes how in scenes like this Waugh's satire emerges as "Paul himself is made to seem foolish, but, even more importantly, his innocence provides a sharp contrast to the brazenness of Mrs. Beste-Chetwynde." (Carens 37) The satire is not in the face of the reader with the way it characterizes Paul, but instead places Paul in a situation where the world around him is overwhelming. He is placed in the corner of the scene and becomes overwhelmed by the new form of the woman he thought he knew as "all her vagueness had left her". He operates as a submissive character through this scene. Paul's amazement continues when the business is concluded and he says, "Margot, you're wonderful. You ought to have been an empress." Margot responds with a remark that revels in this technique of satire and firmly establishes Paul's position as she responds to say "Don't say that you were a Christian slave, dearest." (*Decline and Fall* 194-195) Margot responds to Paul's compliment by comparing his doting to a slave. This response shows the contrast between their characters; Paul's innocence and Margot's unbridled harshness come forth in this moment, as well as her negative influence over him. Paul's character has again remained unchanged as the actions of those around him shape him into stagnation. He does not drive the action of the narrative, but instead stands to the side and watches as other characters like Captain Grimes, Prendergast, and Mrs. Beste-Chetwynde act in the world around him and drive his character forward for him. It is because of this stagnation that Paul's story takes a circular route as he learns nothing, is reincarnated, and ends up back at Oxford.

Chapter 4 of Part Two is titled "Resurrection" and reveals the reemergence of Captain Grimes after his supposed suicide. The final chapter of the novel is also titled "Resurrection", but instead is concerned with the rebirth of Paul Pennyfeather. The

novel's narrative sees Paul wrongly put in prison for the crimes committed by Margot Beste-Chetwynde. Margot then makes a plan to remove Paul from jail by faking his death and giving him a new identity. The plan comes off and Paul finds himself a new man in the novel's final chapter. After spending time doing nothing, Paul makes the decision that "Yes, I'm going back to Oxford again to learn theology." (*Decline and Fall* 281) Not only does he return Oxford, but also theology was the same subject he previously studied there. This decision solidifies the circular nature of Paul's journey.

Paul's lesson "is a sad one, the discovery not of growth but the reincarnation treadmill." (Meckier 64) The characters and world he has had to work through have established his stagnation and his decision to return to Oxford under his new identity has solidified his mentality. Instead of disconnecting with the flawed system that abandoned him, he returns "ripe for another unfavorable turn of Fortune's wheel." (Meckier 65) The circular tragedy of *Decline and Fall's* narrative is summed up in a metaphor in the final chapter. Professor Silenus tells Paul that life is like the big wheel at Luna Park: "At first you sit down and watch the others. They are all trying to sit in the wheel, and they keep getting flung off, and that makes them laugh, and you laugh too. It's great fun." Paul replies to this metaphor, "I don't really think that sounds very much like life." (*Decline and Fall* 282) Professor Silenus' metaphor for life serves as the perfect parallel for the narrative structure endured by the characters through the novel and the experience had by the reader. The narrative of *Decline and Fall* sees its characters act wildly beyond any sense of reason. Characters attempt to settle, like Paul's attempt to find stability through a job or his marriage with Margot Beste-Chetwynde, but the only certainty is the constant destabilization. Just as the passage notes, the constant destabilization of the characters is

where the comedy emerges. Professor Silenus' name also works to reinforce his metaphor for life being like the wild ride at Luna Park. In Greek mythology Silenus is a "creature of the wild, part man part beast, who in Classical times were closely associated with the god Dionysus." (Encyclopedia Britannica) Waugh uses this name particularly for Paul's new professor because it reflects the inhuman chaos of Oxford, which Paul has returned to. Paul's response further sums up his character's arc. Despite being the center of this chaos through his own life, Paul is still just as innocent and naïve as he was at the start of the novel. He will also continue to attempt to find stability, marked by his return to Oxford.

Paul finally returns to Oxford and "entered his old college once more, wearing a commoner's gown and a heavy cavalry moustache. This and his natural diffidence formed a complete disguise." (*Decline and Fall* 284) The facts about his appearance reflect the lack of growth he has had from the first chapter through to the last. Waugh provides a mostly physical description of his character, denoted by his moustache and clothes. His lone emotional characteristic is his "diffidence" but it is qualified as a "natural" quality. Paul's diffidence throughout most of the novel was forced as a result of the constant abuse and manipulation he took from other characters, he was also not openly diffident during his first tenure at Oxford. At this point in his journey, he has been conditioned and his diffidence has been solidified as natural, which is why it now appears as a disguise. The static quality of his character is however still obvious as "After much doubt and deliberation he retained the name of Pennyfeather." (*Decline and Fall* 284) It is clear that despite the events and variety of characters he encountered throughout the

text, Paul floated through the narrative unchanged. Why would Waugh then have his protagonist return to where he started?

Jerome Meckier states that Waugh inserts a deluge of moral ideas for Paul to avoid throughout the text to show the unavoidable and circular nature of life. Paul is resurrected and returns to Oxford “in order to undergo one calamity after another.” (Meckier 57) Paul’s return to Oxford is however not as senseless as Meckier suggests. Instead he returns to Oxford for a second chance to avoid the narrative he has just experienced. Jeffery Heath provides a slightly more agreeable reading of Waugh, as he says “Waugh’s plots are circular and bring the reader, but not the protagonist, to the point where (to use Northrop Frye’s phrase), he can ‘escape from an incorrect procedure.’ Waugh advances his narratives through repetition with variation” (Heath 123). Heath’s reading of Waugh agrees with Meckier’s idea of the circular narrative, but Heath extends the idea by suggesting the course of events that occur after the novel is over. The reader is able to learn from the narrative and proceed, while as seen with Paul Pennyfeather, the protagonist continues to enter the flawed cycle throughout the narrative. However, Waugh’s Epilogue suggests that Paul’s return to Oxford will also allow him some sort of growth despite the recurring corruption of his environment.

The Epilogue of *Decline and Fall* provides a moment of reflection between Paul and his former student at Llanabba, Peter. The action coincidentally takes place on the equivalent day to the prologue, the night of the Bollinger Club dinner. Paul comments that “The Bollinger seem to be enjoying themselves... Whose rooms are they in this time?” (*Decline and Fall* 289) Instead of unwillingly falling into the action, Paul is now in a position where he can observe the drunken acts of those at the dinner. The action

does eventually come to Paul, as “Peter Pastmaster came into the room. He was dressed in the bottle-green and white evening coat of the Bollinger Club. His face was flushed and his dark hair slightly disordered” (*Decline and Fall* 290). Unlike in the Prelude, Paul is now able to handle himself. Despite Peter’s drunkenness and involvement with the dinner that once got Paul kicked out of school, the two men engage in a solemn conversation, which reflects on the fate of Paul. Peter makes the honest accusation that “You know, Paul, I think it was a mistake you ever got mixed up with us; don’t you? We’re different somehow. Don’t quite know how. Don’t think that’s rude, do you, Paul?” (*Decline and Fall* 291) This moment proves to be the sole instance of change in the character of Paul Pennyfeather throughout the text. Instead of responding indignantly or with quiet reserve, Paul makes an honest and succinct point, which sums up his character, as he responds, “No, I know exactly what you mean. You’re dynamic, and I’m static.” (*Decline and Fall* 291) Paul does not expand on this point and Peter responds saying, “Is that it?” Through his succinct response Paul Pennyfeather is able to make a point, which not only hits the truth of the division between Paul and the rest of the novel’s universe, but also shows some signs of growth as he admits how he is “static”.

The novel ends as Paul finally recognizes his deficiencies. There is no obvious sign that he will move forward from this point, but Waugh ends the novel with the final sentence “Then he turned out the light and went into his bedroom to sleep.” (*Decline and Fall* 293) As Heath suggests in his book, the characters in Waugh’s novels are trapped through the duration of the narrative. However, now that the novel is over and the Epilogue has shown some signs of development for Paul Pennyfeather, the suggestion is that he will be able to break from the narrative structure. This is why Paul returns to

Oxford so that he can finally be afforded this opportunity for growth. The ominous ending of the novel suggests hope for Paul. Both turning off the light and falling asleep disengage him from the reader and the narrative, which consequently removes him from the chaotic world he has struggled through. He can now experience Oxford for its true value, which is being able to grow in an environment separated from the chaos of the outside world. Or as Waugh puts it “It gives [him] another four years in which to grow up gradually. It puts [him] out of the way of [his] fellow-citizens.” (*A Little Order* 17)

IV. The Bright Young Things of *Vile Bodies*

The world Waugh creates in his second novel *Vile Bodies* stands as the antithesis to the world of Oxford, established in his essay “Was Oxford Worth It”. Waugh’s Oxford is a “a very beautiful city in which it is convenient to segregate a certain number of the young of the nation while they are growing up.” (*A Little Order* 16-17) The universe of *Vile Bodies* shares the similarity with Oxford in the way that both see young people get drunk and act recklessly, but instead of affording the characters with the opportunity to learn and grow from their experiences, there is no consequence to the actions and lifestyles in *Vile Bodies*. *Brideshead Revisited* shows the dichotomy between life at Oxford and life beyond the university. *Vile Bodies* does not work to this effect because there is no alternative world within its universe. Once Adam Fenwick-Symes gets off the boat from France and steps foot onto England he enters a harried, unruly world of chaos. Waugh uses the universe of *Vile Bodies* to show the negative side to a young aristocracy that have not been afforded the necessary opportunities for growth.

Vile Bodies is described as “a scene of disorientation and moral decay” (Doyle 14), “too wholly fantastic for any question of sympathy or antipathy to arise” (Hollis 8), a “portrait of the last fling of the Bright Young People – the frivolous and frantic young set that characterized the Roaring Twenties in England” (Phillips 15), and with “little direction or consistency in any of the activities.” (Cook 83) The descriptions given by critics and scholars of the novel all agree on the chaos of the world Waugh creates; it is fundamentally without order. Waugh creates this world to show his frustration and to highlight the necessity for the type of education he describes in “Was Oxford Worth It”. In *Brideshead Revisited* and *Decline and Fall*, the characters face chaotic worlds and

disillusioned trials, but there are periods of growth because when they fall out of these worlds they transition into environments that allow them to make sense of the chaos.

William J. Cook draws a line between *Vile Bodies* and *Decline and Fall* because “Adam, although functioning in the central capacity like Paul, is obviously less important to the making of the story, and the plot lacks the unified thrust characteristic of *Decline and Fall*.” (84) Adam never makes sense of his chaos in *Vile Bodies*, which is why he bounces from one ridiculous situation to another as an outsider without any resolution, until Waugh provides an extremely pessimistic conclusion.

Cook describes how in *Vile Bodies* “Adam is the only character who enters every major social area of the novel and who is associated with all of the other characters... Yet, the character of Adam is constantly overshadowed by the events themselves; it is as though he is merely a part of the fantastic panorama.” (Cook 85) The attention of the narrative is never focused on Adam and he becomes a peculiar protagonist because he does not stand as a clear point of identification. Instead the narrative focuses on the action, which surrounds and overwhelms his character. For example, the marriage of Adam to Nina Blount is a continuous struggle, which is maintained throughout the text. Despite the repetitive hardships Adam faces that prevent him from solidifying his marriage, his character and the effects of the action are never the focus. He does not learn from one instance to the next, but instead continues to act in the same manner, until eventually his marriage is called off. Waugh places the action at the forefront of these scenes. The action controls Adam, instead of Adam controlling the action.

In the novel’s first scene, which introduces Adam’s engagement, he does not push anything forward despite initiating the scene’s conversation. Instead he is forced into a

passive position, where he is unable to impose himself. The introductory remarks of the conversation reflects Adam's position, when despite knowing whom he is talking to, he chooses to act otherwise. Adam calls his fiancé Nina and asks, "May I speak to Miss Blount, please?" (*Vile Bodies* 37) He receives the following response: "'I'll just see if she's in,' said Miss Blount's voice. 'Who's speaking, please?' She was always rather snobbish about the fiction of having someone to answer the telephone." (*Vile Bodies* 37) The narrator makes an implication that Adam recognizes the voice on the other end of the phone as Nina, by denoting the speaker as "Miss Blount's voice". Despite this recognition that he is talking to his fiancé already, Adam does not immediately interject, but instead allows Nina to proceed with her charade, under the reason that she is "rather snobbish about the fiction of having someone to answer the telephone". This recognition places Adam in a role beneath his fiancé when he responds to the question about who is speaking, with the simple response "Mr. Fenwick-Symes". Despite being engaged to Nina, Adam allows her to play this game. Adam eventually, passively breaks the charade in a moment Waugh uses to introduce Nina's true character into the novel.

After indirectly addressing Adam on the phone, Nina responds to him telling her his name with the singular remark "Oh." (*Vile Bodies* 37) The brevity of the retort is clear in the way it shows Nina's disappoint in receiving a call from her fiancé. Nina is young and this response is definitive of the characterization of not only her, but also her peers, which Waugh characterizes as "The Bright Young Things". These characters are constantly underwhelmed and unappreciative, despite the fantastic world they sit at the head of. For example at a party where Adam falls asleep, he wakes up to see that "There were about a dozen people left at the party; that hard kernel of gaiety that never breaks. It

was about three o'clock." (*Vile Bodies* 66) The "hard kernel of gaiety" that The Bright Young Things possess is consistently unwavering, ignores time, and exceeds Adam's ability to keep up.

Adam's next response finally breaks from Nina's act when he says, "Adam, you know...How are you Nina?" This statement finally directly addresses her despite the fact he knew it was Nina the moment she picked up the phone. The conversation continues and shows how the impositions of others dictate the actions of Adam. The dialogue continues when Nina tells him that "'Well, I've got rather a pain just at present.' 'Poor Nina. Shall I come round and see you?' 'No, don't do that, darling, because I'm just going to have a bath. Why don't we dine together?'" (*Vile Bodies* 37) Adam very rarely dictates his own actions and is instead thrown around in a whirlwind of the wishes and actions of those around him. For example, Adam's struggle to acquire the money to marry Nina is never a direct result of his own actions, but is stopped for various reasons throughout the novel by customs officers, an old Major drinking in a hotel, Colonel Blount, and that same Major except in a different incident at a horse race.

The conversation between Adam and Nina moves on and the first instance of their marriage being unavoidably postponed is presented. The passage reveals again the way Adam is subject to the actions of his universe and it also shows the division between his character and the characters of the Bright Young Things like Nina:

Oh, I say, Nina, there's one thing – I don't think I shall be able to marry you after all.

Oh, *Adam*, you are a bore. Why not?

They burned my book.

Beasts. Who did?

I'll tell you about it tonight.

Yes, *do*. Good-bye, darling

Good-bye, my sweet.

He hung up the receiver and left the telephone box. (*Vile Bodies* 38)

Adam refers in this passage to an instance, which occurs at the start of the second chapter when he arrives at England and faces customs officers as he gets off a boat from France. The customs officers force the unfavorable and unreasonable situation onto Adam when they tell him:

You can take these books on architecture and the dictionary, and I don't mind stretching a point for once and letting you have the history books, too. But this book on Economics comes under Subversive Propaganda. That you leaves behind. And this here *Purgatorio* doesn't look right to me, so that stays behind, pending inquiries. But as for this autobiography, that's just downright dirt, and we burns that straight away, see. (*Vile Bodies* 26)

The books confiscated by the customs officers show the decline in sensible society. They nonsensically allow Adam to keep his books on architecture, history, and his dictionary, but confiscate books on economics, propaganda, Dante's *Purgatorio*, and his own autobiography, which was going to serve as Adam's primary source of income upon publication. The confiscated books all represent higher learning. Architecture, history, and the dictionary are all necessary and educational, but they are much more standard in contrast to the other subjects. All of these are static, unchanging fields that revolve

around the nation's past and preconceived ideas. Economics and propaganda present more subversive subjects that given a serious understanding could be useful in shifting the status quo. Dante's *Purgatorio* clearly represents higher learning and his autobiography stands as a subjective, creative text. The division in what is confiscated represents the general population of the world Adam is entering. It is a population filled with The Bright Young Things that Waugh despises and Adam does not fit in with. It is a content population ruled by the nation's aristocratic elites, which is why more subversive texts are rejected. This is a group that wants to avoid learning given the fear that their comfortable world would change. The point that he is arriving on the boat from France sets up a further division of the class systems and the point that England has moved away from an exploratory learning and education. France shows how devolution into the contemporary world of England that Waugh despises and is filled with young characters like Nina. The reference Adam makes back to this moment again makes the point that the novel's universe is nonsensical and Adam's fate is not in his hands, but in the trivial hands of those around him.

This conversation also shows the divide between Adam and Nina, which consequently highlights the difference between Adam and the entire universe of The Bright Young Things. The most telling point of the conversation is Nina's response, "you are a bore" when he tells her they can no longer be married. Archie Loss describes the way *Vile Bodies* is a novel of dynamism: "motion gives way to stasis...a feeling of restlessness alternating with calm is conveyed in the structure of Waugh's novel." (159) In this passage and throughout the text, Adam is in a state of stasis, while the artificial dynamism of Nina is revealed. *Vile Bodies* is a world of see and be seen and when Adam

removes himself from the action and the drama of the world, like when he calls off his marriage, Nina's reaction isn't forlorn because she is no longer able to get married, but frustration because his actions will harm her image by slowing her down in this dynamic universe. Waugh uses the restlessness of his characters to criticize the ultimately futile and doomed nature of their lives, which is realized at the end of the novel when their world is broken down.

The novel's dynamism is also reflected in the literal duration of the scenes. Loss describes this effect and the way that "the scenes, some only a few lines long, carry out the theme of restlessness struck at the very beginning of the book. They also bring to mind the...technique of montage that in the 1920s became such a prominent feature in film." (Loss 160) This first scene between Adam and Nina takes place over a page and a half. The final lines of their phone conversation, which ends the scene defines the succinct quality of the novel as the dialogue transitions back and forth, quickly between the two characters until it concludes with "'Good-bye, my sweet.' He hung up the receiver and left the telephone box." Adam concluding the conversation with "my sweet" also shows his extreme affection and reliance on Nina, which is rarely returned. Both the dialogue and the action are short and driven to the point and then transition immediately out and into another scene. Once the phone is hung up, the moment between him and Nina is over and the novel transitions swiftly into the next sentence, which reads, "People had crowded into the Underground station for shelter from the rain, and were shaking their umbrellas and reading their evening papers." (*Vile Bodies* 38) Just as Loss describes, the novel's scenes mimic the quick cuts of a fast paced film. The back and forth nature of the telephone conversation works to the same structure of a shot-reverse-

shot technique. The aforementioned sentence of the people in the Underground also works like an establishing shot, laying out the setting before diving into the action.

Cook defines the role of Adam in the novel as being one of “irregular circularity; the narrative wheel has a flat side upon which it comes to rest momentarily before beginning to move again. The narrator returns to Adam, his reference point, each time before setting out to plumb other social areas.” (86-87) As Cook states, Adam is the novel’s fulcrum, but because of the constant action, he is afforded very little growth. For this reason, he engages in repetitive scenes, such as the delay of his engagement. The action within the scenes and the motivational forces change, but the conversations and Adam’s reactions are largely the same. Throughout the novel, Adam is faced with ridiculous challenges and obstructions to his marriage that he is never able to get around and approaches with the same tepid mentality.

In a scene where his marriage is again put on hold, it is clear how he is the passive observer to the chaotic and nonsensical action. The scene takes place a third of the way through the novel and mirrors the earlier scene where Adam and Nina discuss their engagement. The passage is introduced as “Before Nina was properly awake Adam dressed and went out into the rain to get a shave. He came back bringing two toothbrushes and a bright red celluloid comb. Nina sat up in bed and combed her hair. She put Adam’s coat over her back.” (*Vile Bodies* 100) All of the elements of the passage work towards the positive union of the couple. Adam brings back “two toothbrushes and a bright red celluloid comb,” which Nina then uses before putting on “Adam’s coat over her back.” However, the narrative characteristically transitions out of this passage of brief tranquility and falls back into its chaotic world:

She threw off the coat and jumped out of bed, and he told her that she looked like a fashion drawing without the clothes. Nina was rather pleased about that, but she said that it was cold and that she still had a pain, only not so bad as it was. Then she dressed and they went downstairs. (*Vile Bodies* 100)

Nina makes an obvious transition out of the content state she was in only moments before. Taking off Adam's coat serves as a metaphor for her reentrance into the world of the novel. Once the jacket is off she admits to being cold and having a pain. Being cold contrasts the fact that she just removed Adam's jacket, which would have served as a clear source of warmth. This reflects the nonsensical elements of the world of the *Bright Young Things*. It also parallels the structure of their first conversation, which before getting into the heart of the dialogue, there is a brief period of nonsensical introduction. Nina's pain also reappears in this scene and recurs constantly. The annoying ache is never given a purpose and flows in and out of the novel quickly and without reason. After this introduction to the scene, the couple begins a conversation over breakfast, which is similarly characterized by the short, choppy dialogue. The conversation quickly gets to a point and then transitions away to a different scene of action. Adam again initiates the conversation:

‘By the way’ said Adam. ‘You said there was something you wanted to say.’

‘Oh, yes, so there is. My dear, something quite awful.’

‘Do tell me.’

‘Well, its about the check papa gave you. I’m afraid it wont help us as much as you thought.’ (*Vile Bodies* 100)

Adam again serves as the point for moving the action of the novel forward. He reminds Nina of the drama, which once stated, sets off the next series of events. Again the conversation starts almost as an aside. In the previously referenced passage about their engagement, Adam starts the conversation with “there’s one thing –” and here it begins as Adam reminds Nina of “something you wanted to say.” Both of these phrases reduce the significance of what is said by making it seem as if it was almost forgotten. This allows the proceeding action to happen faster. This new incident, halting the marriage of Adam and Nina is as she states because the money her father gave Adam for the wedding is illegitimate. The reason for the check’s illegitimacy is the signature. Adam finally recognizes how “the old idiot’s signed it ‘Charlie Chaplin’” (*Vile Bodies* 101). This situation again reflects the nonsense of the novel’s universe. His character quickly moves through a series of ridiculous situations, like the inexplicable confiscation of his autobiography, or how his would be father in law decides to sign a check with the name Charlie Chaplin.

After Adam and Nina discuss their predicament they agree on the fact that as a result of the false check they “shan’t be able to get married after all.” (*Vile Bodies* 102) Despite this somewhat momentous occasion in the narrative, the scene immediately falls back into the aforementioned style of rapid transition as it cuts away quickly from the action, disregarding space and time, much as a film would. After the affirmation that they will not be able to get married, the dialogue ends with Adam saying, “It *is* a bore, isn’t it?” (*Vile Bodies* 102) In this moment Adam reaffirms Nina’s mentality by repeating the phrase “It *is* a bore”, which she used when Adam first told her that their marriage was going to have to be postponed. Waugh uses the repetition of this statement to show

Adam's regrettable acceptance of his universe. The narrator does not provide the reader with a moment of reflection or a break in the narrative, but instead the next lines are: "Later he said, 'I expect that parson thought I was dotty too.' And later. 'As a matter of fact, it's rather a good joke, don't you think?'" (*Vile Bodies* 102) Both of these lines disconnect from the sullen sentiments of the marriage being again put on hold and instead use Adam as a point of transition by providing a series of unrelated thoughts, which then allows Nina the space to provide her own unrelated explication. Adam is merely a device used by characters like Nina and the other Bright Young Things of the novel as means of finding constant action.

Adam is similar to *Decline and Fall's* Paul Pennyfeather in this regard. Both men serve as passive protagonists. They themselves engage in very little spontaneous, self-derived action and instead rely on the motivations of the surrounding universe to progress their narratives. The key difference is that despite being thrown around by the wills of others, Paul lies at the center of his universe. Adam is not at the center of his universe and instead most of his actions progress or influence the lives of others rather than his own. For example, when Adam suggests to his party: "Let's go to Lottie Crump's and have a drink." (*Vile Bodies* 66) The result of this series of events has little significance for Adam. The lone outcome for him is that the next morning he "woke up feeling terribly ill." (*Vile Bodies* 73) However, the other members of his party have a wild night of drinking and end up at the Prime Minister's home. Adam is not mentioned once in the scenes following his suggestion that they go out and drink. If Paul Pennyfeather had made a similar suggestion in *Decline and Fall*, he would have ended up in a situation

beyond his control, but still would have been the focus of the scene and center of the action.

Nina and her peers are given an obviously negative portrayal by Waugh. As shown by the previous depictions of Nina, Waugh generalizes the aristocratic youth of his novel as the Bright Young Things and characterizes them as vapid, attention seeking creatures with no moral compass. Paul Doyle describes the world and the characters in the novel as a “scene of disorientation and moral decay. Obligations are not taken seriously; people hurt one another emotionally, mentally, and physically, and usually do not have the depth or sensitivity to realize their deficiencies. As long as they can pass time pleurably and gratify their personal desires, the Bright Young Things dispense with moral standards and responsibilities.” (14) This is why Nina’s reaction to Adam’s difficulty in trying to marry her is boredom and disregard for his feelings. Doyle’s point is extremely true, the world of The Bright Young Things is emotionally vapid and the primary concern of the characters is not to connect with one another, but to maintain their shallow personas. Nina never makes any legitimate attempt to love Adam and instead only becomes openly invested in their relationship when it is convenient for her. When Adam experiences a brief stint of fame and popularity writing under the pseudonym Mr. Chatterbox, Nina becomes far more invested in his life. However, when he loses this position she again distances herself. This is also why Adam struggles to grow because he is in a world shaped by these beings that do not truly care for him. Waugh uses his novel to criticize this generation of emotionally gaunt, flippant youths. Neil Johnson describes a scene from the novel when the character Mrs. Ape openly criticizes the attendees of her party asking, “*Just you look at yourselves*” (*Vile Bodies* 136) Johnson writes how the

effect for the Bright Young Things is that they for a short time exit their catered universe and become “trapped in the gaze of Mrs Ape, and whom do they see in that gaze if not themselves? This act of seeing themselves in Mrs Ape’s gaze produces emotions of both shame and guilt, but shame is clearly dominant.” (10) Johnson appropriately points out how when The Bright Young Things are occasionally forced to look at their lives, they are faced with nothing, but the reality of shame and judgment.

Waugh uses *Vile Bodies* to show what would potentially happen to the young, wealthy population of England if their education were removed. Symbolically shown through the removal of Adam’s educational texts by the customs agents as he crosses into England, the world of the novel is one that lacks a concrete educational influence. The experience Waugh calls for in his essay *Was Oxford Worth While?* is completely removed from the novel’s universe. The outcome is a population that has not been afforded the opportunity for an emotional growth and a gradual integration into society, which is why the Bright Young Things are so deplorable and the novel avoids any sort of emotional sympathy and instead follows a constant stream of outlandish acts. Aside from Adam the population is economically sound, which again backs up Waugh’s point that school is a necessity not because of the money that will accompany earning a degree, but because of the experiences that will grant some emotional growth and help students avoid turning into The Bright Young Things of *Vile Bodies*.

Waugh completely deconstructs the world of the novel, with the ironically named final chapter “Happy Ending”. The final line of the chapter preceding “Happy Ending” is: *War has been declared.*” (*Vile Bodies* 282) After this declaration the novel finally shifts away from the hectic pace and outlandish narrative, into the final chapter. The final

chapter uses a temporal gap and sees Adam on the battlefield. The scenes are no longer being employed rapidly and the tone is not as playful. Waugh has taken the characters of *Vile Bodies* out of their fantastical setting and placed them in a world rooted in reality. It is a rude awakening and summed up in a moment when one of the girls from earlier in the novel is placed on the battlefield and is given the description of “The woebegone fragment of womanhood in the corner looked a little less terrified when she saw the wine. She recognized it as the symbol of international goodwill.” (*Vile Bodies* 287) This description shows both her removal from the world of chaotic comfort and her inability to handle her current reality, which is now firmly rooted in Waugh’s realistic depiction of war. The wine represents a forlorn symbol of comfort and reflects the priorities of the novel’s former world. After this initial description, the girl presents a monologue, which Waugh uses to unapologetically criticize her character. In her monologue, she reveals her name to be “Chastity”, which Waugh again places ironically to mock the despicable quality of the old world. The rest of her monologue is wayward as Chastity attempts to assemble the narrative of her life and how she ended up wandering the battlefield. There is no logic to her series of events, she was sent to Buenos Aires, “then when the war came she brought me back again”, and then the “lorry I was in got stuck in the ditch so I got in with some other foreigners” (*Vile Bodies* 287). Her monologue makes little to no sense and reinforces Waugh’s point that when faced with a harsh reality such as war, The Bright Young Things will be completely ill equipped.

Waugh ends this brief final chapter with the line: “And presently, like a circling typhoon, the sounds of battle began to return.” (*Vile Bodies* 289) This final statement again ironically parallels the rest of the novel. Adam moves through a circular narrative

as he is confronted by a number of social situations and characters that all lead him nowhere. For example, he is unable to marry Nina at the beginning of the novel, he continues to struggle to honor their engagement through the middle, and by the end he is still unable to find enough money to marry her. The irony here is that the circularity of the old world presented very little actual significance; all of the characters were completely content to float through their repetitive lives. However, in this new world of the final chapter the repetition holds all of the consequence as it leads them back into “the sounds of battle”, which they are completely unable to handle.

The final chapter is a “Happy Ending” for Waugh because despite war breaking out, it finally presents the reality of the characters and separates them from the bullshit world they previously ruled. Unlike *Brideshead Revisited* and *Decline and Fall* there is only one world for the characters of *Vile Bodies* to live in, which restricts their growth. Unlike Charles and Sebastian, Adam Fenwick-Symes cannot leave his world temporarily and return having learned a lesson from the variety of his experiences. When Waugh finally does give the characters a new world in the final chapter, they are completely ill equipped and flounder as they are thrown into the deep end of a more realistic reality.

V. The Reaffirming Power of Evelyn Waugh Through Film and Television

The film and television adaptations of *Brideshead Revisited*, *Decline and Fall*, and *Vile Bodies* all work to reinforce the themes and ideas of their source material. Despite occasional liberties and diversions within their narratives, the themes are maintained and presented clearly to the viewer. All of the adaptations reinforce the point Waugh makes on education in his article *Was Oxford Worth While?* because they illustrate a clear division in space and the effects on the protagonists are all largely the same. The film adaptation of *Decline and Fall*, *Decline and Fall of a Birdwatcher* (Krish 1969), takes the greatest liberties when adapting the novel, yet despite its obvious differences, the film makes the same conclusion as Waugh's novel. Unlike *Decline and Fall of a Birdwatcher*, the television series *Brideshead Revisited* (Sturridge & Lindsay-Hogg 1981) and film adaptation of *Vile Bodies*, *Bright Young Things* (Fry 2003) stick closely to their source material.

The *Brideshead Revisited* television miniseries distinguishes space through its cinematography. The themes taken on by the miniseries mimic the effects of the book. There are very few, if any digressions from its source. The voice of the series is that of Waugh. Most of the language is taken verbatim from its source material. Sticking so closely to the original is neither a good nor bad quality; it creates a piece of work that is ineffective in creating any new or revelatory thought that cannot be found in the book. The greatest effects are cultural as a reflective article by the New York Times titled "30 Years Later, Revisiting 'Brideshead'" makes the point that "It made stars of Jeremy Irons, who played the moody, disillusioned painter Charles Ryder, and Anthony Andrews

as the outwardly insouciant but desperately dissolute aristocracy Sebastian Flyte. It popularized such English fashions as Oxford bags and terms like ‘spiffing’” (Lyall)

The *Brideshead Revisited* miniseries most effectively worked to expose a large audience to Waugh’s work and to operate on a visual level that a novel can obviously not achieve. In her essay *Hollywood Convention and Film Adaptation*, Debra Fried states that films change their source material through three conventions, “the style in which dialogue was edited, the status of filmed objects, and the star system.” (Fried 294) Given the aforementioned details that the dialogue is strikingly literal in its adaptation from the book and that the series main actors, Jeremy Irons and Anthony Andrews did not emerge as stars until after the release of the series, the only convention in Fried’s essay operating in this adaptation is “the status of filmed objects”. Fried describes the “status of filmed objects” as the way that a film can take an object from a book and through the larger scope of the medium, achieve something greater. A film can use the manipulation of the camera, setting, and sound to create a clearer image for its audience than what Waugh was able to do through the limitations of his novel. A reader is forced to derive meaning based on his or her own understanding of the language. For example, when Waugh writes, “Oxford, in those days, was still a city of aquatint.” (*Brideshead Revisited* 21) the meaning of this sentence heavily depends on whether or not a reader is familiar with the word “aquatint”. When Irons delivers the same line from the opening monologue of Chapter One, the words are given more obvious meaning as the camera pans over a medium shot of a building at Oxford, while at the same time a bird can be heard chirping as the accompanying orchestra begins to swell. Just like in the novel, “aquatint” is a peculiar word that would have been lost on the average person watching the show.

However, given the onscreen reinforcement of beautiful imagery and sound, the meaning is forced and the viewer is prescribed a definition. The definition for the viewer is now an association with the variety and beauty of Oxford's campus.

In the novel the first chapter's introduction continues to the line, "In her spacious and quiet streets men walked and spoke as they had done in Newman's day; her autumnal mists, her gray springtime, and the rare glory of her summer days – such as that day –" (*Brideshead Revisited* 21) However, the miniseries skips this passage and Irons continues straight into the following lines, which begins with "when the chestnut was in flower and the bells rang out high and clear" and proceeds from there. The adaptation is able to skip this passage and nothing is lost for the viewer because of the idea of onscreen objects. The series writer's made the conscious decision to leave out this detail describing the exact day because the viewer is literally looking at that day on screen. The audience does not need to have the continued beauty of Oxford compared to the day being talked about because they are presently immersed in an image of a beautiful Oxford day, through the series' establishing shot of the college. This presents a literal translation of the text not simply through the words being used, but the imagery on screen.

The camera cuts from the initial establishing shots of the Oxford building, later revealed through dialogue to be the college Charles inhabited, to a long shot straight down a hallway, which again paired with the voiceover narration can be assumed to be a college at Oxford. The scene's setting is paired with an unspoken line from the novel. The long shot of the hallway shows the "palms and azaleas [that] were banked round the porter's lodge." (*Brideshead Revisited* 22) This scene however sees the series taking another liberty that the novel is incapable of achieving. The line spoken by Irons from the

text “Echoes of the intruders penetrated every corner, and in my own college was no echo, but an original fount of the grossest disturbance.” (*Brideshead Revisited* 22) This line possesses little significance and is confusing for a first time reader of the book. The idea of an intruder is only mentioned here and then dropped immediately; the effect of foreshadowing in any sense is lost without a greater context of the entire work. Nothing has yet been said of the novel’s ultimate intruder, Sebastian Flyte, yet the miniseries places him as the focal point of this brief shot in the hallway. As Charles’ voiceover narration utters this line the camera begins to zoom on a figure dressed in all white, holding a teddy bear that has stepped from the sunlight, into the shadows of the hallway. When Charles begins to say the end of the line, a dresser being moved across the screen obstructs the viewer’s image of the figure and the camera cuts. In hindsight, Waugh’s intention to use the word intruder to mark the coming introduction of Sebastian is obvious. However, it is an easily missed and ignored detail. The congruent scene from the series takes the liberty of making this foreshadow obvious.

Although lacking original substance, the television series provided a visual lens, which works to magnify in particular the physical settings seen in the novel, especially at Oxford. Through this visual lens, the series is able to enhance Waugh’s positive characterization of Oxford and the formative effects of the space. Oxford is cast primarily through the expressive use of light and the natural quality of the setting. Just like the novel, the series opens with the prologue, showing scenes of war and the eventual transition into *Brideshead*. The first episode transitions from the prologue into a shot of the university through a dissolve, which goes from the face of an older Charles into a shot of the University. As mentioned, this first shot of the university is accompanied by

Charles' introductory monologue as the screen extends the images being discussed. The effect of using imagery to provide further exposition and highlight the emotion provided in the text extends beyond Oxford and is obvious throughout a number of episodes.

For example, in episode three "The Bleak Light of Day" when Sebastian and Charles go drinking in London the scenes are lit brightly without any noticeable shadows. The scenes also set the individuals on screen in medium close-ups and as the focal point of the frame, forcing the gaze of the viewer directly onto the individual being shot. The direct nature of these shots allows the viewer to engage with the positive emotions of their drinking. The camera makes it seem as though the viewer is at the table drinking and relies on a series of quick, cross cuts to again force the attention onto the obvious emotions within the scene. This contrasts heavily with the scenes later in the episode where the boys are put in prison. Here the camera pulls away providing a longer shot and instead of using quick, cross cutting the scenes linger. Charles is shown sitting in the corner of the frame on the floor of his cell. Instead of cutting to the hapless yells of Rex and Sebastian it remains on Charles. The lighting is dimmer and the shadows surrounding Charles are obvious and accentuated, highlighting the quality of his grief. The series cuts from this scene to a dark, empty hallway in the prison. The boys begin speaking to each other from their separate cells and again instead of cross cutting to the individual speaking, the shot of the hallway is maintained, showing the separation and hopelessness of their situation.

Both the miniseries and the novel utilize the divisions in space to show the effects of the university and how an Oxford education shapes Charles and Sebastian. In the novel, Waugh shows the way Charles begins to develop once he enters the university and

how he is able to learn from the interactions within the college and the contrasting nature of the outside world. The miniseries works to all of the exact same effects, but utilizes the objects onscreen to highlight and provide more obvious and engaging emotions for the viewer to connect with. Stephen Fry's film adaptation of Waugh's *Vile Bodies* works to an almost identical effect as the miniseries. The film, *Bright Young Things*, uses an over stylized technique to illustrate the frantic pace of the novel and the outlandishness of its characters.

For example, in a scene where Adam Fenwick-Symes loses the money he was going to use to marry his fiancée, the scene preemptively transitions. The film moves into an unrelated scene, which immediately starts into a different, unrelated series of action. As Adam looks into a mirror, forlorn at having lost his fortune, an up-tempo jazz clarinet begins to play. The tempo and festive style of the song contrast Adam's somber state, but the shot soon transitions through an upward, vertical wipe. The vertical wipe is an unconventional transition and mimics the peculiar nature of the music. If these techniques were used in a different film, or even in the *Brideshead Revisited* miniseries they would appear ridiculous. However, given his subject matter Fry incorporates them seamlessly into the film. He uses them alongside Waugh's narrative and language to enhance the sense of ridiculousness, which is upheld throughout the entire film.

The scene proceeding the vertical wipe provides an example of the over the top style of the film's cinematography. As the wipe starts an audible scream is heard from a woman. By the time the wipe ends the screaming woman becomes visible on the screen and given her outfit and dancing movements the scream is quickly interpreted as a festive cry as she dance at one of the film's many parties. The transitions of the film are never

gentle and no scene or situation is ever gently eased into the narrative, instead the film jumps rapidly through the story. After the wipe and shot of the woman, the party is then introduced as the camera weaves quickly through the crowd and is then followed by a series of rapid jump cuts. The fast camera movement and the quick cuts serve to reflect the pace of the story and the detestably frantic lives of the characters. The conversations of the film are all constructed through a series of short, quick cuts, which revolve around the action. Similarly the camera constantly weaves through the action as Fry takes the viewer on a twisted journey through the world of Waugh's.

The other aspect of this scene is that it shows the way Fry uses intense color patterns. In the film it is as though every party is themed by a color. The party shown during the opening credits is distinctly red. It achieves this color pattern through the lighting, set design and costumes. The party in this scene with the screaming woman is distinctly blue; again Fry uses the lighting, set, and costumes to construct a scene that is definitively one color. This over stylization through color reflects the shallow, superficiality of the characters and the overpowering, encompassing effect of their universe. The particularity to which the sets and costumes are constructed parallels the vapid quality of the characters and their interactions, as well as the search for constant action despite their everlasting dissatisfaction.

Bright Young Things parallels the effects of the *Brideshead Revisited* miniseries because they both work to construct worlds, which adhere to the original images created by Waugh in his novels. They subsequently serve to reinforce the point that Waugh makes on the necessity for a formative, educational space for his characters to grow and how the world of *Bright Young Things* neglects to provide this for Adam. *Decline and*

Fall of a Birdwatcher eventually reinforces this point, but takes greater liberties in conveying its source material. The greatest distinction between the other adaptations and *Decline and Fall of a Bird Watcher* is the period of time that each film presents. The *Brideshead* miniseries and *Bright Young Things* are firmly rooted in maintaining the purity of their time periods. The scenes of the series try to make the viewer feel as if they are immersed in a series shot in the 1920s, while *Bright Young Things* creates the frantic, swinging world of London during the 1930s. The series and film are entirely concerned with upholding the realism of its subject matter. *Decline and Fall of a Bird Watcher* reflects a period of time more in line with when the movie was created rather than when its subject matter was set. The music, color patterns, and set designs all work appropriately with the chaos of the text it is drawing from, but unlike the other adaptations, it also reflects the fact that it was a film made in England during 1968, rather than the 1920s, which is when the novel was set.

The introductory credit sequence presents a series of images accompanied by the film's theme tune. Both are entirely definitive of the late 1960s. The art movement of the 1960s is defined as the period moving out of abstract expressionism. The period of Abstract Expressionism "was an art of introspection largely, although not exclusively, induced by the war." (Polcari 490) It served as the predecessor to surrealism and the style is largely defined by its spontaneous and abstract elements. Jackson Pollock, a renowned artist from this period developed the technique of drip painting, in which paint was simply dripped onto a canvas and allowed to work actively on its own. For example in his painting *Blue Poles* the image is not distinct, but instead the viewer is forced to create an experience from the colors, which have been sprayed on the canvas in front of them.

Polcari asks the question, which establishes the movement in which *Decline and Fall of a Birdwatcher* was made: “Abstract Expressionism had been absorbed by British artists during the second half of the 1950s, the problem – for those who believed in a linear, progressive model of modern art – became ‘What next?’

Following this period and moving into the period in which the film was made, British artists continued to work within forms of abstract expressionism, but were also introduced to American Pop Art. For many artists, these two periods collided to form the distinct, surreal, hypnotic and trippy art distinct to the late 1960s. American Pop Art introduced a new, vibrant and defined color palette for artists to work with, which combined with the spontaneity of abstract expressionism. Artists were making “surrealist-style collages and abstract paintings with rainbow like bands of colour.” (Walker 95) This style takes over the introductory credit sequence of *Decline and Fall of a Birdwatcher*. The opening credit sequence shows a collection of colors as they continuously kaleidoscope behind the titles. They work to create the surreal, vibrant art, which was popular for the time period. The style of art that is evident on screen, does not relate in any way to when Waugh’s novel was published in 1928. In contrast, the opening credit sequence of *Bright Young Things* works to the sole purpose of rooting the film in its time period. As the credits role, Fry’s film shows a party with outfits and music obviously related to the culture of the late 1920s and early 30s. The sequence precedes the start of the narrative and is included as a means of providing a distinct orientation for the viewer. *Decline and Fall of a Birdwatcher* instead elects to create an adaptation that is more concerned with connecting its audience to the immediate present rather than trying to immerse them with the past and the period of its source material.

The film's theme song simultaneously works to reflect its modernity. The theme recurs throughout the film and was done by British composer Ron Goodwin. Goodwin's most notable film score was the post war nostalgia documentary *Battle of Britain* (Hamilton, 1969). *Battle of Britain* was made as a propaganda documentary to reflect Britain's dominance over the world and the outstanding effect of the nation's culture. The style of the song is very much in line with the music made by popular British artists and serves as a reflection of contemporary culture. The theme for *Decline and Fall of a Birdwatcher* presents a certain sense of camp, which plays to the satirized nature of its subject matter. However, it again reflects the late 1960s. Goodwin's theme is instrumental, but mimics the style of contemporary British pop artists like Sandie Shaw, The Fortunes, and Gerry and the Pacemakers, with upbeat drums, an organ and strings section, with the occasional flute solo accentuating the staccato bass.

The insertion of modernity produces a definitively British film for audiences. British culture of the 1960s was expanding across the globe with The British Invasion and films especially began to try and achieve a definitively British aesthetic. The British Invasion saw "in the 1960s, a confluence of new stylistic strategies gradually made its way into Hollywood filmmaking practices." (Beck 11) *Decline and Fall of a Bird Watcher* was made during this period and despite being made outside of Hollywood, it attempts to achieve the aesthetic. This is the most obvious reason why Krish changes the time period of his film. It both reflects its status as a British made film and achieves an extremely popular aesthetic. In terms of how his decisions to change the film affect Waugh's themes and narrative, they remain largely the same. By changing the time period of the narrative, Krish shows the timelessness and continued relevancy of

Waugh's points. This works to enhance the themes of the novel because Krish demonstrates through his film how despite obvious changes to the time period, his characters are still engaged in the same trials and prove the necessity for a formative educational space several decades after Waugh's novel was first published. The fact that this adaptation was made several decades after Waugh originally published his novel highlights the strength of the author and it shows his continued connection to a contemporary audience.

Decline and Fall of a Birdwatcher takes another shift away from Waugh's novel with its ending. In Waugh's novel the story concludes when Paul Pennyfeather escapes prison when he fakes his death. After this, he spends some time in Margot's Villa in the final chapter and then heads back to Oxford in the epilogue. *Decline and Fall of a Birdwatcher* follows a nearly identical narrative to the book, until its ending. Instead of Paul completing his circular trajectory and enrolling back at Oxford, the ending is slightly more ambiguous. The film's final scene shows Paul as he sheds a layer of his former self and runs into a somewhat different future than what is seen in the novel.

After attending his own funeral in a completely outlandish disguise (he wears a long false beard and a winter coat), Paul exits the funeral home. There is an initial long shot upon his exit from the funeral home, which immediately cuts in tandem with Paul's action. As he leaves he turns to a fire pit which stands on either side of the entrance to the funeral home and he drops a piece of paper into it. As the paper enters the flames the camera cuts to a close-up of the document burning. The close up of the document burning is maintained for six seconds, which provides time and focus to read the name "Paul Pennyfeather" through the flames. The shot then has a reverse cut to a low angle close up

of Paul staring down on his name as it burns. This shot both illustrates a period of reflection for the character, but also for the viewer as it shows the immediate perspective that the viewer just held looking down on the fire. The shot then cuts back to the paper, which has now turned black and shriveled in the flames. As the paper begins to deteriorate, the camera quickly zooms in. The zoom provides emphasis of the scene's action, but also is jarring given its speed. The jarring nature of the zoom reflects the unconventional world of Paul, which is quickly being erased. The camera then cuts back to the same reverse shot of Paul looking down, however the flames have grown higher and encompass his face. The camera cuts back to a now completely blackened, pulp of a piece of paper and then again quickly back to Paul. In this final reverse shot of Paul, he lingers over the fire, but quickly turns and walks out of the shot. The way the flames begin to take up the space between the camera and Paul's face, make it look as though he is literally being engulfed by flames and provides an even clearer image of his old character being disposed of. The way he then turns and exits the shot serves as a metaphor for the resurrected Paul, which can now move on since his old person has been burned and forgotten through the faking of his death.

The camera then pulls away from this series of shot reverse shot and cuts to an establishing long shot, which shows the funeral home. In front of the funeral home there is a driveway where an absurd purple car and its valet, who is wearing a matching purple suit stands over shining the car's exterior. Paul then walks into this long shot. The shot cuts to a medium shot with the valet in the foreground and Paul in the background. Paul turns and starts to walk towards the valet and the camera reveals that the valet is Captain Grimes. Paul walks in front of Captain Grimes, the camera zooms in to a close-up of the

two men and once the zoom ends, Paul states “Not a word old boy”. Captain Grimes served as one of Paul’s primary sources of control throughout the film and in this scene, Paul is finally able to assert his authority and conclude his circular narrative. Walking in front of the captain after having taken up a space in the background of the shot reflects this, but so too does the phrase Paul says. Grimes had previously said the same exact phrase to Paul earlier in the film, when he himself was wearing a disguise after his own faked death. Now the roles have been reversed and Paul solidifies his position by saying this to Captain Grimes and paralleling his actions. Paul walks away from Captain Grimes, imitating his limp and the film cuts to the final shot in the direction opposite the funeral home.

The final shot sees Paul walk into the frame, skip over a barrier in the path, turn around and while facing the camera, he jumps gleefully into the air. Paul then turns back around and begins to run off the path and into the distance of the shot. As he is running he begins to take off layers of his clothing and toss them haphazardly into the air. There is a brief cut back to an astonished Captain Grimes, before cutting back to Paul still running off into the distance, while taking more of his clothes off. The film’s theme begins to play and the credits roll. This final sequence parallels the burning of Paul’s name in the way that it again shows him shed his former self. This is most obviously done in the way that he starts to remove the various layers of his clothes. The way he runs away from the camera makes it seem as though he is finally leaving the destructive world of the film, however it is made slightly ambiguous when the theme song returns. Had the theme not recurred it would have been obvious that Paul had broken free from the story, especially in the way that Captain Grimes looks on in astonishment. However, the return

of the song, which played consistently throughout the film, muddies the clarity of the ending.

The ambiguity of the song raises the question that despite Paul shedding his former self there is a chance that his new identity is just going to reenter a world of unavoidable chaos. No matter what changes Paul is able to make, the film seems to say with its ending that the fortunes of Paul were less a result of his character and more a result of the world that he was forced to live in. The film's theme is used during the introductory credits and its placement at the very end, just before the credits role signifies a return to the initial reality. Krish changed the narrative, by excluding the final chapter and epilogue of *Decline and Fall*, but he maintains the idea of Paul's circular trajectory. The film does so less obviously and unlike the novel is more explicit about Paul's potential change at the end, but it eventually falls back into a similar trajectory and reaffirms the novel's theme.

The adaptations back up and prove the point of Waugh's essay *Was Oxford Worth While?* Attending Oxford is indeed worthwhile because it allowed Charles to meet Sebastian and experience a new world that challenged all his preconceptions and eventually shaped him into a well-rounded adult. Paul's return to Oxford in the novel signifies his happy ending and his potential for a life beyond the chaotic world the novel traps him within. The Bright Young Things of *Vile Bodies* and *Bright Young Things* are unfortunately unable to attend Oxford and through their lack of education they become completely intolerable and create an abysmal world that can only be saved by war. The constant theme across all of Waugh's novels, which the adaptations bring appropriately into their contemporary worlds, years after Waugh's initial publication, shows how the

idea that students need to attend university in order to have “another four years in which to grow up gradually” because “It puts them out of the way of their fellow-citizens while they are making fools of themselves.” (*A Little Order* 17) resonates timelessly as an undeniable truth.

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