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Paul Pennyfeather and the Victorian Governess: The Rejection of Nineteenth-Century Idealism in *Decline and Fall*

Ellen O'Brien

Much has been written on the disputed use of satire in Evelyn Waugh's first novel.¹ While critics have offered various readings of the satirical elements in *Decline and Fall* (1928), the novel also invites discussion of the role of parody, farce, black humour, burlesque, the bildungsroman, the picaresque and the anti-hero in creating an amusing but damning representation of society between the wars. This difficulty identifying a clear style is possibly due to the elusive nature of Waugh's moral critique, which is so subtle as to be "everywhere felt but nowhere expressed" (Heath 77). His satirical target has been variously described as the "the beastliness of undergraduate societies and the leniency of college authorities toward wealthy and aristocratic members... the morals and outlook of 'smart' society," the mismanagement of private boarding schools, the prison system, and modern religion, (Nichols 51) and more broadly as "inconsistency, hypocrisy, cruelty and folly... a satirical engagement with contemporary anxieties about English cultural decline in the years following the Great War" (Milthorpe 2, 20).

Given the richness and variation of the textual commentary, it makes more sense, perhaps, to view *Decline and Fall* as a fluid, prismatic novel that draws on literary elements as and when they are required, rather than conforming to some inelastic ideal of genre. James Carens explains how satire, as just one of the novel's many styles, "may lightly brush the surface of a novel... may lend a pronounced colour to other significant elements... may deeply suffuse the whole" (xi). Equally, David Lodge suggests that when "satiric impulse is joined to the fictive imagination," the result can be "too strong to be contained within a simple didactic framework" (12). It is, perhaps, better to do without a "didactic framework," and to allow that a text may incorporate elements of farce, satire and parody in order to comment on a wide variety of subjects, both general and specific.

False Idols of the Nineteenth Century

Due to its borrowing from several genres, and its multi-layered "textual imitations and contextual attacks," (Milthorpe 2) *Decline and Fall* invites the identification of new influences or

¹ Some useful sources are Naomi Milthorpe *Evelyn Waugh's Satire: Texts and Contexts* (2016), James Nichols "Romantic and Realistic: The Tone of Evelyn Waugh's Early Novels" (1962), George McCartney *Confused Roaring: Evelyn Waugh and the Modernist Tradition* (1987), Jerome Meckier "Cycle, Symbol, and Parody in Evelyn Waugh's *Decline and Fall*" (1979).

hitherto overlooked cultural references. One such reference, and the subject of this paper, is that of the nineteenth-century governess. As a literary and cultural trope, she engages with the male twentieth-century protagonist as part of Waugh's rejection of nineteenth-century ideals. Most critics seem able to agree that *Decline and Fall* is very much a product of its time. Cut off from the nineteenth century by the trauma of the early twentieth, it exhibits the rejection of certain late-nineteenth-century qualities, perhaps broadly described as sentimental idealism. Despite Waugh's notorious crotchiness regarding the advances of the twentieth century, McCartney points out that

. . . in novel after novel, he ridicules those of his characters who try to go on living as though the Great War never happened, as though the achievement of true happiness were only a matter of perpetuating the attitudes and values of the previous age. (4)

Criticism of nineteenth century idealism appears in different guises in *Decline and Fall*, but perhaps most stridently in the form of Otto Silenus. The architect could be described as the "cranky moral centre" of the novel, and delivers a "specifically modernist critique of nineteenth century humanism Waugh detested for its deluding sentimentality" (McCartney, 6). If Otto Silenus is a mouthpiece for unflinching, modernist honesty, then Pennyfeather is, at times, a representative of faded, irrelevant nineteenth century values. After all, the two men are in direct competition for Margot's hand: diametrically opposed, Paul's outdated chivalry contrasts starkly with Otto's nihilistic pragmatism.

Pennyfeather's flashes of alliance with this recognisable Victorian figure strengthen his identification with the previous century. Rather than providing a simple parody of the governess figure, the evocation and disruption of the trope is part of the satirical engagement with textual precursors. More specifically, it works as yet another rejection of the obsolete idealism of the nineteenth century— a period that Waugh, arguably, "had little love for" (McCartney 4). Thus, *Decline and Fall* could be seen as part of the modernist movement that worked to "clear away the conventional esthetic pieties that only served to obscure one's view of the world as it was after 1914" (McCartney 6). As a young man, Waugh expressed a view that "in the nineteenth century the old men saw visions and the young men dreamed dreams," and predicted that his own generation would be "very hard and analytical and unsympathetic." He wrote that although they will lose much, "all that they have will be real" (YG). While "metaphysical emptiness [and] the aimless pursuit of sensation" (McCartney 6) were perhaps not comforting replacements for "ideals and illusions" (YG), there is a sense that Waugh "preferred to look at the disease rather than hide behind a façade of nineteenth century reasonableness pretending nothing had changed" (McCartney 6). Allusion to the governess figure is part of this alliance between Pennyfeather and the nineteenth century, and by rejecting or disrupting the initial likeness, forms another rejection of pre-war idealism.

Part of the novel's identification with a satiric template lies in its evocation, then rejection of textual precursors. "Satire aims to 'disrupt,' deform and distort its textual

precursors,” and it is satire’s propensity to *disrupt* that resonates so strongly with the “liberating iconoclasm” of *Decline and Fall* (McCartney 10, 6). Many of these disruptions specifically target the “ethical secular nineteenth century,” hence the allusions to “Browning, Arnold, Butler, Morris, Thackeray, Dickens, Frazer, Longfellow, Smile’s *Self Help* [and] Hardy” (Heath 73). “A peculiarly intertextual mode,” satire relies on the “reading and transformation of prior texts (literary, moral, and socio-historical)” (McCartney 10). So too does the notably intertextual *Decline and Fall*, which alludes to numerous literary precursors, such as Gibbon’s *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (Lodge 7), Spengler’s *The Decline of the West*, Voltaire’s *Candide* (Lodge 17), Clough William-Ellis’s *England and the Octopus* (Milthorpe 19), Arthurian legend— who was not only a symbol of national hope, but a key figure of Victorian medievalism— (Heath, 75), while Fagan evokes Dickens, Chokey parodies Shylock, and Otto Silenus, Hamlet. In terms of socio-historical references, many of the characters, too, are composite or thinly veiled society figures: Mrs Graham (Lady Circumference), Cecil Beaton (Davy Lennox), Gavin Henderson and Eddie Gaythorne-Hardie (Miles Malpractice and Lord Parakeet) and Dick Young (Captain Grimes) (Byrne, 107). Pennyfeather too, is an intertextual-composite, who amongst his many models (*Candide*, for example), exhibits a curious number of parallels with the governess figure.

Pennyfeather’s trajectory, from schoolmaster to tutor to fiancé, is almost immediately reminiscent of Jane Eyre’s, and during his time as a master-tutor-then-fiancé, he evokes similar concerns about social mobility. After the initial governess-likeness, which is principally a result of his almost marrying the parent of his charge, Pennyfeather exhibits inverted governess traits: where they are manipulative, he is naïve, where they are seductive, he is inexperienced. Why would the governess figure be chosen as a target for parody? Broadly speaking, she belongs to the nineteenth century, a period whose tropes Waugh habitually inverts, rejects or ridicules. More specifically, the *fictional* governess was a product of upper and middle class social anxiety— a concerning, social-climbing upstart who was both a symbol of gentility (if you employed one) but an uncomfortable reminder of genteel poverty. Her life was policed by her liminal status as working-gentlewoman, and as such, evokes the invasive exercise of moral control over sexual, financial and professional agency. In a novel like *Decline and Fall*, whose overarching theme is the failure of discipline and order to control chaos and barbarism (Heath 65), this nineteenth century symbol of control and social anxiety is the perfect figure to rip to pieces, to invert, to dismantle, and who ultimately, adds to the satiric and parodic chaos of the text.

Getting to Know the Governess

In the 1840s, the clamour surrounding the governess figure reached a peak. The charitable efforts of the Governesses Benevolent Institution (GBI), and the literary criticism of Lady Elizabeth Eastlake (1848) drew attention to the fact that the governess experienced more

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difficulty than most in negotiating a competitive social hierarchy. She was the most obviously *liminal* figure in both the household and the labour market, and attracted concern from many quarters. Philanthropists and charities were eager to assist straitened gentlewomen through the GBI, and many were concerned that her position—a woman living in close proximity to a genteel family—provided too much opportunity for social climbing. Her liminality arose from the fact that she was both a gentlewoman and working class, due to the unavoidable fact that she received payment for her services. Her marginal status was reinforced on a daily basis by the rooms she was allowed to occupy, who she could talk to, and what she might do in her leisure time. In larger houses, she often led a lonely existence, for she was not welcome in the servants' hall, and only occasionally invited to the dining room with the family. A second uncomfortable association was frequently made between the governess and the prostitute, due to the former's position as a "sexually vulnerable," unchaperoned woman at the heart of a household (Hughes 119). In addition, "the paradigm of the fallen woman seemed a particularly appropriate way" to understand the situation of a woman whose degradation had been caused by the folly of male family members (rather than a seducer), and whose "descent to the schoolroom" was a source of "shame and remorse" (Hughes 120). Despite the eminent respectability of her role, her unique status as an unmarried female and a fallen gentlewoman conjured a persistent threat of uncontrolled sexuality, which, however unfounded, lingered at the edge of cultural conception.

In literature, the largely unfounded view of the governess as a socially mobile and sexually dangerous woman had the space to develop. The prospect of the upwardly mobile governess "found more fertile ground in the nineteenth century novel than it did in real life" (Lynch 95), but it happened with just enough regularity to make it a genuine source of hope or uneasiness—depending on whether you were a governess, or an employer. Once engaged, Pennyfeather, like the upwardly-mobile Victorian governess, becomes both a worrying spectre of class permeability, and a symbol of hope, "striking a still vibrant chord" among young professionals who whisper, "It may be me next time" (*DAF* 127). In the nineteenth century, "this ploy to leave behind her former station— as Thackeray observes with Becky Sharp" was reliant on the governesses' social position, "that awkward hybrid of lady and servant," and "her proximity to her employer's social level," which was "deemed sufficient evidence of her qualifications for negotiating middle class values" (Lynch 94). The ideal Victorian or Edwardian governess was often depicted in publications like *Punch* as a "homely, severe, unfeminine type of woman" (Peterson 15), who posed no danger to the moral fortitude of a household. However, a common Victorian trope was that of the ultra-feminine governess, beautiful and disruptive. Becky Sharp, in William Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, is a well-known example of the social-climbing and opportunistic young educator. Her rise through marriage, and subsequent descent into obscurity, poverty and moral bankruptcy acts as a warning against similar behaviour.

Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* offer alternative tales of the socially aspirant governess; Jane ends her days in hard-earned matrimony, and the criminal Lady Audley ends hers in a European asylum. *What Maisie Knew* (1897) by

Henry James, warns of the beautiful and socially-mobile governess through the figure of Miss Overmore, who is hired as a governess for Maisie, and marries Maisie's divorced father. Before Miss Overmore is employed, it is suggested that she is "almost too pretty," and the threat of attraction (or adultery) lingers behind the suggestion that it would be all right, "so long as Beale [Maisie's father] wasn't there" (James 24). As soon as Miss Overmore becomes Maisie's new stepmother, she abandons the role of governess, embracing her new position amongst the leisured classes, which she found to be "inconsistent with all servitude" (James 52). Although limited to the parts of the narrative when Pennyfeather is a teacher, tutor, and engaged to Margot, his transition from educator to engaged-to-be-married is reminiscent of characters such as Jane Eyre, Becky Sharp, Lucy Audley and Miss Overmore. However, after the initial evocation of the governess, which rests on Pennyfeather being a middle-class teacher-become-tutor engaged to his employer, Waugh dismantles it, inverting every subsequent allusion to the governess trope. In addition to being a source of humour, and adding to the passivity of his anti-hero, it provides another moment of rejected nineteenth century idealism.

Necessary to his alliance with the governess figure, is Pennyfeather's status as a gentleman. Just as Waugh noted that any man could get a job in a private school, as long as he "spoke without an accent" (*ALL* 215), the most desirable (and cashable) trait in a Victorian governess was her gentility, and the manners, deportment and accent that entailed. Most commonly, she was a lady who had been forced to enter the profession due to straitened circumstances: "take a lady, born and bred, and let her father pass through the gazette [bankruptcy], and she wants nothing more to suit our highest *beau ideal* of a guide and instructress to our children" (Lady Eastlake, in Lynch, 94). Surveys conducted by the Governesses' Benevolent Institution showed that only between 2 and 4% of governess were in the profession by choice, the rest having to support themselves or family members (Horn 333-334). Pennyfeather is in a similar position. He is an orphan (like Jane Eyre and Becky Sharp), and has no access to his annuity, thanks to his unscrupulous guardian. In terms of class, Pennyfeather's identity is bound up in his being a gentleman— "I am a gentleman. I can't help it: it's born in me"— (*DAF* 37) although, unlike the nineteenth-century gentlewoman, there is no stigma attached to his earning a wage. Pennyfeather, too, hovers awkwardly on the threshold of paid employment and gentle respectability. In class terms, although the governess was "expected to be the equal of her employer in birth, manners and education" (Horn 337), she was understood to be, by both herself *and* her charges, of inferior station. The governess, for whom genteel attributes were a prerequisite, drew a salary that barely allowed for life on the fringe of polite society, with no margin for illness or unemployment, and many were destitute by the time they reached old age. Prendergast's extreme thrift and Fagan's ungenerous salary reinforce this stereotype, and no doubt, the reality of the impoverished educator.

This sense of social in-between-ness, of employed gentility, characterises Pennyfeather's time as a tutor. At King's Thursday, before his engagement, Pennyfeather is included only conditionally in social gatherings, usually in the role of chaperone to Peter (who in any case, is

too busy making cocktails to cause trouble). In these situations, the governess “would not normally be expected to join in the general conversation unless specifically addressed, and then she had to take care not to express her views forcefully” (Renton 143). Pennyfeather hovers awkwardly between lessons with Peter, and the weekend house party: “Peter and Paul went back to their cylindrical study and began another spelling lesson” (*DAF* 113). The marginal status of tutors, somewhere between impoverished social equal and servant, is noted in other novels of Waugh’s. In *Brideshead*, the distasteful Mr Samgrass is ignored by the Marchmain’s foreign guests, who “mistaking the status of tutor, took him for an unusually privileged upper servant,” and “were unaffected by his presence” (115). Just as Miss Overmore is allowed to shed the yoke of servitude upon her engagement, Pennyfeather experiences a similar promotion. Once engaged to Margot, his duties to Peter are at an end, and he abandons organ lessons in favour of luncheon at the Ritz.

Pennyfeather’s first foray into the world of education is facilitated by the scholastic agency, “Church and Gargoyle,” modelled on Gabbitas and Thring (founded in 1873), about which Stephen Fry doubted “any writer will ever be able to come up with a partnership that quite matches the ludicrous perfection of the names.” (13). Pennyfeather’s encounter with the “public-and prep-school dating agency” (Fry 13) was not dissimilar to Waugh’s, who recalled an agent who “remarked, few headmasters were able to find men with all the qualities they demanded,” and a head master who only asked “whether I possessed a dinner-jacket” (*ALL* 215-216). Like Waugh, who “with desperate levity, offered to teach anything which anyone might require,” (*ALL* 215) Pennyfeather soon finds himself teaching subjects for which he has no aptitude, such as music and cricket. Further, the scene at Gabbitas and Thring also evokes the descent into the realms of domestic service, which, along with teaching, Waugh joked were the “only two sorts of job always open under the English social system... however abominable one’s record” (GC). The use of an agency, although not unusual for teachers, also evokes the well-known domestic service agencies of the nineteenth century, such as Massey’s, or the employment register run by the Governess’s Benevolent Institution.

Pennyfeather’s interview with Church and Gargoyle taps into another Victorian concern that the governess, if not properly observed, would teach her little charges all sorts of unsavoury, worldly, or otherwise unsuitable pieces of information. After offering Pennyfeather a place in a school for which he is woefully unqualified, the scholastic agent tells him, “It’s wonderful what one can teach when one tries” (*DAF* 12-13). There was a genuine concern that the governess, oppressed in almost every aspect of her life (financial, social and sexual) might release these suppressed energies in the form of inappropriate conduct before her charges. The idea was that it might manifest as cruelty or emotional attachment, cynical bitterness, or merely that the content she passed on would not be sufficiently genteel: “the governess was disturbing to the Victorians... because they were not confident that the effects of her pedagogy could be controlled” (Regaignon 87). Of course, the misinformation spread by the teachers in Waugh’s novel is far worse than that feared by the Victorians. Rather than ungentle manners or the theory

of evolution, buggery, alcoholism and smoking are the order of the day. Captain Grimes teaches Beste-Chetwynde to make cocktails and grooms young Clutterbuck, and Pennyfeather, who has no relevant qualifications, sets the boys essays, for which “there will be a prize of half a crown for the longest, irrespective of any possible merit” (*DAF* 31).

The question of irresponsible education taps into a contemporary concern about the hard-bitten scepticism of what Waugh called “the younger generation.” Waugh himself questioned the effects of the lack of discipline in education, suggesting that teachers’ “jolly tolerance of everything that seemed ‘modern’” had rendered his generation “Bolshevik at eighteen and bored at twenty.” As a result, there was nothing left for them to rebel against, except “the widest conceptions of mere decency” (WYG)— enter the “bright young things.” Waugh’s generation (and that represented by Peter and Clutterbuck) have been allowed to learn everything there is to know, and the result is not enlightenment, but bored cynicism with a tinge of nihilism, even. There is a sense that petty Victorian anxieties about inappropriate pedagogy have been abandoned, imploded by the disruption and trauma of the early twentieth century. There is no longer any point worrying about the possible effects of “inappropriate content,” when youth are encouraged to “think for themselves,” and to discuss “birth control and nationalisation” (although probably sarcastic exaggeration on Waugh’s part).

Disrupting the Trope

In the nineteenth century, the much-maligned figure of the fortune-seeking, tantalising young governess became a focal point for anxieties about social mobility. This was further compounded by her means of advancement, which were implicitly sexual. “In an era deeply suspicious of sudden upward shifts in class position” (Lynch 90), the most common recourse available to a fictional Victorian governess was to marry into a higher class. There was a lot of unease surrounding the governess figure, who in theory, should have been below the recognition of any upper-class male employer, but, due to her particular *feminine* attributes, often was not. In the case of Paul Pennyfeather, this trope is utterly inverted. He cannot be categorised alongside Becky Sharp or Lucy Audley: he does not belong to the league of slender, beguiling governesses, or, for that matter, possess much in the way of personal attraction at all.

Pennyfeather is a passive figure, inanimate and apathetic, which is part of his role as picaresque foil, but also makes him incapable of seducing anybody. Instead, he unwittingly catches the eye of Margot Beste-Chetwynde, and romantic things are done *to* him, rather than *by* him. Pennyfeather’s physical portrait is never given, but Waugh’s description of a man in “his third year of uneventful residence at Scone,” whose guardian was “proud of his progress and abysmally bored by his company,” does not suggest a socially-aspirant womanizer (*DAF* 7). Pennyfeather’s lack of physicality contrasts with someone like Lady Audley, whose childlike figure, pretty face, and golden halo of hair is almost fetishized. With her “soft and melting blue

eyes; the graceful beauty of that slender that and dropping head, with its wealth of showering flaxen curls; the low music of that gentle voice,” she represents the absolute worst kind of governess: the sort who can snare an elderly baronet for a husband (Braddon 12). Thackeray’s Becky Sharp enjoys a similar description, “small and slight in person; pale, sandy-haired, and with eyes habitually cast down: when they looked up they were very large, odd, and attractive.” Like Lucy Audley, her innocence gives way to such sensuality, that men are “shot dead by a glance of her eyes” (Thackeray Ch. 2. para. 14). She is also a consummate seducer, suggested by the tantalising application of her lips to the tip of Rawdon’s cigar, which elicits the inelegant (but understandable) response: “Jove–aw–Gad–aw!”

Pennyfeather, by comparison, is unversed in the art of seduction, or even of basic human attraction. Having been sheltered by the English school system, he cannot comprehend his feelings for Margot: “‘Old boy,’ said Grimes, ‘you’re in love.’ There was a long pause, ‘Grimes,’ said Paul at length, ‘I wonder if you can be right?’” (DAF 75) Margot, on the other hand, is worldly, sensual, and acquisitive: it is she, not Pennyfeather, who manipulates and contrives, while maintaining a façade of innocence. We see these machinations in her letter to Peter: “don’t you think it would be a good thing if we were to have a tutor next holidays? Some one young who would fit in. I thought, would that good-looking young master you said you liked care to come?” Her feigned innocence about matters of payment, “How much ought I to pay him? I never know these things” (DAF 80), in light of her successful chain of brothels, is reminiscent of the artifice of the seeming ingénue, Lady Audley. The love scene, which is fairly anti-climactic, also casts Margot in the role of seducer. “‘Hush, dear! Don’t turn on the light. Where are you?’ The silk rustled again as though falling to the ground” (DAF 117). The role reversal from the traditionally female seducer and male innocent² is at once a source of humour, an opportunity to slight the morals of Margot’s set, and a disruption of the typical gender roles of the governess trope.

There are just a few more small disruptions. Waugh makes Peter, rather than Margot or Pennyfeather, the final arbiter of their marital happiness: “‘You wouldn’t like [Maltravers] for a stepfather, would you, darling?’ ‘No,’ said Peter, ‘if you must marry again do choose someone young and quiet’” (DAF 107). Traditionally, children were not involved in these discussions: in texts like *What Maisie Knew* and *Jane Eyre*, Maisie and Adèle have no say in the matter. Peter, a member of that bored and cynical young generation, must give his indifferent blessing for the marriage go ahead. Finally, Pennyfeather’s return to Scone contains one final dig against the rather weak, sensation novel stereotype of the thinly disguised returned mother or servant. Pennyfeather’s surprisingly effective disguise of a heavy cavalry moustache is reminiscent of Mrs Ellen Wood’s *East Lynne* (1861), in which an adulterous mother returns as governess to her own children after being “unrecognizably” disfigured. The efficacy of such poor disguises could be interpreted as a lack of “clear-sightedness,” and the failure of a complacent, bygone age to see

² With the notable exception of *Jane Eyre*.

beyond “ideals and illusions” (YG). This failing is perhaps most applicable to the college authorities, who the scene derides.

Pennyfeather’s innocence is made more striking by its deviation from the established governess trope, and serves to poke fun at the questionable morals of high society. The results in a starker contrast between his idealistic chivalry– a remnant of the nineteenth century– and the self-centred detachment associated with the twentieth.

Pennyfeather’s innocence is not merely used to highlight the deplorable behaviour of the upper-class set, but his outlook, which is inherently Victorian, contrasts unfavourably with the “perverse, unregenerate self-will” of people like Margot and Alastair (Wilson 146). Bad behaviour from the upper classes was a favourite theme of Waugh’s, and one more fully explored in *Vile Bodies*, and in this novel, the people who should be setting an example, uniformly behave in a way that does not befit their station. Margot never takes the blame for the consequences of her licentious corruption, and Alastair riots and vandalises with impunity. Their guilt emphasises Pennyfeather’s innocence, and he comes to question the idealistic precept, “inherited from generations of school masters,” that one should always do the “right thing” by “shielding the woman” (DAF 160). Pennyfeather “is awakened from his Victorian dream,” (McCartney 15) and made to realise that there is “something radically inapplicable about this whole code” of “ready-made honour” (DAF 160). His discovery that the chivalric codes expounded in the nineteenth century have no place in the age of Margot, renders him a “last vestige of an old but inadequate regime,” (Heath 75) ineffective and out of place in a world that rewards self-serving detachment.

It is interesting to wonder, had he truly been a governess in a Victorian novel, whether Pennyfeather’s stint in prison might have been interpreted as punishment for social climbing by a nineteenth-century audience, and his return to his starting point, a welcome restoration of social order. Although he does not die in poverty or an asylum (always popular choices, for a governess), a nineteenth century audience might have interpreted a similar cyclical journey as a warning against social movement, and a message to aspirant governesses. However, in 1928, it was unlikely to have been interpreted as a warning against arriviste tutors. Rather, Pennyfeather’s Victorian roots– compounded by moments of similarity to the governess figure– emphasise the “confusion and impudence” of the twentieth century (Wilson 146), and contribute to the novel’s rejection of the idealistic, nineteenth-century sentimentalism.

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***Put Out More Flags* and Literary Tradition**

Robert Murray Davis

Estimates of Evelyn Waugh's *Put Out More Flags* have ranged from L. E. Sissman's, that it is "a novel of breathtaking symmetry, grace, craft, and discipline,"¹ to John Bayley's, that even though Waugh's books can give pleasure to the uninstructed, he is not really a novelist and lacks humor besides.² While the disparity may amount to no more than the fact that Sissman is prepared to be pleased and Bayley is not, it may be useful to step back from theoretical principles that on the one hand seem at best implied and on the other over-determined and instead to employ E. M. Forster's inclusive definition of a novel as "prose fiction of a certain length." That will enable us to look at what Waugh's novel seems to be doing, and how, and thereby to place it in a series of broader historical and literary contexts.

For one thing, it seems clear that this and other Waugh novels can rightly and even best be seen in the tradition of tragicomedy, however much Waugh might resist being linked with any philosopher, let alone a German. According to Gotthold Lessing, in this mode "seriousness stimulates laughter and pain pleasure." Demonstrating its relevance to Waugh's corpus could be the subject of a monograph; I will mention only the second epigraph to *Vile Bodies* (Alice's "If I wasn't real...I shouldn't be able to cry" and Tweedledum's response, "I hope you don't suppose those are real tears."), significant elements of *Black Mischief* and *Scoop*, and almost all of *A Handful of Dust*. In the late 1930s, in *Enemies of Promise*, Cyril Connolly was aware of this mixture, but his unstated aesthetic principles led him to see it as Waugh's failure of understanding rather than a path to further insights.

In *Put Out More Flags* there is a good deal of pathos, perhaps shading over into tragedy, in the solitary and futile death in battle of Cedric Lyne, in the destruction of Ambrose Silk's hopes for an aesthetic revival, in the descent of Angela Lyne into alcoholism, and even in the disruption of genteel households by the appalling refugee children. It's also clear, to anticipate later discussion and *pace* Bayley, that a number of things in *Put Out More Flags* are funny, sometimes, like the awful refugee Connolly children in a horrible sort of way, sometimes, like the mental gyrations of the arty Left attempting to come to terms with the fact of war, in more traditional satiric terms, or in the incidental bureaucratic idiocies at the Ministry of Information, even more ironically named than Orwell's subsequent Ministry of Truth.

But most significant is what Waugh is serious about. The best way to understand this is to see *Put Out More Flags* as Waugh's version of "the Condition of England" novel in the tradition

¹ <http://www.theatlantic.com/past/docs/issues/72mar/sissman.htm>

² <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v08/n21/john-bayley/blacking> and <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v16/n20/john-bayley/mr-toad>

of Benjamin Disraeli's *Coningsby*, Mrs. Gaskell's *North and South*, H. G. Wells's *Tono-Bungay*, or George Orwell's *Coming Up for Air*. Granted, Waugh deals with a much narrower segment of English society, the upper-, upper-middle, and officer classes, but he does so to describe the state of a country from the declaration of World War II in September, 1939, to the edge of serious fighting in May, 1940, or what was called "the Great Bore War."

And that state, though Waugh implies it indirectly, was very serious indeed. When he actually wrote the novel, during the long sea voyage from Egypt to England in the summer of 1941 after he had been evacuated from Crete, things were about as serious as they were going to get. Germany's invasion of Russia, diverting forces from the Cretan campaign and allowing "the transfer of [VIII. Fliegerkorps](#) during the battle in order to reach their assigned positions in time for *Barbarossa*[,] was a key reason in allowing the Royal Navy to evacuate so many of the defenders."³ (Ironically, what in *Officers and Gentlemen* Guy Crouchback saw as a blurring of moral lines gave Waugh the leisure to write *Put Out More Flags*.) Neither America nor Japan had entered the war, but the English hold on North Africa was by no means secure.

Personally, Waugh was at loose ends, separated from the Army and unsure of his future in the military. His diary does not record the kind of disgust which Guy Crouchback felt on the evacuation of Crete, but the depth of that disgust perhaps gives a hint of his creator's state of mind. Turning to a period before the defeats and disgraces of the past year may have seemed a relief. In professional terms, writing *Put Out More Flags* gave Waugh the opportunity to repair the rupture in his fictional world occasioned by the beginning of the war and the abandonment of the novel which, in fragmentary form, became *Work Suspended*. In 1942, Waugh published it with a dedication to Alexander Woolcott, noting that "the world in which and for which it was designed, has ceased to exist." After the war he revised it for publication with "Other Stories Written Before the Second World War" in the Uniform Edition of his work. He deleted the dedication but added a "Postscript," announcing in the voice of John Plant, the narrator, that with the declaration of war "an epoch, my epoch, came to an end. Intellectually we had foreseen the event and had calmly discussed it, but our inherited habits continued until the last moment."

And, as the opening pages of *Put Out More Flags* and especially the dedication to Major Randolph Churchill show, characters from earlier novels re-emerge as "a race of ghosts, the survivors of the world we both knew ten years ago" who "have been disturbed in their habits by the rough intrusion of current history."⁴ As Waugh knew, the history was almost two years out of date, but the narrative he constructed enabled him to revive and develop characters from his fictional world who had been insouciantly comic but were now adapted to new and serious conditions.

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Crete

⁴ "Dedicatory Letter," *Put Out More Flags* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1942).

How serious can be seen by comparing Waugh's analysis, set in that period but in fact written during the long sea voyage from Egypt to England in the summer of 1941, with that of George Orwell in *The Lion and the Unicorn*, written during the Blitz of late 1940. Neither man knew of the other's work, but their views are remarkably similar.⁵

As Orwell demonstrated in *The Lion and the Unicorn*, and Waugh implies more delicately and humorously in *Put Out More Flags*, the actions and attitudes of the previous decade created conditions which very nearly led to tragedy. Orwell argues that "the decay of ability in the ruling class"⁶ and the Left's "chipping away at English morale, trying to spread an outlook that was sometimes squashily pacifist, sometimes violently pro-Russian, but always anti-British," led to a disastrous failure to arm for a war which everyone knew was coming, and even after the debacle of Dunkirk, which very nearly ended the possibility of England's resistance to Hitler, the country was "still commanded by people who managed to live through the years 1931-9 without even discovering that Hitler was dangerous." Looking farther down the chain of command, Orwell argued against the folly of allowing "only people with private incomes...positions of command." And for months after war was declared, the country as a whole was still "vaguely wondering what the war was about." Until it was jolted into awareness by a series of defeats, the British military forces were undermanned and woefully underequipped, so that "There were not even enough revolvers to supply all the officers" and there was still a shortage of uniforms and helmets.

Orwell regarded the Left and Right as equally useless. The latter had been lulled into willful stupidity so that they could ignore pressing economic conditions. The former had dwindled into a feeble irrelevance, first as pacifists whose safety was guaranteed by the British Navy and whose incomes were guaranteed by the labor of colonial subjects, then as supporters of the Popular Front who hoped that Russia would do the fighting for them. If anything, in other essays like "Inside the Whale," Orwell was more scornful of the Left, especially some of its poets. But there was plenty of scorn to go round: "The Bloomsbury highbrow, with his mechanical snigger, is as out-of-date as the cavalry colonel." But "One thing that has shown that the English ruling class are *morally* fairly sound, is that in time of war they are ready enough to get themselves killed."

⁵ For extended discussions of the temperamental and intellectual similarities of Waugh and Orwell, see Robert Murray Davis, "Quixote Meets Pinfold: George Orwell and Evelyn Waugh." *Encounter*, 72 (March 1989), 46-52 and David Lebedof, *The Same Man: George Orwell and Evelyn Waugh in Love and War* (New York: Random House, 2008). Early in the 1930s, John Strachey praised Waugh's first two novels as giving "quite the best—and in many ways actually the most accurate—account of English society," though, as Orwell was later to do, he regretted Waugh's conversion to Catholicism. See *The Coming Struggle for Power* (London: Gollancz, 1934, 4th ed.), p. 223, n. 1.]

⁶ All quotations are from <http://www.k-1.com/Orwell/site/work/essays/lionunicorn.html>

Anyone who has read *Put Out More Flags* with moderate attention can find passages which illustrate Orwell's generalizations, so many that it is difficult to know where to start. From the top down? Sir Joseph Mainwaring, the confidant of Lady Cynthia Seal and the kind of booby whom even Orwell could not have envisioned, is consistently wrong about every point of tactics and strategy. The Lieutenant-Colonel of Bombardiers to whom he introduces her son Basil is willfully uninterested in any larger considerations of strategy and considers "the right type of officer" to be "the officer-type." Freddy Sothill, Basil's brother-in-law and by his position as owner of a country house an officer in the yeomanry, can't quite fit into his uniform and has misplaced his revolver, later found in a toy cupboard. No wonder, as Colonel Plum tells Basil when he solicits a commission in order to get into a uniform of any kind, "it's the best possible disguise for a man of intelligence. No one ever suspects a soldier of taking a serious interest in the war."

Alastair Trumpington is a partial exception. For one thing, he illustrates the moral soundness of his class, believing "that he would make as good a target as anyone else for the King's enemies to shoot at." He volunteers for the Army as a private, rather in the spirit of T. E. Lawrence, his wife Sonia thinks, though whose name she can't remember, because "if we hadn't had so much fun perhaps there wouldn't have been any war.... He went into the ranks as a kind of penance...." But instead of a mortar he is given a wooden replica—for the moment a cushier assignment than bearing a rifle or anti-tank rifles, as the soldiers assigned to them discover when the weapons unexpectedly turn up. And the training exercises in which he participates are a shambles—and not in the official army sense of the term.

Most of the civilians do not even wonder what the war is about. Sir Joseph, striving to uphold or rather create a standard of politeness, asserts that one takes one's gas mask to one's office but not to one's club. Hordes of applicants besiege the Ministry of Information for jobs, and those who are successful engage in bureaucratic skirmishes primarily to annoy each other.

At least they have proximate goals. Many of the other characters have no clue. The progressive young—Poppet Green and her coterie—spend hours, mercifully compressed in Waugh's account, debating whether the poets Parsnip and Pimpernell (i.e., Auden and Isherwood) were right to move to America on the eve of war, and if so on what grounds. One young man balks at registering as a conscientious objector because he doesn't have a conscience and then wonders why that should trouble him. Ambrose Silk, the homosexual aesthete who has sought their fellowship, thinks the whole idea of war insane but at moments wonders why the others don't simply get on with fighting the Germans.

The upper classes are no better. Lady Seal reflexively acts out of *noblesse oblige*, sending servants to the basement while herself awaiting German bombs. Sonia Trumpington uses the first air raid warning as a pretext for wangling a luncheon invitation. Her husband envies his friend Peter Pastmaster because, having been in a cavalry regiment, he has military equipment that seems like a desirable set of toys.

Throughout much of the novel, the characters are busy constructing scenarios, many from an irrelevant past that would turn to their own benefit. The book begins with the sister, mother, and mistress of Basil Seal, the novel's central character if not exactly its hero, envisioning what part, finally creditable, he will take in the war. Barbara, his sister, draws her narrative from that of the writer-fighters of the previous war: Siegfried Sassoon, Compton Mackenzie, T. E. Lawrence, and Rupert Brooke. His mother sees him enshrined in one of the tableaux she learned from her schoolroom history, static and glorious—anticipating Charles Ryder's view of military glories in *Brideshead Revisited*, neither conscious of the slightest irony. His mistress, Angela Lyne, sees him as an Athenian among Spartans or in the iconography of Victorian art or the trenches and wire of World War I—in any case, dead.

These three visions of Basil's future open the novel, and much of the rest of it is devoted to finding him a place in the war. Not an easy task, since he thinks “there are too many people in on the racket” (42) and in any case wants “to be one of those people one heard about in 1919; the hard-faced men who did well out of the war” (53). In the past, he had operated much in the fashion of Nazi diplomacy—“a system of push, appeasement, agitation and blackmail” (56). In his and others' estimation, Basil would seem to fit into an adventure story, recruited surreptitiously for an undercover mission with elaborate cover identities and complicated instructions.

Basil has no more loyalty or sense of direction than a Restoration rake, and it is to conventions of New Comedy, notably Restoration Comedy, that Waugh turns in order to make seriousness stimulate laughter. He has a long-term mistress but also seduces women easily, almost casually, engages in a number of scams for his own profit and pleasure, and lives by his wits if not by and for wit. (Any doubt that Waugh thought of Basil in these terms should be removed by a glance at the subtitle of his last work of fiction, *Basil Seal Rides Again or The Rake's Regress*.) Sir Joseph Mainwaring is obviously a *senex*, though he does not fulfill the blocking function. The coterie of Leftists who find that their political jargon cannot adequately describe the current situation or convince even themselves are the would-be wits. There is the fashionable world, or at any rate the formerly fashionable world, represented by Alastair and Sonia Trumpington, so confident in their enclosed little circle that they do not realize that they are no longer fashionable, and again Basil. Instead of being summoned to a secret meeting, he fails to get a commission from the pompous Lieutenant-Colonel, spends a few lucrative months using the horrifying Connolly refugees to extort funds from genteel householders, and gets a job with Internal Security in which he tries to betray Poppet and her circle, and succeeds in setting the authorities onto the hapless Ambrose, essentially by vandalizing a novella which had been a major work of art.

Like Dorimant in *The Man of Mode* and Mirabell in *The Way of the World*, however, Basil is governed by inexorable comic conventions. New Comedy centers on a new generation replacing the old—but to revitalize rather than to overturn the forms and structures of the previous generation. Dorimant is willing to travel to the *terra incognita* of the country to woo

Harriet Woodvill (a remote ancestor of Waugh's Molly Meadows); alone among Restoration wits, Mirabell anticipates offspring. Things are a bit more complex in *Put Out More Flags*—there is, after all, a war going on—but Alastair and Sonia are to have a child, Peter Pastmaster decides to marry for dynastic reasons and gets a woman who is much smarter than he is, and even Basil, his mistress Angela now a widow, will marry if not settle down and after the war will be rich, if anyone is, and, as Angela says, echoing Orwell, “If no one is, I don't suppose it matters so much being poor” (280).

Of course, Ambrose's reputation as a writer has been destroyed, Cedric Lyne has been killed in battle to no one's particular regret and to the convenience of the plot, and even the householders on whom the Connollys have been foisted have had their peace and probably some of their goods destroyed. Even these events, though tragic in a loose sense, can be fitted into the pattern of New Comedy, where discordant characters are expelled to assure the peace and, under the conditions, the stability of the reconstituted society. There are dozens of examples: Malvolio in *Twelfth Night*, Fainall in *The Man of Mode*, Ftatateeta in *Caesar and Cleopatra* to name a few.

In *Put Out More Flags*, the formerly aimless butterflies of fashion are turned into soldiers ready to fight. Those like Cedric and Ambrose unsuited to the war effort are killed or expelled so that “the new spirit abroad” can prevail. But even more significant, especially from the point of vantage from which the novel was written, the strongest indication that everyone, even Basil, has gotten serious is Angela Lyne's assertion that “if there's one thing right the day is made” (281). Whether that's comic or serious depends, I suppose, on how grave one thinks the situation to be.

REVIEWS

Fictional Counterparts

Commando General: The Life of Major General Sir Robert Laycock KCMG CB DSO, by Richard Mead, with a Foreword by Major General Julian Thompson CB OBE. Barnsley, South Yorkshire, Pen and Sword, 2016. 240 pp. UK £25.00, US \$44.95.

Reviewed by Donat Gallagher

Readers of *Evelyn Waugh Studies* will know Sir Robert (Bob) Laycock as the friend of Waugh and as the recognized model for the confident, pragmatic, and likable Colonel Tommy Blackhouse in *Officers and Gentlemen* and the *Sword of Honour* trilogy—the C.O. of No. X Commando and Deputy Commander of HOOKFORCE, both with strong links to the umbrella organization HOO (Hazardous Offensive Operations). Richard Mead’s excellent biography of Laycock gives a very full account Laycock himself and of the “real-life” equivalents of these fictional units, all of which Laycock came to command: viz. No. 8 Commando, LAYFORCE, and Combined Operations. (He also commanded the Special Service Brigade, but that has no fictional counterpart.) Baseless allegations that Laycock acted dishonourably during the evacuation of Crete, and that Waugh covered up for him, will have come to many readers’ attention. So too will Waugh’s fanciful encomium of Laycock in “Commando Raid on Bardia,” where he is the young officer who combined a “brilliant career at the Staff College” with “such feats of toughness as sailing round the world as an ordinary seaman in a Finnish windjammer.” Most Wavians probably also know that the tough, extrovert Commando with “the face of a gentleman boxer” was an avid and sophisticated reader; and that after leaving the Army he became Governor of Malta.

Richard Mead, of course, gives a much wider and deeper view of Laycock than the Waugh-related literature can begin to summon up. Incidentally, but inevitably perhaps, *Commando General* creates a new history of the Army Commandos, from individualistic origins to final replacement by the more orthodox Royal Marines. It also details the kaleidoscopic (and to the non-professional mind somewhat bewildering) formations that proliferated in the Commando, Special Service, and Combined Operations areas and names the officers who, in the snakes-and-ladder world of Army politics, commanded them. Fortunately, nothing obscures the extremely interesting and often surprising life and career of Robert Edward Laycock.

Mead’s work is incalculably enriched by information from primary Laycock sources. Bob’s diaries cover his years at Sandhurst, his pre-war service in the Royal Horse Guards (the Blues), his early love life, and his trip on a windjammer. An unpublished memoir provides fascinating new insights into many areas of the life and career, *inter alia* into subjects close to Waugh such as Bardia and Crete. Correspondence with wife and father treats of many pertinent non-family matters.

In the eighteenth century the Laycocks were agents and managers. In the nineteenth they became seriously wealthy through manufacturing railway wagons and (like Ronald Firbank's forebears) by speculating in railway land. Relatively recently they became landed gentry, with interests in coal mining, before marrying into aristocracy. Joe, Bob's father, a major influence on his son, was gregarious, with a passion for sailing—he owned a clipper ship—a passion Bob shared. Distinguishing himself in free-ranging service in the Boer War, Joe formed life-long friendships with Winston Churchill and several high-ranking army officers, connections which helped advance “lucky” Bob Laycock's military career. Joe's love life was unconventional and his wife, Bob's mother, was a remarkably determined woman; losing a leg in a motorcar accident, she continued to hunt and bear children. Bob and his brothers and sisters had a happy childhood, taking particular pleasure in sailing, hunting, shooting, and fishing. In a letter not quoted by Mead, Bob says that the “happiest day of my life” was when he was out with a sister who, on the one day, caught an outsize fish and shot a magnificent stag. Thus the future Commando learned superb sailing, field craft, and horsemanship skills early in life and forged connections at the highest military and political levels.

Like so many English biographers, Mead spells out the details of Bob's education. Suffice to say—prescinding from significant highs and lows—that young Robert did well, but not outstandingly at school: he played football for his House, not for the school. Enrolled in the elite Army class at Eton, he seems not to have passed the stringent entrance examinations for the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, but was admitted on a special provision. On the other hand he was popular—he always had an outstanding talent for friendship—gaining election to the exclusive Eton Society, or “Pop,” and to the equally selective House Debating Society and House Library. Friendships made at Eton became a supportive network in the inter-unit wars endemic to the upper levels of the armed services.

Bob always surprises. As a cadet at Sandhurst, aged eighteen, he began a passionate three-year affair with the forty-five-year-old mother of a friend. Young officers in the Royal Horse Guards (the Blues), the regiment into which Bob graduated, were expected to have a private income and they lived active social and sporting lives. Bob's main sports were polo, hunting (in winter, officers were given “hunting leave”), and sailing. But there was also some serious soldiering, including specialist courses. A machine-gun course, for instance, led to Bob's commanding the Household Cavalry Machine-Gun Troop.

But he became bored—the army was not his first choice as a career—and at some risk to his seniority he obtained leave to make a journey on a sailing ship. *Pace* Waugh, the trip was not “round the world as an ordinary seaman” but from Copenhagen to Portuguese East Africa as a paying passenger. Nevertheless, Laycock insisted on learning all the jobs of an able-seaman while studying navigation with the officers.

In 1935 Bob married Angela Dudley Ward, “Angie,” a strong and attractive character, and a prominent socialite, with whom Waugh is sometimes said to have been in love. Mead gives full

credit to Angie's administering, and waitressing in, one of the British Restaurants set up by Churchill for the bombed out, activities reflected in Kerstie Kilbannock's running, and working in, a canteen in a transit centre in *Officers and Gentlemen* (although Angie was very different from the frugal and faithful Kerstie). Angie also worked hard for the Commando Benevolent Fund. After the marriage, Laycock's career continued with largely ceremonial duties. But in 1937 he was drawn to gas and chemical warfare. As he had always been interested in chemistry—and would have preferred a career as a research chemist to the military option—this was not entirely surprising. He soon became an instructor in the “School of Military Engineering,” a boring job from which he was extricated by an invitation to join a specialist gas group in the War Office. In 1939 he went to France as part of a gas unit; this time rescue coming by way of an invitation to a course at the Staff College. After that he was appointed to a chemical warfare group at Middle East Headquarters.

But on the very eve of departing for Cairo, Bob saw a letter by Winston Churchill, calling for volunteers to join a special force being created for raiding the coast of Occupied Europe. He immediately applied and, despite having to find a substitute qualified to fill the Middle-East post overnight—which by miracle rather than luck he succeeded in doing—and despite strong competition, he won the post of Leader of No. 8 Commando. The decisive factors were his experience of sailing, hunting, deer-stalking, boxing, machine gunning, and signals.

No. 8 Commando—the debonair upper-class character of which needs no comment after Waugh's fictional description of X Commando in *Officers and Gentlemen*—saw Bob make his mark by devising innovative training regimes and seaborne exercises. But 8 Commando was soon “brigaded” with two other Commandos into Z Force, with Laycock in command, for dispatch to the Middle East. Once there—after a journey marked by inexcusable inter-service bitchiness—Z Force grew into the four-battalion LAYFORCE. Most unhappily, the “brigade,” so full of enthusiasm and so often trained to concert pitch for cancelled operations, suffered nothing but disappointment. Middle East HQ had little work (or regard) for Commandos. The end came for LAYFORCE after a rearguard action on Crete (of which more later), when only 209 of the 800 commandos participating returned to Egypt. The loss of 600 men (mainly as prisoners of war) was catastrophic. They could not be replaced. Disbandment followed.

Laycock was fighting strenuously, but unsuccessfully, to replace LAYFORCE with a smaller-scale “Middle East Commando” when, although he had had nothing to do with its inspiration or planning, he led a daring seaborne raid on Rommel's supposed HQ. Based on flawed intelligence—Rommel wasn't at Beda Littoria and, it seems, had rarely visited there—the raid went sadly awry. Its proponent and the leader of the attack on Rommel's imagined house, Lt Colonel Geoffrey Keyes, was accidentally killed by a colleague. The tragic story, too complex for summary, is well set out by Mead. Laycock's leadership of the raid has been severely censured by Michael Asher in *Get Rommel: The Secret British Mission to Kill Hitler's Greatest General* (2004). It is typical of Mead's anodyne approach that he does not mention Asher in the

text (although he includes him in the bibliography) but incorporates most of Asher's criticisms in gentler form

One upshot of the abortive raid was that Laycock and a Sergeant Terry were left stranded in enemy territory, posted Missing for forty-one days. Making their hungry way back to Egypt, they evaded capture by using the tricks of the hunted fox—constantly returning to areas that their pursuers had searched.

But the triumphant return to British territory paradoxically proved the lowest point in Laycock's career—while Missing, he had lost his temporary rank and his command of the Middle East Commando. But "luck," spectacular luck, again intervened. Lord Louis Mountbatten, Bob's patron, recalled him to London to take command of the Special Service Brigade. It was a significant appointment, for the Brigade now embraced a large number of Commandos and specialized detachments spread widely across Britain.

But influential Royal Marine eminences were now beginning to demand a new Commando organization. The Army Commandos had been conceived as independent bodies of volunteers, each with its own individual character and methods—an ideal to which Laycock was passionately committed. The gist of the vehemently argued new organization was that the Army Commandos should adopt a more conventional structure and that they come under the umbrella of a Royal Marine formation. Laycock angrily opposed the move, using uncharacteristically harsh language and—breaking a sacrosanct convention—criticizing the work of another service, the Royal Marine Commandos. But while this acrimony was embittering old friendships, a large force of Commandos, led by Laycock, sailed for the Mediterranean to take part in the invasion of Sicily (HUSKY) and the landing at Salerno (AVALANCHE). In the midst of AVALANCHE, Laycock received notice of the latest proposed version of the new organization. His reply was a furious pages-long telegram requesting that at the end of the campaign he be relieved of his command.

But again "luck," or a miracle, intervened. Mountbatten once again summoned Laycock from the battlefield to London, this time to take over his own job of Chief of Combined Operations. And after various difficulties were overcome, Laycock, at 36, became the youngest officer promoted to General during the Hitler war. The appointment created a sensation in the press and elevated Bob to a very high level, close to the Chiefs of Staff. Mead describes the busy period into which Bob now entered very well: restructurings required by various reports, constant travel to distant units, and refining the workings of Combined Operations for the D Day landings and for many subsequent operations. After D Day, with victory in sight, General Laycock took part in major military missions and conferences, such as Yalta, mixing with Prime Ministers, Presidents and Commanders in Chief.

Mead cannot fully explain Laycock's decision to retire from the Army in 1947, aged only 40, because Laycock himself was unusually reticent about it. Peace brought necessary

contraction and the Army offered few prospects. Bob, as the son of an ageing father perhaps saw himself as soon becoming responsible for administering the family's extensive land and business interests. But Joe died in 1952 and death duties and post-war income taxes meant that most of the family property had to be sold. Bob's total wealth now equalled his father's annual income. From that point of view, he must have welcomed appointment for two terms as Governor of Malta, and the knighthood that went with it, although the intensity of political acrimony in a country seeking independence tested his famed good nature and diplomacy. Bob also took up a few directorships and was honoured with appointments, such as High Sherriff of Nottinghamshire and Colonel Commandant of the Special Air Service Regiment, duties he fulfilled enthusiastically and punctiliously. He and Angie lived a busy social life among a wide circle of friends. A large family was entering on adulthood. And Bob pursued an array of hobbies including such unexpected interests as woodworking and needlepoint tapestry. In 1968 he died of a sudden heart attack, returning from church, aged only 60.

But how does Evelyn Waugh enter into, and come out of, the Laycock story? Apart from a gratuitously insulting passage in General Julian Thompson's Foreword to the book, the tone is everywhere civil, basically disapproving, often neutral, occasionally offering new and intriguing insights. Mead finds Laycock's patronage of Waugh "puzzling" and wonders why he retained him in the Special Service Brigade when "many of its officers" objected. Moreover, he is less than investigative when dealing with Waugh's forced resignation from the Brigade: he tries to be fair, but Lovat, who gave at least three contradictory accounts of the affair, can hardly be cited as a reliable witness. By way of balance, Mead reports that a senior officer new to the Brigade "got on very well" with Waugh. *Commando General* also includes some very interesting new Waugh material. A letter to Angie contains Laycock's real opinion of *Officers and Gentlemen* as "screamingly funny in parts but pretty bloody as a whole" because Waugh "has a mission;" a judgement that vividly illustrates the gulf dividing Waugh from the bulk of British educated opinion. Laycock also reveals that Waugh wished to seek guidance from a priest about the (Roman Catholic) morality of swimming out to sea to avoid capture: that is, would it amount to the sin of suicide? Corporal-Major Ludovic asks this question in Book Two, Chapter VI of *Officers and Gentlemen*. (As a boy, this writer lived next door to a New Zealander who swam off Crete, was picked up by a ship, and was lauded as a hero.) Mead fills out other well known incidents involving Waugh from Laycock memories. All in all, Wavians will find much of interest in this biography.

Mead's treatment of the Crete evacuation relies on Laycock's memoir, and I therefore looked forward to reading it very eagerly. Would this be the definitive account? Most disappointingly, Laycock actually adds a new layer of confusion. Mead does not engage with the issues Antony Beevor raises in *Crete: The Battle and the Resistance* (1991) but focuses on General Weston's order of 31 May 1941 that Laycock conduct the surrender next morning; Laycock's refusal to carry out that order; and the delegation of the order, with Weston's agreement, to Lt Colonel Colvin. But Laycock's version of the incident is so radically different

from more credible accounts that it is impossible to reconcile them. Major (later Major General) F. C. C. (Freddy) Graham, Laycock's Brigade Major, relates, with the utmost clarity, how, in the absence of Laycock, he and Colvin were summoned by the officer commanding Crete, General Weston, into the Creforce HQ cave around 10.00 pm. There Weston dictated the surrender order, which Graham took down in triplicate. He handed one copy to Weston and one to Colvin (who had been nominated to conduct the capitulation) and kept one copy for himself. Laycock, however, writes that Weston said: "Take down this order." I turned to Freddy who produced a notebook and pencil. . . . When he had finished, Freddy handed the message to me." Laycock then goes on to say that he "flatly refused" to obey the order to surrender.

Laycock's version cannot possibly be true because he could not have been at Creforce HQ at 10.00 pm. In reality, he "panted up" to the Creforce HQ cave more than an hour after Weston had dictated the order to Graham—when Graham had already heard the leading cruiser *Phoebe* embarking troops, which the ship's log reveals was after 11.35 pm—long after Weston had left to board the seaplane which would take him to Egypt. The truth is that Laycock conflates two meetings. It was at the first meeting, held at 2.00 pm and recorded in a variety of reliable documents, that Weston ordered Laycock to conduct the surrender, that Laycock refused the order, and Weston accepted Colvin's nomination as the officer to capitulate. At that hour, Laycock was the obvious choice to surrender because at 2.00 pm the Navy was still expected to pick up only 2000 men and no spaces were allotted to Layforce. Nor did Laycock make a secret of his "flatly refusing" to conduct the surrender: he revealed it, without prompting, to the New Zealand Official Historian, Dan Davin. By the 10.00 pm meeting the situation was quite different. The Navy had by then agreed to fill the ships to capacity and, if the embarkation had not fallen into chaos, all fighting troops, Layforce included (but in last place), would have found room on the ships; exactly the situation envisaged by General Freyberg when in his order of 28 May he instructed the Commandos to hold an "intermediate position" covering other units as they boarded, and then "disengage and embark."

But this is not the place to debate the intricacies of the evacuation of Crete. This is a review of a very fine biography, one to buy and to keep. I must confess, too, that my foregoing account of Laycock's life and career based on Richard Mead's work conveys little of the pleasure of reading his book. *Commando General* is packed with a wealth of essential fact, personal anecdote, and military exposition; it nowhere theorises or seeks attention; it is always difficult to put down. The pleasure is in the detail.

A Slow Build

Evelyn Waugh's Satire: Texts and Contexts, by Naomi Milthorpe. Farleigh Dickinson UP, 2016, 185 pp.

Evelyn Waugh's Satire: Texts and Contexts is actually two books: one book is about Waugh's satire; the other advances an agenda. It is also a book of two, noticeably, distinct halves.

It is important to state upfront, because of what follows, this is a book that deserves to be read, and seriously considered, despite its shortcomings. Equally important, it will require patience on the part of the reader, but patience will in the main be rewarded. The purpose of this review is more to prepare any who decide to read this book on what to expect. Why? Because this is not only a piece of scholarship, or literary study, it is a polemic.

The stated aim of the book is to explore "Waugh's satire through the lenses of form and feeling, in the belief that the story of his place in the modernist and interwar literary landscape is far from resolved" (11). And to do so "through: first, an examination of his satiric novels and their particular techniques, strategies, effects, and affects; and second, a critical appraisal of his novels in context with contemporary works and ideas, making use of recent scholarly work on the period to position Waugh as a central figure of late modernism and interwar satire" (11). Milthorpe asserts that despite the "foundational scholarship" of others, "a new, large-scale study of Waugh's satire as it develops throughout his career is crucial" (11).

This satiric retrospective takes the works chronologically. In addition to the Introduction -- which at nineteen pages is about as long as most chapters and longer than three of them -- there are seven chapters and a Coda. Here is a very brief rundown. Chapter one: looks at *Decline and Fall* with Clough William Ellis's *England and the Octopus*; chapter two: *Vile Bodies* runs alongside Wyndham Lewis's *Apes of God*; chapter three: pairs *Black Mischief* and *Scoop* with Stella Gibbon's *Cold Comfort Farm*; chapter four: *A Handful of Dust* and several "deliberately misread" source texts from Eliot, Dickens, Tennyson, Proust and Conrad are examined; chapter five: posits *Put Out More Flags* "should be read at the center and turning point of Waugh's oeuvre" and *Scott-King's Modern Europe* is further exemplified; chapter six: "reads *The Loved One* intertextually with the poems Dennis [Barlow] steals, but also intratextually, with Waugh's 1953 dystopian *Love Among the Ruins*" (14); chapter seven: explores how *The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold* is in fact not a portrait of Evelyn Waugh but rather a beard, "a reflection and deflection -- hard, bright and artificial -- of readerly [and critical] expectations of Waugh" (14); and the Coda evinces how in "Basil Seal Rides Again," Waugh, through the 60-year-old Basil, echoes the "artificial persona" of Pinfold while at the same time chronicling Basil's "rejection of pompous duty in favor of a return to his former, glorious rakishness" (14).

When one arrives to Milthorpe's stated purpose and synopses, beginning on page eleven, one perks up because the objective, the satires themselves and the other reference sources from which she intends to draw are intriguing. Tracing the arc of Waugh's satire over the course of his career should prove enlightening and compelling. And to be sure it does -- with Milthorpe making discoveries, intertextual links, authoritative proclamations.

Following are *some* stops on the arc Milthorpe catalogues. Starting with *Decline and Fall*, which she contends has been mislabeled "anarchic," and William-Ellis's *England and the Octopus*, Milthorpe posits that Waugh's satire runs parallel "to a recurring concern in Waugh's essays and reviews in the twenties and thirties, namely the destructive impact of [unchecked] freedom upon modern subjects and environments (20)." And, further, that the erstwhile bastions of traditional authority -- the Church, the law, the aristocracy, the school system -- have abdicated responsibility resulting in disorder. Change for the worse is represented in the tentacles of the octopus: and the octopus is a recurring theme, appearing at least three times in Waugh's fiction, a symbol that has been "ignored by critics" (21): until now.

In *A Handful of Dust*, Waugh asserts "that the novel is 'about humanism,' by which he seems to refer to the view espoused by Tony Last, in which humans, not God, occupy the central position in the scheme of existence" (82). Milthorpe asserts it is in fact "a remarkable modernist novel, one that fruitfully engages with the dominant literary mode of the time while simultaneously satirizing it" (87).

The vacuum left by the abdication of traditional authority and the slide toward humanism mentioned above was filled by, to Waugh, something far worse: the Century of the Common Man (104): where the individual is persona non grata. "Disgusted by the corporate masculinity of the twentieth century, Waugh began to sympathize with the individual case in his novels, and to prize 'Liberty, Diversity, Privacy'" (101). In *Put Out More Flags* and *Scott-King's Modern Europe*, this is explored. Milthorpe states, "it is the homogenization of individuals into a uniform category used as a means to political, social, and national ends, into a herd in fact, that renders the 'Common Man' so odious [to Waugh]" (118). In chapter five, Milthorpe purposes to "renovate the reputation of Waugh's sixth novel" (103).

And, finally, "'Basil Seal Rides Again,' suggests a renewal, repetition, and restoration; its subtitle 'The Rake's Regress' similarly indicates re-entry into a place of origin . . . a regression to the satirical mode Waugh had seemingly laid to rest in favor of the reflective *Sword of Honour*" (157). Basil has grown fat (in all forms), "florid" and become a part of the system against which he once rebelled. "The satirical claim to cure is here invoked to restore power not to tradition and convention, but to the disruptive intruder" (161): the individual.

The agenda, aforementioned, also starts on page eleven and works through the book like leaven. That is not problematic in and of itself; the problem, for this reader, lay in its execution: that aspect of things is so overt as to skate on the edge of off putting. It is "explicitly"

"signposted" to use a couple of resident words. It gets in the way of the ostensible substance and scholarly value of the book. And that is a pity. While generous in praise or citing other scholars by name, she then follows with criticism, often of those same critics or scholars -- sometimes by name, sometimes inferred. This type of territory marking detracts. One is talking here about tact, not PC. PC has no place in the world of Waugh, except as an object of satire or scorn. The simple fact is: her arguments can be made, and made well, without the veiled aggression. There is a difference between being bold and brash. As Alexander Pope said, "Good satire should not butcher a person but should, like an extremely sharp sword, slice entirely through the neck, leaving the head in place." The same can be said about staking a claim. Considering the number of times she takes on fellow critics, it could have been done more tastefully, subtly, without diminishing substance.

The book at 185 pages is probably one-quarter to one-third longer than it needs to be. I persevered through the opening sections, and otherwise would have done Milthorpe a great disservice, because the second half of the book is so much better, like the roads when one enters Switzerland from Italy. There is still the "critics" leaven mentioned above. The second half covers *A Handful of Dust*, *Put Out More Flags*, *Scott-King's Modern Europe*, *The Loved One*, *Love Among the Ruins*, *The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold*, and "Basil Seal Rides Again." Her prose is different; there is elegance, concision and communication. It became enjoyable, kinetic, the sunroof opened and *Zadok the Priest* was blasting on the stereo. And in reading it was obvious that there was confidence of the right kind.

It is blatantly clear that Milthorpe is intelligent, astute, energetic, witty, enthusiastic – and driven. She has researched her subject well, meticulously. The footnotes, bibliography and index are excellent. There are a number of proofreading errors (e.g. boo-kended) that could be emended should a reprint occur.

More to the point, Milthorpe has lit the spark to revisit these works bearing in mind what she has put forward and to see how it measures. Whether or not her arguments or conclusions become de rigueur, they are worthy of study and debate. If properly weighted and bruited, they could forge new direction, opinion and perhaps consensus as to the depth, breadth, and scope of meanings that really lie behind, relate to, and underpin Waugh's satire -- adding a heft, prescience and resonance to his works and another layer to his stature among the great satirists. The positives outweigh the negatives, and this work is on the whole a positive and active addition to the canon of literary study on Evelyn Waugh and his writing.

To quote Mybug from *Cold Comfort Farm*: ". . . there's rich soil in here if you care to dig for it." It is the hope that, with the above caveats in mind, readers *will* care to dig for it.

NEWS

John H. Wilson Jr. Evelyn Waugh Undergraduate Essay Contest

Submissions are still welcome for the John H. Wilson Jr. Evelyn Waugh Undergraduate Essay Contest. Essays (normally limited to 20 pages or 5000 words) are invited on any aspect of Waugh's life or work and will be judged by the *Evelyn Waugh Studies* editorial board. The winning essay will be published in the journal, and the author will receive a prize of \$500. Deadline: 31 December 2017. Email submissions to jpitcher@bennington.edu or Patrick.Query@usma.edu.

“Wavian Reactions to Anthony Powell”

A lecture given by Alexander Waugh, hosted by the Anthony Powell Society at the Travellers' Club in London, on Wednesday, 6th December, which traced the relationship of Anthony Powell with Evelyn Waugh, Waugh's brother-in-law Alec Dru and Waugh's heirs and assigns, particularly Auberon Waugh.

A Personal Note

I Owe It All to *Brideshead*

By David Bittner

As I have considered the various influences which led me, a Jew by birth and upbringing (and even now still a Jew by heritage), to join the Catholic Church in 2001, at the tender age of 50, I have been able to pinpoint the fateful moment of my young life that made the big difference. It occurred one day during the first semester of my junior year at the University of Wisconsin. I was in the sub-street-level bowels of University Memorial Library looking for a good book to read as a reward for doing my dreary political science and zoology homework. All of a sudden, as I glanced up, my attention became riveted by a book title consisting of two magical words, *Brideshead Revisited*. I checked out the medium-sized novel by Evelyn Waugh and took a few days to read it.

The first thing I found out was that the author of *Brideshead Revisited* was a man, not a woman, as I had supposed Evelyn Waugh to be when I read *The Loved One* in my mid-teens. Now, a little maturity had come with a little age, and I found myself charmed by the aristocratic glamour of *Brideshead Revisited*, as seen so well especially in the book's many scenes of Catholic ritual practice. These scenes---including praying the rosary, making confession, taking communion, making the sign of the cross, and receiving the last sacrament---fairly drip with dramaturgy. I might say that Mr. Samgrass, with his fondness for the "picturesque" trappings of Catholicism, such as the black lace mantillas worn by Catholic women at worship, embodies this positive view of religion that inconsistency cannot disturb. As it was said about Voltaire, by the English poet Thomas Cowpers (1731-1800), "The Scripture was his jest-book, whence he drew / Bon Mots to gall the Christian and the Jew. / An infidel in health, but what when sick? / Oh--- then a text would touch him at the quick (Ringo 102)." Sticking with rhyme, I might put these different views of religion another way, using two words that *Brideshead* groupies should find very familiar. What the socially aspiring Rex Mottram admiringly calls "posh," [the theatricality of European Catholicism], Charles Ryder calls, along with modern art, "bosh."

It would be outside the scope of this short article to explain how I made the sacraments understandable to myself. But I will give you two examples. First, not all cannibalism is equal. Just one short step away from "eating the body of Jesus" is eating the flesh of tame animals in order to absorb their qualities of sweetness and gentleness. That is one reason why many barnyard animals, such as cattle, sheep, goats, lambs, chickens, and geese, are kosher. (So why not pigs and how come deer, which live in the wild? I *said*: "outside the scope"!)

Second, what is wrong with using intermediaries to pray? God (it has always commonly been thought) uses angels to communicate with man; why shouldn't there be stepping-stones from us to Him (thinking now of Jesus, Mary, Joseph, and all the saints)?

I believe my own exposure as a schoolboy to TV specials like *Give Us Barabbas*, and *Green Pastures*, and movies like *A Man Called Peter* and *Going My Way*, and all the Christmas carols I learned in public school, prepared me, when I read *Brideshead Revisited*, to be impacted by all the sacramental scenes. Who could fail to be touched by Lord Marchmain's deathbed reaffirmation of faith, expressed by wordlessly crossing himself, after living the last 25 years of his life as a "scoffer"(336). Sir Laurence Olivier played the scene beautifully. Originally offered the part of either Lord Marchmain or Mr. Ryder Senior, Olivier chose Lord Marchmain because he could never resist a good deathbed scene. I never get tired of reading Charles Ryder's description of Lord Marchmain's final gesture: "His hand moved slowly down his breast, then to his shoulder, and Lord Marchmain made the sign of the cross." From across the Atlantic Ocean, you could hear the proverbial pin drop.

Today, as I analyze the impact of those two "magical words," *Brideshead Revisited*, I also see their appeal to my interest in a certain theme of popular culture, *viz.*, the wistful yearning of many people to "go home again," to return to the scenes of their childhood and youth. Of course Thomas Wolfe, in his novel, "You Can't Go Home Again," argued that no such return was possible. After living for a while in Germany and seeing fascism's increasing hold on the German people, Wolfe's hero, George Webber, does return to his hometown of "Libya Hill," probably somewhere in the southern part of *The United Shades of America*. [Why not use this new and clever pun on the name of our diverse country?] But he is disappointed by the mood of the townspeople. They do not seem much happier than the Germans among whom he tried to live.

I, for one, can identify with this theme of *Brideshead Revisited*. I have frequent dreams of going back to live in the house I was raised in from age 3 to 10. In these dreams I sometimes tell myself, "Now, this time it's not just a dream. It's for real!" And of course it never is. So when I saw that word, "Revisited," in Waugh's title, I suspected that this book would concern someone's nostalgic return to the scene of his youth, and I hoped it would be a successful return. And of course that's just what it was! Charles Ryder gets the unexpected chance, when his regiment happens to make camp in the vicinity of Brideshead Castle, to prowl around the house and grounds and relive 20-year-old memories of the summer of 1923, when his good friend, Sebastian Flyte, treated him to a brief, belated spell of something Charles had never known---a happy childhood, including a two-week holiday in Venice. Charles has a reunion with two old family retainers, Nanny Hawkins and Effie, the housemaid, and is flooded by warm memories of all his other old friends, Lord and Lady Marchmain and Sebastian and Julia, and Cordelia and Bridey, and the whole "Brideshead Set." Charles's good mood is infectious. As Charles and Hooper drive away in their jeep, Hooper tells Charles, "You're looking unusually cheerful today."

Now, I believe it may be fairly hopeless, as Wolfe suggests it is, to actually resume living in a beloved old home later in life. But I think *Brideshead Revisited* proves this can be done on a minor scale. Another example of the satisfaction that "one last look" can bring is provided by the

1985 feature film, "The Trip to Bountiful," starring Geraldine Page. Page plays "Carrie Watts," an elderly Houston woman who gives the slip to her custodial son and daughter-in-law and takes a long Greyhound bus trip to "Bountiful," her tiny, old Texas hometown on the Gulf of Mexico. Carrie finds that since her last visit to Bountiful 20 years earlier, Bountiful has become even more of a ghost town than ever. It is full of uninhabited, run-down, old frame houses, most with white paint peeling off. But now, in an hour's time or less, she has seen what she came to see, and she is satisfied. She is ready to return to Houston with her son and daughter-in-law, who have just caught up with her. Carrie has gone home again!

In my 35-year career as a journalist, I once interviewed a nationally-known TV personality (who shall remain nameless, of course). She told me sadly, during the course of our interview, that her plans to move into her parents' old home in Hollywood, where she had been raised, fell through because of unfavorable conditions in the real estate market at the time. I think that's a really heartbreaking example of not being able to go home again, so I will close with a story that starts sadly, but gets much better. Picking grapes in some vineyards in Alsace, in my early 20s, I met an elderly Jewish couple, M. and Mme. Pierre Lehman, in the village of Itterswiller, Bas-Rhin. Here the young married couple, M. and Mme. Edmond Kobloth, who owned the far-flung vineyards, lived in a three-story, half-timbered house and had their business office; and here the Lehmans owned and operated a little grocery store. My French is not brilliant, so I'm not sure what the Lehmans tried to tell me. It was either that they were related to the Depression-era governor of New York, Herbert Lehman, or that they just knew of him. They also told me about the Holocaust period in Alsace, and how they survived. M. Lehman fought in the French army before the Fall of France in 1940. The Germans took him prisoner and placed him in one of their P.O.W. camps. Now, as Cordelia Flyte says to Charles Ryder about Sebastian's German companion, Kurt, and Greece's humanizing influence on Kurt: "You know how Germans sometimes seem to discover a sense of decency when they get to a classical country (306)." Well, roughly fulfilling these same expectations of them, the Germans usually respected the Geneva convention when it came to the way they treated captured Jewish Allied soldiers. Generally the Wehrmacht---the ordinary standing German army, not the dreaded S.S.---spared the lives of these Jewish soldiers from America, Canada, France, England, etc. M. Lehman said that Jewish P.O.W.s were, however, kept separate from non-Jewish French P.O.W.'s, and that their labor in the rock quarries was twice as hard. Mme. Lehman survived by going into hiding in southern France. I asked the couple why they returned to Itterswiller after the war, instead of joining the flow of most liberated Alsatian Jews to Strasbourg. Mme. Lehman just laughed and said, "Because we wouldn't have known how to live anywhere else!" Then she added, as an apostrophe to their neighbors who looked after the Lehmans' local interests during their exile: "Et nous habitons dans la *même* maison qu'avant la guerre, dans la *même* maison!"--"and we live in the *same* house as before the war, the *same* house!" Could the matter be any clearer? The Lehmans had gone home again!

Evelyn Waugh Society

The Waugh Society has 182 members. To join, please go to <http://evelynwaughsociety.org/>.

The Evelyn Waugh Discussion List has 78 members. To join, please visit

http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Evelyn_Waugh.

The Evelyn Waugh Society is also on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/evelynwaughsoc>.

The Waugh Society is providing an RSS feed: <http://evelynwaughsociety.org/feed>.

And the Waugh Society's web site has opportunities for threaded discussions:

<http://evelynwaughsociety.org/forums/>.

The Evelyn Waugh Society is seeking a new Secretary. If you are interested or would like further information, please contact the current Secretary, Patrick Query, at Patrick.Query@usma.edu.

Submission Guidelines

Essays as well as notes and news about Waugh and his work may be submitted to *Evelyn Waugh Studies* by mail or email to (jpitcher@bennington.edu, patrick.query@usma.edu). Submissions should follow MLA style and be no more than 5000 words in length. Since most readers will be familiar with Waugh's work, authors should minimize unnecessary quotations and explanatory references. All submitted essays are first screened by the Editors and if deemed acceptable for publication are then sent to Associate Editors for further review. Authors should expect to be notified of the editors' final decision within twelve weeks of submission.

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