

# EVELYN WAUGH STUDIES

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## Trying to Excite the Pornophiles: Evelyn Waugh and *Candy*

Naomi Milthorpe, University of Tasmania

John Howard Wilson

*Evelyn Waugh and His World* (1973) includes an essay entitled “His Bookseller’s View” by Handasyde Buchanan, one-time manager of Heywood Hill’s shop in Mayfair. Waugh often sent orders via postcards and sometimes letters, and Buchanan frequently quotes from these. He refers to an exchange over the erotic novel *Candy* (1958) by Terry Southern and Mason Hoffenberg, but Buchanan’s representation of Waugh’s interest in the book is incomplete and slightly misleading. More than 110 of Waugh’s cards and letters are in the Waugh-Buchanan Collection at the Special Collections Research Center, Georgetown University, while replies from Buchanan to Waugh are held in the Evelyn Waugh Papers in the British Library. One can compare the originals with what Buchanan decided to quote, add a little information to his essay, and draw a few conclusions about Waugh. Buchanan’s essay remembers Waugh fondly as “entertaining at all times and in his own special way” (Buchanan 225), and the Waugh-Buchanan letters support and enrich Handasyde’s image of Waugh as a bawdy and captious correspondent. Yet the Waugh-Buchanan postcards dealing with the sale of *Candy* also reveal a side of Waugh that Buchanan neglects: his conflicted obsession with the moral and economic value of his library. What emerges is that Waugh might not wish *Candy* in his library, but he is also not averse to turning this piece of “pornography” to profit.

In his essay, Buchanan quotes Waugh’s first note about *Candy*: “I think you have a customer with a taste for pornography. An American Jew wrongly supposes that I have this taste and has sent me CANDY. Ripe for confiscation and destruction in this more civilized country. Any offers?” (Buchanan 226).<sup>1</sup> Waugh valued the book at “\$5. Mint,” autographed the card and inserted it in an envelope marked “PERSONAL,” postmarked 10 April 1964; apparently he wanted to keep the message private. (Waugh-Buchanan, Box 1, Folder 79). The “American Jew” was Peter Israel, editor-in-chief at G. P. Putnam’s Sons in New York. He wrote to Waugh on 20 March 1964: “CANDY is, to us, the wildest, funniest, most irreverent and outlandish satiric novel we have ever published. I hope you will find the time to read it, and I would love to know what you think of it, either on or off the record.” Waugh went to Rome for Easter on 24 March (*Letters of Waugh* 618-19; *Letters of Waugh and Cooper* 305-07); after he returned on 1 April (*Diaries* 789), he proposed selling the novel to Buchanan. At some point Waugh forwarded Israel’s letter to Buchanan, adding a note at the bottom that the letter “gives more information about smutty book,” and it became part of the collection, arranged by date (W-B, B1, F77).

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<sup>1</sup> The original letter reads “the taste for pornography”, not “a taste.” In the letter he also encouraged Buchanan to “push” the books of Alfred Duggan, who had died on 4 April and had left a “widow & orphan”.

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Peter Israel had edited the science-fiction classics *Stranger in a Strange Land* (1961) by Robert A. Heinlein and *The Man in the High Castle* (1962) by Philip K. Dick (“Peter Israel”). *Candy* had been published in Paris in 1958 by Olympia Press, known for “dirty books,” and ascribed to Maxwell Kenton, a pseudonym. Putnam decided to publish the first American edition in 1964. To promote sales, Putnam bought a half-page advertisement in *Publishers Weekly* on 3 February. Though “banned in France,” *Candy* was endorsed by Dwight MacDonald (essayist and critic), Robert B. Silvers (editor-in-chief, *New York Review of Books*), and Francis Wyndham (editor of *Queen*, where Waugh’s son Auberon had worked). When the novel appeared on 12 May, the dust jacket carried further endorsements from Karl Miller (editor and critic), Herbert Gold (novelist), and James Jones (author) (Martin). *Candy* failed to impress Waugh, but the book became a bestseller, with 140,000 copies sold by the end of the year (Martin).

Waugh continued to press for his copy’s resale, with subsequent letters repeating both the jokes about the book’s low moral value and his hopes for some heightened economic return. In the only extant letter from Buchanan that mentions *Candy*, dated 11 April, the bookseller wrote that he had “never heard of [it]” but expected he could sell it to “one of two or three pornographic customers: \$5 is 35/- so if 7 offer 25/- is this reasonable” (Waugh, BL 81049, 102).<sup>2</sup> It may not have been: in a letter of 13 April, Waugh asked Buchanan “to wait until Candy becomes the subject of criminal proceedings when I am sure it will command a fancy price” (W-B, B1, F80). Buchanan did not quote this sentence, though he did quote the rest of the letter, about Waugh’s autobiography, *A Little Learning* (1964).

Waugh did not forget about *Candy*, however, and continued to bait Buchanan with jokes about his customers’ smutty tastes. According to Buchanan, Waugh asked “Will not this bit in the *Sunday Times* excite your pornophiles to fancy prices?” (226). Waugh actually wrote “Will not this in Sunday Times ...”; his letter is postmarked 2 June 1964, or about seven weeks after his second note to Buchanan about *Candy*. The clipping is entitled “Candy,” by Nicholas Tomalin (W-B, B1, F81).<sup>3</sup> In the clipping, he suggests that *Candy* is “joke pornography [...] a send-up of the whole genre of those peculiarly printed books people brought back from Port Said or Paris. But at the same time, as it happens, it is pornographic. It achieves the effect it is satirising” (Tomalin, W-B, B1, 81). Just as Waugh was charged with the moral transgressions of his satires’ characters and incidents – Ernest Oldmeadow’s complaints about *Black Mischief*

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<sup>2</sup> Buchanan’s proposal does not seem to make sense. In 1964, before decimalization in 1971, one pound was worth 20 shillings or US\$2.80. Five dollars equaled 35 shillings, but if he thought he could make \$7, why offer it at 25 shillings? He may have made a mistake, or he may not have written clearly.

<sup>3</sup> Tomalin was the husband of Claire Tomalin, prize-winning biographer of, most recently, Charles Dickens (2011). He was killed while reporting on the Arab-Israeli War in 1973.

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spring to mind – so were Southern and Hoffenberg. The content is of course vastly different but results in similar effects, of the satirist tarred with his own brush. Waugh's arch tone suggests that he recognized *Candy*'s satire but still thought it necessary to reject the book.

In his last letter about *Candy*, Buchanan suggests, Waugh requested to “return this absolutely awful book. I can't read it myself and I don't want to leave it lying about to corrupt my children” (226). Yet the letter that matches this request is dated 15 October 1961 – that is, almost three years prior to the *Candy* series (W-B, B1, 59). Buchanan seems confused; he is indifferent about the “consequent arrangement” of his correspondence with Waugh (225). *Candy* was a review copy that Waugh had decided to sell, not a purchase he wished to return. Still, Buchanan is right to emphasize Waugh's uneasiness with books of questionable moral, literary, or economic value. In an undated postcard, Waugh asks to return a book he “inadvisedly purchased. The last paragraph of the text shocked me inexpressibly & can't have it under my roof” (W-B, B1, F105).

In the paragraph before he introduces *Candy*, Buchanan notes that he has “a piece of wrapping-paper returning a book that [Waugh] had disliked addressed to ‘The Secretary, West London Pornophilic Society, c/o [actually ‘c/re’] H. Buchanan, Esq’.” (226). This label is postmarked June 1964 (exact date illegible), and it includes further details: “c/re Heywood Hill Ltd, 10 Curzon Street, London W1” (W-B, B1, F82). It was sent soon after Waugh's previous note about *Candy*, dated 2 June, and may have directed the American novel to Buchanan, not some other book that Waugh had “disliked.” Waugh's joke about Buchanan being the secretary of the West London Pornophilic Society seems a bit harsh and embarrassing, but it becomes funnier in the context of Waugh's earlier note about “pornophiles.” Waugh seems to have felt that Buchanan was moving too slowly on *Candy*, and he tried to prompt him into action.

In his next postcard, postmarked 22 June 1964, Waugh asked if Buchanan had received the “£4 novel I sent you anonymously. It is not credited to the account received today” (W-B, B1, F83). Waugh sent the card openly through the post, but using coded language, referring to *Candy* as a “sweet” novel. He seems to have enjoyed these games, concealing some information, encoding some, sending packages anonymously to fanciful addresses, and so on. He valued *Candy* at £4; the British pound was pegged at \$2.80, so *Candy* would have been worth \$11.20, more than twice the retail price of \$5.00 in the USA, and more than the \$7.00 Buchanan had suggested in April. The OED suggests that fancy stock or fancy prices are “estimated by caprice, rather than by actual value.” The *Candy* letters seem to suggest Waugh's own caprice – perhaps he hoped to increase the value of the book by emphasizing its salaciousness. He did not get a “fancy price,” but he was willing to settle for a small profit to expend on another book or two. Buchanan excluded this card from his essay. He seems to have acquiesced, since the matter is not raised again.

It is surprising to find Waugh, a famous writer, quibbling over a small sum (though 1964 dollars were worth perhaps ten times more than those of today). He still had children at home,

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and in his sixties he was anxious about income. A few dollars hardly mattered, but even late in life Waugh continued to enjoy the give-and-take of the literary marketplace. As he had grown, Evelyn had acquired an innate sense of a book's value, and he thought he had detected a winner in *Candy*—at least in the restricted English market. He also enjoyed teasing Buchanan, whom he described in another letter as an “Agnostic socialist” (Buchanan 225). Why should Buchanan not be a “pornophile” too? While Waugh persisted in teasing Buchanan, his bookseller's replies are by contrast serious and earnest, yet they reveal Buchanan's parallel concern with the value of Waugh's library as a whole. Waugh had Buchanan undertake valuations of the library in 1952 and 1962. In his letter of 2 July 1962, Buchanan reports that the library, including the manuscripts and presentation copies, had undergone a “colossal appreciation,” thanks in part to the Waugh bookplates (Waugh, BL 81049, 100).

*Candy* did not initiate the criminal proceedings anticipated by Waugh. A trial seemed possible after the case of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928) by D. H. Lawrence in 1960. Under the Obscene Publications Act (1959), the government prosecuted Penguin Books for their unexpurgated edition, but a jury decided that *Lady Chatterley* had literary merit. Waugh lamented “a shameful week for English justice,” partly because Lawrence had been “declared a great writer.” If he had been called as a witness, Waugh would have explained “to the bemused jury that Lawrence's reputation had been made by an illiterate clique at Cambridge” (*Letters of Waugh* 552). He wrote to the *Spectator* emphasizing Lawrence's “incapacity as an artist” (*Letters* 553), and he seems to have written an article on *Lady Chatterley* lost by the *Daily Mail* (Davis, *Catalogue* 258). Evidence from the Harry Ransom Center reflects Waugh's ongoing interest in criminal proceedings occasioned by erotic literature. The HRC contains a privately printed transcript copy of *The Trial of Lady Chatterley* (1961), with Waugh's armorial bookplate tipped in. The copy contains no annotations by Waugh, but there are three items tipped into the concluding pages, including two 1962 [Encounter](#) pieces on the trial by John Sparrow (then Warden of All Souls and a noted book collector), and a note from Sparrow to Waugh.

Interest in *Candy* can also be considered in the context of Waugh's correspondence with his agent, A. D. Peters, from November 1960 to July 1963. Though Waugh complained of ill health, he pursued almost any project that might produce a few pounds. He and Peters discussed recordings, commissions for travel and other journalism, short stories, reviews, interviews, film rights, translations, reprints, introductions, his new novel, his autobiography, a book about the popes, and even a musical comedy of *Vile Bodies*. Some wages were paid in wine, some in cigars, but Waugh was sometimes desperate: he needed money, and he secured a loan. He also dabbled in the Trust, supposedly an investment for his children but actually an excuse to buy (and sell) paintings, manuscripts, and furniture while saving on taxes (Davis, *Catalogue* 258-88). The small deal over *Candy* fits into the big picture. Waugh may seem mean, but he had to scrounge to make a decent living as a writer, and he had to make the most of opportunities. As things turned out, Waugh did well to press Buchanan on compensation for *Candy* in 1964. Waugh died in 1966, and the first British edition of *Candy*, “considerably reduced and censored”

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by Bernard Geis, appeared in 1968 (Martin). Partly because Geis was cautious, partly because the law had become more permissive, and perhaps partly because *Candy* was “joke pornography,” criminal proceedings in the UK never got started.

Ironically, in 1964 the co-author of *Candy*, Terry Southern, was with Christopher Isherwood rewriting the script for *The Loved One* (1965), the film based on Waugh's novel (1948). We know of no evidence that Waugh made the connection between *Candy* and the co-writer of the film, but he was certainly distressed about the project and tried to stop it (Davis, *Mischief* 97-128). Perhaps selling his copy of *Candy* was a way of making a few dollars more.

Thus Waugh's original letters and cards create an impression slightly different from that conveyed by Buchanan in “His Bookseller's View.” Waugh seems funnier, sharper, and more prickly as friend and client. He also seems conflicted, interested in pornography but wanting to get rid of it, covering his tracks but determined to make some money. This obsession with money is ongoing throughout the Waugh-Buchanan letters. Waugh is very much concerned with how much he can get for certain books, how much his library is worth, and whether in purchasing a book he has been swindled out of a good deal. Many have remarked upon the tension between Waugh's youthful anarchism and later conservatism; to judge from his interest in *Candy*, the conflict persisted nearly to the end of his life.

*Candy* turned into a film in 1968. Lee Hill wrote a biography of Terry Southern, *A Grand Guy* (2001). Terry's son Nile Southern wrote *The Candy Men: The Rollicking Life and Times of the Notorious Novel Candy* (2004).

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# Evelyn Waugh and Architecture

## Adrian Pascu-Tulbure

### 1. The Squire from the Suburbs: A Biographical Reading

“Darling, I think I have just bought a castle. I hope you will approve,”<sup>4</sup> wrote Waugh to his wife in 1945. “I think” is a studiedly Waugh statement, implying both aristocratic vagueness and the relative insignificance of purchasing such a thing as a castle. From the purchase of his first country house in 1937, his diaries and letters are filled with accounts of the mid-Victorian art and furniture he “seemed to have” bought, all implying not only the lifestyle of the gentleman collector but also the atmosphere – subconsciously striven for or otherwise – of inherited wealth. “Seem to” is, once again, typical of Waugh: bemusedly detached to his achievements because he is socially secure enough to do so. This is rather different from the undergraduate Waugh who, when asked why he was such a loud drunk, replied “I have to make a noise because I’m poor,”<sup>5</sup> or the Waugh who rhetorically asked in his diary, apropos of moving to Ireland, “why it is I smell all the time wherever I turn the reek of the Displaced Persons’ Camp.”<sup>6</sup> In this light, “I hope you will approve” extends not just to Laura but to the landed classes.

There is far more to Waugh’s consistent use of architecture as a motif than these biographical details, of course. Yet a biographical approach can indicate why Waugh was so attuned to the implications of the building as a literary symbol.

To be able to write in detached terms about castles and country houses was important for Waugh. A product of 11 Hillfield Road, an unassuming late Victorian terrace house in West Hampstead, and Underhill, a suburban villa in North End Road, Golders Green, Waugh was solidly middle-class, and his childhood homes became a reminder that his background was patently not that of families such as the Mitfords, the Sitwells, or the Herberts, whom he adored and into whose circles he sought “to buy himself a season ticket.”<sup>7</sup> To remedy this, Waugh resorted to spin. Anecdotal evidence is rich about his youthful snobbishness, although the story that when a child Waugh would “walk to Hampstead to post his letters in order that they might

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<sup>4</sup> Letter to Laura Waugh, 19.v.1945, cited in *The Letters of Evelyn Waugh*, ed. Mark Amory, (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1981) 207. (The castle was never bought.)

<sup>5</sup> Cited in David Lodge, *Working with Structuralism* (London: Routledge, 1981) 119.

<sup>6</sup> 10.xi.1946, in *The Diaries of Evelyn Waugh*. Ed. Michael Davie (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1976) 662.

<sup>7</sup> Edward Pearce. “Brideshead Revisited.” *Quadrant* 26/7 (July 1982) 59.

bear a more aristocratic postmark”<sup>8</sup> is apocryphal.<sup>9</sup> Two facts from his 1964 autobiography, however, are telling. First, he finds it necessary to devote the first chapter to “heredity”: with the disingenuous apologia that “none of my ancestors was illustrious”<sup>10</sup>, he spends twenty-six pages chronicling the achievements of a string of landowners, Governors-General, ministers, royal ADCs, and artists: “such, then, are the physical materials of which I am made” (LL25). Second, he exaggerates the rural idyll of North End Village to the point of aggrandisement. Despite mentions of meadows and kitchen gardens, Underhill was no rural idyll; nor was it particularly large (see Appendix 1). “All round us lay dairy farms, market gardens and a few handsome old houses of brick and stucco standing in twenty acres or more” (LL34), Waugh writes; presumably his memory does not stretch to the terrace of simple mid-Victorian houses, their façades barely a metre away from the pavement, a hundred yards further up North End Road. Nor was Underhill unique, as Waugh implies: barely a couple of years later, six further houses, identical although semi-detached rather than detached, had been built next door to the Waughs. Waugh does occasionally permit wry references to his *bourgeois* upbringing, often in describing his father refusing to number his house “145” or ignoring the change of postal address from Hampstead to Golders Green; furthermore, he admits that his father was “the first” person to spoil North End. Yet it is a North End, and an Underhill, which is portrayed inaccurately in the first place.

It can be seen from Waugh’s efforts to idealise his childhood milieu that for him, the family home became of symbolic importance in defining the person. And if he was going to set himself up as a country squire it had to be done from a country house – hence Piers Court, in Stinchcombe, Gloucestershire (referred to with faux-aristocratic insouciance as “Stinkers”), and then Combe Florey near Taunton. From there he could be on a par with his new friends from the prominent British families, for little else defined this desirable, aristocratic world than the houses they lived in. In his mind – as in Charles Ryder’s – the relationship between house and family was symbiotic, all the more so had the family lived in the house for generations:

More even than the work of the great architects, I admired buildings that grew silently with the centuries, catching and keeping the best of each generation, while time curbed the artist’s pride and the Philistine’s vulgarity, and repaired the clumsiness of the dull workman. In such buildings England abounded, and, in the last decade of their grandeur, Englishmen seemed

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<sup>8</sup> Attributed to Christopher Hollis in Humphrey Carpenter. *The Brideshead Generation*. (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1989) 48.

<sup>9</sup> Alan Pryce-Jones dismisses the anecdote as a “jest” made by Waugh’s contemporaries in *Evelyn Waugh’s World*. Ed. David Pryce-Jones. (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1973) 8.

<sup>10</sup> Evelyn Waugh. *A Little Learning*. (London: Chapman & Hall, 1964) 2. All subsequent references will be to this edition and will be given parenthetically in the text thus: (LL2).

for the first time to become conscious of what before was taken for granted, and to salute their achievement at the moment of extinction.<sup>11</sup>

This brings into play several key elements to Waugh's perception of the relationship between people and their houses. First is the obvious one that houses are monuments to their owners' taste and decisions – from the sham Gothic front of Llanabba Castle to the antiquated King's Thursday before its demolition. "The history of the home," Osbert Lancaster writes in the preface of *Homes Sweet Homes*, "provides the most intimate, and in some ways the most reliable, picture of the growth and development of European culture; at all periods the average man [...] has revealed most clearly his prejudices, his standards and his general outlook in the ordering of his most intimate surroundings."<sup>12</sup> Somebody, in other words, *chooses* to change the decoration, add a new wing, demolish or rebuild; they do so in accordance to personal taste and what is considered fashionable at the time; what they do, and how they do it, reflects on their character. Brenda Last allows the morning-room at Hetton to be chromium-plated because of her inherent weakness; Rex Mottram suggests getting the penthouse over the old Marchmain House because he genuinely cannot understand why the new flats would be as offensive to Julia Flyte as they are to Charles Ryder. Choice of surroundings is an emblem of character, both of inherited traits and individual tastes, and it is elevated to the utmost importance – even more so, in the short story "Winner Takes All," than that of a spouse. In a review of Saki's *The Unbearable Bassington*, a book Waugh greatly admired and alluded to throughout his life, Waugh makes the point that the "catastrophe" is not Comus Bassington's death but his mother's discovery that her Van der Meulen is a fake. The tragedy is "of the London drawing-room of a middle-aged lady"<sup>13</sup> whose "drawing room was her soul;" "one had stamped the impress of its character on the other;" "wherever her eyes might turn she saw the embodied results of her successes, economies, good luck, good management or good taste."<sup>14</sup> The point that Saki makes and Waugh highlights is that this, though gruesomely materialistic perhaps, is not unnatural. The special links between character and environment were clear to both.

The second point is that architecture is endangered, not merely by the likes of Margot Beste-Chetwynde's destructive behaviour but also by the waning of the aristocratic families'

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<sup>11</sup> Evelyn Waugh. *Brideshead Revisited* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2000 [1945]), 215-16. All subsequent references will be to this edition and will be given parenthetically in the text thus: (B215-6)

<sup>12</sup> Osbert Lancaster, *Homes Sweet Homes* (London: John Murray, 1939) 10.

<sup>13</sup> "The Unbearable Bassington," in *The Essays, Articles and Reviews of Evelyn Waugh*. Ed. Donat Gallagher (London, 1983), 323. All subsequent references will be to this edition and will be given parenthetically in the text thus: (C323)

<sup>14</sup> H. H. Munro, *The Unbearable Bassington* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1947 [1912]) 7-8.

wealth and importance, and the constant battle against the encroaching suburbs. John Carey points out that “since English writers in this period were recruited, generally speaking, from the educated and comfortably off, many of them grew up in old-style garden outer suburbs, which were later spoiled by housing development.”<sup>15</sup> For Waugh, this had particular biographical relevance: in building Underhill, his father had both sought out a rural idyll and, ironically, “been the first of its spoliators” (LL34), cause as well as victim of North End’s descent into Metroland. What Waugh termed “this huge deprivation of the pleasures of the eye,” “poisoning love of country and of neighbours,” is seen in the fate of both the houses in North End and his fictional buildings. Broome becomes a school, impoverished relatives breed silver foxes at Hetton, and Brideshead’s fate is unknown but grim, at least until its salvation of sorts in Waugh’s 1959 prologue, where he states that “Brideshead today would be open to trippers, its treasures rearranged by expert hands and the fabric better maintained” (B8). Therefore old garden suburbs and country houses alike risk succumbing to the threats of modernity. In championing old architecture, Waugh was trying to prolong and preserve the old order, both because he was attracted by the memories of “absolutely lyrically happy” childhood and the more worldly delights of aristocratic company, and because he felt keenly that if an environment decays, then so do the people living in it. Houses consequently become both a barometer of character and a constant reminder of an earlier, disappearing set of values.

## 2. Change and Decay

In *A Little Learning*, Waugh laments the destruction of the English village and, more specifically, his aunts’ house at Midsomer Norton:

The process is notorious and inevitable. Expostulation is futile, lament tedious. This is part of the grim cyclorama of spoliation which surrounded all English experience in this century...(LL33)

Regrets came later when, as my aunts grew older, the interior of the house grew younger. Late but ineluctable the twentieth century came creeping in. Plush gave place to chintz, gas to electric-light; the primitive geyser was superseded; water came from the mains and the pumps rusted...(LL53)

“The grim cyclorama of spoliation” is certainly a recurring motif throughout Waugh’s *oeuvre*. The choice of the word “cyclorama” is worth pausing on, the pseudo-American modernity of the ‘-orama’ construction a dig at the modern world. Importantly, the theatrical device of the cyclorama is an entirely fake one; it does not grow organically, as great houses and close communities did; it is dishonest, and all-enveloping. As an amateur architectural historian, Waugh would certainly have been aware that great houses had often been rebuilt on the foundations of older ones. But the difference is that the tide has turned: change in the modern

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<sup>15</sup> John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses* (London: Faber, 1992) 47.

world implies degradation and a move away from the natural and spontaneous. Waugh therefore accepts that buildings had always been renewed: his argument is rather that the changes taking place in his world are fundamentally different from anything previous.

In *Vile Bodies*, the contrast between old and new is played out more viciously. Although Waugh professes ambivalence as to the goings-on of his bright young protagonists, being smitten and horrified in equal measure, he attempts to nail his colours to the mast on two important occasions. The first is his description of Anchorage House, the “last survivor of the noble town houses of London,” which had “grace and dignity and other-worldliness”<sup>16</sup>. The guests, too, impress:

...a great concourse of pious and honourable people (many of whom made the Anchorage House reception the one outing of the year), their women-folk well gowned in rich and durable stuffs, their men-folk ablaze with orders; people who had represented their country in foreign places and sent their sons to die for her in battle, people of decent and temperate life, uncultured, unaffected, unembarrassed, unassuming, unambitious people, of independent judgment and marked eccentricities, kind people who care for animals and the deserving poor, brave and rather unreasonable people, that fine phalanx of the passing order... Lady Circumference saw all this and sniffed the exhalation of her own herd. (V107)

“Uncultured, unaffected, unembarrassed, unassuming, unambitious” could easily describe the new breed of suburbanites. Yet, later on in the novel, when Nina looks over England from a plane, her reaction is one of disgust:

Nina looked down and saw inclined at an odd angle a horizon of straggling red suburb; arterial roads dotted with little cars; factories, some of them working, others empty and decaying; a disused canal; some distant hills sown with bungalows; wireless masts and overhead power cables; men and women were indiscernible except as tiny spots; they were marrying and shopping and making money and having children. [...] “I think I’m going to be sick”, said Nina. (V168)

The contrast is clear. One group has grace and tradition behind them; the other doesn’t. There is a touch of the ascetic in Waugh’s championing of “decent and temperate life,” and its associated qualities of piety, loyalty and patriotism. These are all essentially human and humanising characteristics with the grace and the elegant permanence of the aptly named Anchorage House. Even “marked eccentricities” are tolerated as the mark of an individual. Inhabitants of identically

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<sup>16</sup> Evelyn Waugh, *Vile Bodies* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2000 [1930]), p. 106. All subsequent references will be to this edition and will be given parenthetically in the text thus: (V106).

bland streets of mock-Tudor semis, on the other hand, are given the status of machines kept going by electricity, or of animals protected by the carapace of the automobile. There are two things which do, however, need to be said before accepting the seemingly inescapable hypothesis that this is all linked to issues of class. First, the atmosphere of Anchorage House is ultimately seen as a stagnant one of lukewarm small talk, smutty chatter from Kitty and Fanny, and the shameless hawking of the Stayles to find a suitable match, however loveless, for their daughter. Lines such as “The Presence of Royalty was heavy as thunder in the drawing room” (V107) show that irony and deflation are never far away. Second, Nina is a not particularly sympathetic character who represents the essential vacuity of the Bright Young Things. And one should bear in mind Waugh’s 1953 dictum that “people weren’t ever anywhere alike at all. There is no such thing as a man in the street, there is no ordinary run of mankind; there are only individuals who are totally different.”<sup>17</sup>

It would be naïve, therefore, to attempt to divide Waugh’s world into fixed groups of middle-class villa-dwellers and aristocrats who live in country houses, and then to draw a clear preference for the latter, seeing it as the last refuge of a rapidly diminishing world of order and beauty. After all, in the case of two country houses which suffer badly, *Doubting* and *King’s Thursday*, they do so due to the incompetence of their upper-class owners. *Doubting Hall*, as its name suggests, is a symbol of instability. Its Palladian façade implies order and prosperity, but it is in fact shabby and dilapidated; there is no lodge-keeper and Colonel Blount opens the door himself. Inside, too, the scene is cluttered and stagnant, “a sedentary life, as you might say” (V60). The Colonel lives his life obsessed with that most modern and suburban of inventions, the cinema, praising the glories of the motor-car and the Hoover while signalling his intention of moving to one of the “nice little red houses” outside Aylesbury which boast a “bathroom and everything” and are “quite cheap” (V59). His essential characteristic is an eccentric refusal to conform to what is expected, in terms of running and maintaining his house in suitable style, in terms of helping out Adam and Nina with the thousand pounds, and also in the structural sense of playing the necessary role in Waugh’s quest story. Importantly, *Doubting* is a house where identities are constantly shifting, as Adam becomes the vacuum salesman, himself, *Chatterbox* and finally Colonel Littlejohn. The *Florins*, the elderly servants, know it is in decline and that “times is changed” (V181); and unsurprisingly *Doubting* becomes a wartime hospital. The role of Lord Pastmaster in the decline of *King’s Thursday* is simpler: “he supposed it was very historic, and all that, but his own taste lay towards the green shutters and semi-tropical vegetation of a villa on the French Riviera.”<sup>18</sup> Thus the “finest piece of domestic Tudor in

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<sup>17</sup> Evelyn Waugh, excerpt from “The *Frankly Speaking* Interview,” in <http://www.abbotshill.freeserve.co.uk/ExcerptsFranklySpeaking.htm> [accessed 22/2/2009]

<sup>18</sup> Evelyn Waugh, *Decline and Fall* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986 [1928]) 117. All subsequent references will be to this edition and will be given parenthetically in the text thus: (D117)

England” (D116) is allowed to be knocked down “with rather less reluctance than might have been expected” (D117), and its soulless Modernist replacement built on the whim that it would replace something “bourgeois and awful” (D118). In both these cases, we can see the upper-class character with no interest in maintaining or appreciating the surroundings that give them their identity. Ironically, it falls to the urban bourgeoisie such as Lancaster or Betjeman to educate the aristocracy about the value of their surroundings, just as Charles Ryder informs Lord Brideshead, to his absolute indifference, that the soon-to-be-demolished Marchmain House is “one of the most beautiful houses I know” (B209).

The backdrop of change and decay is strongest in *Brideshead*. Here, Waugh describes the country house in plain terms as a “chief national artistic achievement” (B8), spoliation of which would be cultural vandalism. But reading between the lines it is as much the associations of the grand house that are important: the “kind of gluttony, for food and wine, for the splendours of the recent past, and for ornamental and rhetorical language” (B7), are as infatuating as the aesthete’s delight in good architecture. Importantly, too, domestic and ecclesiastical architecture are fused in the Catholic Brideshead. Once more, Waugh exalts the insouciance associated with having such a place to live in: Ryder, who asks whether the dome is by Inigo Jones, is laughingly called “such a tourist” by Sebastian, who, in turn, displays his preference for emotion to fact by asking “what does it matter as long as it’s pretty” (B78). Brideshead represents a cultural and an emotional flowering for Charles Ryder; his “conversion to the Baroque” (B79) gives him added aesthetic maturity, coincides with the development of his sexuality, and subtly sets the groundwork for a fuller exploration of Catholicism. Significantly, when the halcyon days of Charles and Sebastian’s stay at Brideshead are described, the reader is already acquainted with the death of Charles’ “last love” as set out in the Prologue. The nostalgically represented world of Brideshead cannot be taken away from the reader’s knowledge of the wartime context – as Waugh later described it, of “soya beans and Basic English” (B7) – when Brideshead was seen by Hooper and men of his class and generation as “a great barrack of a place” (B22), doubtlessly “very ornate” (B22) but of no use whatsoever and quite doomed. This is a generational and social conflict that is consistently referred to in Waugh’s war writing.

Against this historicist pedal point, however, Waugh uses the extended metaphor of building to make a subtle shift. Brideshead is not of one architectural style; rather, it has grown and evolved over the ages. The original Brideshead Castle had been demolished several centuries previously; Lord Marchmain recollects that “they dug to the foundations to carry the stone for the new house [...] Those were our roots in the waste hollows of Castle Hill” (B317). The Art Nouveau chapel is built in a pavilion where the interior had been completely gutted and “rebuilt with the old stones behind the old walls” (B318). Even the ornate fountain “was old before it came here, weathered two hundred years by the sons of Naples” (B317); the symbolism of the English house receiving an import from Italy does not need to be stressed, although crucially it is mentioned that the fountain had always been part of the plan of the house, and will blend seamlessly in: “soon [it] will be dry till the rain fills it” (B317), and the water will flush out the

dead leaves and flow into the ancestral lakes. Thus, suggestions of cleansing, perpetual renewal and baptism in a font are fused in one image. The final effect reiterates the difficulties encountered in deciding whether change meant renewal or despoiling; here, they are partially resolved by the addition of a religious dimension, which is explained at the novel's close:

The builders did not know the uses to which their work would descend; they made a new house with the stones of the old castle; year by year, generation after generation, they enriched and extended it; year by year the great harvest of timber in the lark grew to ripeness; until, in sudden frost, came the age of Hooper; the place was desolate and the work all brought to nothing; Quomodo sedet sola civitas. Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.

And yet... (B331)

For Charles Ryder at least, it is the spirit of Catholicism, symbolised by the regeneration of flame, water, and the renewing and rebuilding of a house, which shows that all is not in vain. The house, in essence, becomes more than the spirit of a family or a symbol of the old order; the "inevitability" of change and decay has a religious dimension, including, but not limiting itself to, the notion of paradise lost. For an audience predominantly composed of what Waugh, with some seriousness, referred to as "heathens," this conclusion presents many difficulties, not least because overtly religious writing seems uncomfortable when compared to the urbane satire of early Waugh. We should, however, take it as an honest attempt to provide a coherent answer to a problem so perennially important to Waugh.

### 3. Ghastly Good Taste

*Ghastly Good Taste* is the title of a slim book published by John Betjeman in 1933, which attempts to chart the progress of what was tasteful in British architecture, ending on a note of high complaint about the lapse of architecture "into the horny hands of engineers" (CE408). Waugh, too, was fascinated about what constituted good taste – with the assumption that what the middle classes consider good taste for respectability's sake was in fact to be avoided. In expressions such as "impotence and sodomy are socially OK but birth control is flagrantly middle class,"<sup>19</sup> we can see Waugh reaffirming the nineteenth-century French Decadents' spirit of "*éclatons la bourgeoisie!*" The difference is that in deriding and shocking the middle classes, French decadents aimed to rise above them intellectually, while Waugh and Betjeman were striving to rise above them socially; but "good taste," a little like "suburban," was relegated in Waugh's vocabulary to the provinces of those too hamstrung by respectability to lead a meaningful existence. In an essay of 1929, entitled "Take your home into your own hands!" Waugh describes how to free oneself of "good taste," the presumed brainchild of "art classes at an evening polytechnic" (CE44):

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<sup>19</sup> *An Open Letter to the Hon. Mrs Peter Rodd (Nancy Mitford) on a Very Serious Subject*, in *Noblesse Oblige*. Ed. Nancy Mitford (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1959 [1956]) 64.



Just you say very decisively, ‘I don’t know much about art, but I do know what I like’; then they [inquisitive neighbours] will see that they are beaten, and Mrs Brown will say to the vicar’s wife that it is so sad that you have no taste, and the vicar’s wife will say to the doctor’s wife that it really only shows what sort of people you are, but all three will envy you at heart and even perhaps, one by one, bring out from the attics a few of the things they really like. (CE45)

Waugh is being sly here. Not knowing anything about art except for what you like is a cliché of the philistine, and Waugh, despite affecting distrust of “cleverness,” was no philistine. Yet Waugh solidly identifies with this statement. Disingenuously, he realises that it is rather smarter not to show oneself too bothered about being considered “good taste,” in the same way that truly smart characters such as Alastair and Sonia Digby-Vane-Trumpington can get away with living in servantless, dog-haired squalor. After all, who really cares whether a treasured possession is tasteful or not? Mrs Brown, the vicar’s wife and the doctor’s wife are hardly the kind of people worth impressing. Far better to retreat inside a comfortable, Midsomer Norton-like cocoon and not bother about pleasing such irrelevant people. We should perhaps be wary of ascribing too much liberal, easy-living *bonhomie* to this essay – it is after all in many respects informed by a vehement dislike of suburban housewives and their world – yet, especially in lines such as “everybody seems to have been bullied into an inferiority complex about their own homes,” we can see glimmers of sympathy for anybody who dare furnish their rooms and their lives according to their own, and not society’s, taste.

In March 1930, Waugh gives another light-hearted verdict on the matter when describing Heaven: “The architecture is varied. There are no Tudor mansions or cottages with half-timbered fronts, but there are many examples of Italian seventeenth-century and English eighteenth-century domestic architecture; there are some very comic Gothic revival castles and a few genuine Gothic cathedrals” (CE65). Here a subtle paradox can be discovered. Genuine Gothic is good, clearly, as is Italian seventeenth-century and English eighteenth-century. Tudor and mock-Tudor is bad, as they are either fakes or have been so debased by fakes that they can no longer be taken seriously. As he later wrote: “Imitation, if extensive enough, really does debauch one’s taste for the genuine. It is almost impossible now to take any real delight in Elizabethan half-timber – logical and honourable as it is – because we are so sickened with the miles of shoddy imitation with which we are surrounded” (CE217). Yet what about the Gothic Revival castles? They are surely a symbol of the worst kind of fakery, as ugly as they are false. Gothic Revival architecture, in the first half of the twentieth century, was almost universally panned, Osbert Lancaster summing it up in saying that “nineteenth-century manifestations of the Gothic spirit in architecture may, with very few exceptions, be dismissed as deplorable.”<sup>20</sup> Waugh, however, treats Gothic Revival with some sympathy for several reasons.

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<sup>20</sup> Osbert Lancaster, *From Pillar to Post* (London: John Murray, 1938) 42.

In an article decrying the debasement of the Georgian orders, Waugh writes that “Gothic was made to be played with and its misuse, like that of oriental styles, has often had the most enchanting effect” (CE217). This certainly ties in with “comic Gothic revival” or with the description of Hetton as “amusing.”<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, the sheer joyous bad taste of Hetton, with its ornate glazed bricks, gaudy encaustic tiling, and prehistoric plumbing, antagonizes the “refeened” middle classes, and Waugh, echoing the anti-bourgeois spirit of “Take your home into your own hands!” revels in celebrating the architectural “odd and the obscure” (CE429). Yet, in a 1942 letter to the *Times*, Waugh also makes the serious point that “there is always dead ground immediately in front of the lines of popular taste extending for two generations. It is only recently, still imperfectly and after heavy losses, that the work of the eighteenth century has been recognised as having aesthetic value” (CE269). In other words, good taste is responsible for much damage, however well meaning, and it will only be a matter of time before the rehabilitation of “Victorian monstrosities” back into the aesthetic mainstream. For this reason, Waugh states, destructors and detractors should proceed cautiously.

Yet the importance of Hetton’s architecture is not merely historical but also structural, providing a constant symbol against which characters’ reactions can be observed. Brenda’s attitude to it is telling: ‘Me? I *detest* it ... at least I don’t mean that really, but I do wish sometimes that it wasn’t *all*, every bit of it, so appallingly ugly. Only I’d die rather than say that to Tony’ (HD36). This is representative of her outlook on life: the vehement “I detest it” is linked to her vehement repudiation of life with Tony; her retraction of the statement is connected to her gradual realisation that she was not gaining anything more with Beaver; finally, her last sentence both reveals her use of deception as well as confirming the realisation that for the “feudal” Tony, Hetton and his cultural heritage matters more than anything else. Tony’s attitude to Hetton is also deeply revealing. His trust that Hetton, restored to its former glory, will one day be appreciated for its architectural merit, is as misplaced as his trust in Brenda’s faithfulness; for Brenda, like Guinevere after whom her bedroom is named, commits adultery. Tony’s bedroom is called Morgan le Fay, which, as Frederick L. Beaty points out, “suggests not only the enchantment of his own childhood but that of the young Arthur under the spell of an evil sorceress;”<sup>22</sup> importantly, too, the medieval names are given Tennyson’s Victorian spellings, once again corrupting the Medieval world. Deception, therefore, is a key part in the atmosphere Tony and Brenda have created for themselves, and this is where the symbolism of the Gothic Revival comes into fullest play. Gothic Revival, fundamentally an escapist form of architecture seeking to replace the ugliness of the industrial era by harking back to a mythical golden age of

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<sup>21</sup> Evelyn Waugh. *A Handful of Dust*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963 [1934]) 14. All subsequent references will be to this edition and will be given parenthetically in the text thus: (HD14)

<sup>22</sup> Frederick L. Beaty. *The Ironic World of Evelyn Waugh* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1992) 91.

piety, industry and chivalry, was deceptive; although it might have “given keen pleasure” (CE269) the results fall short of the originals’ splendour. The Gothic fantasy that Tony is so intent on recreating and living is as fake as his wife’s promises of fidelity. Moreover, the city to which Tony finally transfers his allegiances is described in the terms of a Gothic Revival building, a “transfigured Hetton” (HD160). They are empty emotions for the illusion of a city, but they are at the same time more admirable than the empty, cold pragmatism of Lady Metroland’s circles. Hetton is therefore an ambivalent symbol, on the one hand unrealistic and impractical, and on the other more genuine – because it imitates something good rather than repudiating it – than the horror of what was to follow.

That horror is represented as the soulless apartments of Mrs Beaver or Brenda’s attempt to redecorate the morning room with chromium plating and sheepskin carpet. At the height of his jungle fever Tony realises that “there is no city. Mrs Beaver has covered it with chromium plating and converted it into flats... Very suitable for base love” (HD207). The horrors of the modern are also present in the wholesale destruction of King’s Thursday and its replacement by Professor Silenus’ first, and last, masterpiece in the high modernist style. Crucially, the reason for its destruction is Margot Beste-Chetwynde’s disdain of (presumably bad-taste) Tudor half-timbered architecture. The description of Professor Silenus is one of Waugh’s most celebrated comic set pieces as, with the brief of producing “something clean and square” (D119) in high Bauhaus fashion, he ruminates on the perfection of architecture:

‘The problem of architecture as I see it,’ he told a journalist who had come to report on the progress of his surprising creation of ferro-concrete and aluminium, ‘is the problem of all art: the elimination of the human element from the consideration of form. The only perfect building must be the factory, because that is built to house machines, not men. I do not think it is possible for domestic architecture to be beautiful, but I am doing my best. All ill comes from man,’ he said gloomily; ‘please tell your readers that.’ (D120)

Silenus is full of inconsistencies, and rightly so: his disgust at humans, for example, is expressed in a newspaper, a construct of human interest. His film, too, which eliminates all human characters, founders because of the human characters paying the entrance fee at the cinema. Ultimately, he is ridiculed as a ludicrous character when he tries to eat a biscuit; “the hand which had held the biscuit still rose and fell to and from his mouth with a regular motion, while his empty jaws champed rhythmically” (D121). Even if the machine is perfect in action, the argument goes, the action becomes mechanical and meaningless; Hamlet’s “what a piece of work is a man” speech is better than Silenus’ vicious parody of it because it allows the potential for meaningful existence. But the world created by Silenus’ school of thought becomes as empty and as lifeless as the new Kings’ Thursday. Ghastly good taste, and adhering too strictly to it, eliminates the human; and although Waugh’s belief, religious as well as aesthetic, is that the human is a flawed character, just as Gothic Revival is a flawed representation of genuine Gothic, this is ultimately better than not being human at all.

#### 4. Waugh and the Architectural Writing Style

Architecture has been found to be a significant, indeed an emblematic, theme in the works of Evelyn Waugh. Throughout his novels, articles, essays and short stories, architecture informs his characters and helps explain his philosophies. Waugh uses architecture as a symbol in his fiction, one which allows him to make explicit points about buildings, styles, and conservation. At his command, it is serious or frivolous, satiric or sympathetic. Yet there remains a crucial point to be made. For Waugh, architecture does not only provide themes within his writing; it also provides the structure behind his writing. His books are written – self-consciously so – architecturally. By this I do not mean that they have a clunking emphasis on structure or on showing the bones of the plot; nor do I mean that they showily play about with increasingly obscure ways of telling a story. Waugh, in a review of Cyril Connolly's *Enemies of Promise*, attempts to clarify:

‘Creative’ is an invidious term too often used at the expense of the critic. A better word, except that it would always involve explanation, would be ‘architectural’. I believe that what makes a writer, as distinct from a clever and cultured man who can write, is an added energy and breadth of vision which enables him to conceive and complete a structure. Critics, so far as they are critics only, lack this; Mr Connolly evidently, for his book, full as it is of phrase after phrase of lapidary form [...] is structurally jerry-built [...]

The style is the whole [...] Writing is an art which exists in a time sequence; each sentence and each page is dependent on its predecessors and successors; a sentence which he admires may owe its significance to another fifty pages distant. I beg Mr Connolly to believe that even quite popular writers take great trouble sometimes in this matter. (CE238-39)

It is surely not necessary to enumerate all similarities between a good structure and a good façade. One obvious difference would be that one sees a façade at once in its entirety and then wanders round it of one's own accord, whereas one reads a novel from the beginning to the end. Yet arguments about vista and decoration hold. Just as it is tedious to provide too much decoration or to show everything at once in writing, lack of depth and unnecessary detail can ruin the appearance of a building. Good decoration is applied in small clusters, leaving blank space around it; features such as pillars or buttresses are not just decorative; all features have some sort of a beginning and some sort of an end; it is a given that not everything can be seen at the same time. Thus, Waugh's technique when reporting conversations at the school sports in *Decline and Fall*, or at the Anchorage House party in *Vile Bodies*, giving isolated snippets of conversation but never repeating them in full, is analogous to walking around an architectural monument repeatedly, always seeing part of its features but never everything simultaneously. Similarly, the sweeping driveways of the country house are echoed in the vistas seen in *Brideshead Revisited*: we see the house at dark, we know that Charles Ryder “had been here

before; knew all about it" (B22), but before we are allowed more than a glimpse of the house, the driveway swings round, the house is obscured by trees, and the setting of the novel returns to Oxford. And if the Oxford passages echo Waugh's appreciation of the "peculiar grace and magnificence" (C83) of the university city, then the altogether more florid prose of the descriptions of Charles and Sebastian's time at Brideshead echoes the house's high Baroque architecture.

We can see Waugh's attempts at providing architectural unity on every scale from the arcs of his plots, to his uses of a recurring motif, to his sentence structures. On the largest scale, there is much that is architectural in the space inhabited by Waugh's novels. The recurring background characters are an obvious means of linking and uniting various novels; in the same way that a literary tic marks a sentence or a chapter as "typically" that of a specific author, or recurring features help unite an architectural development. Within individual novels, too, architectural unity is suggested through recurring allusions. In *Decline and Fall*, for example, the untimely death of Lord Tangent is never described except *en passant*. First he gets shot at the school races (D71); then Peter Beste-Chetwynde mentions that his foot "has swollen up and turned back" as an attempt to waste time in an organ lesson (D94); next, he is absent at the wedding, "having his foot amputated at a local nursing home" (D105); finally Lady Circumference states "it's maddenin' Tangent having died just at this time" (D149) in reference to her refusal to attend Paul and Margot's wedding. This is typical of Waugh's method of creating links between sentences "fifty pages apart," giving the impression that the book is a consistent, unified creation, and providing the literary counterpart of, for example, regular mouldings underneath a cornice, or the replication of a particular brickwork pattern. The implication is that the novel needs to be recognisably the consistent work of an author just as a façade shows stylistic regularity. Of course, it would be ridiculous to suggest that this means that the tone of the book should remain the same throughout. Both *Vile Bodies* and *A Handful of Dust*, after all, end up on a note of bitter pessimism. Yet that pessimism, or the potential for it at least, had been there from the start, in the description of Beaver's arid and meaningless life in London, for example, or in Adam Symes' aimless drifting on his ship. The pessimism in Silenus' parody of Shakespeare, meanwhile, as well as providing a central location for the wasteland in Waugh's comedy, is surely an example of the debasement which is implicit in any sort of pastiche, be it literary or architectural.

At the smallest scale, finally, a line such as "High overhead among its gargoyles and crockets the clock chimed for the hour and solemnly struck fourteen" (HD218), although less famous than Orwell's later use of the idea, combines several key traits of architecture, and that of the Gothic Revival in particular. The most memorable feature of the form is seen first – "high overhead" – before being combined with the most salient details, crockets and gargoyles in this case, words that imply falsifications of nature and, in the case of the gargoyle, deliberate perversion. The mechanical clock, a symbol of modernity and certainly not a feature of medieval Gothic, is mentioned only afterwards; implicitly function is less important than form and detail.

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Moreover, in failing to function properly, the “solemnity” of Gothic Revival architecture, Hetton, and by association Tony Last, is made ridiculous. The reader does not need to be informed that “it was half-past eight,” but the bland, prosaic note perfectly mirrors the encroaching modernity of the antagonistic new world, and implies that something which, although fake and impractical, did provide interest and amusement – in literary as well as in architectural terms – is being overrun by barbarians.

Having examined the pervasive effects of architecture on Waugh’s writing style, it is tempting to ask whether this is the self-conscious product of a lifelong infatuation with beautiful houses, a writer’s awareness of architecture’s potential as a literary symbol, or simply an aesthetic technique informed by but not resulting from Waugh’s heightened sense of the *genius loci*. It is surely impossible not to view the three as inextricably linked. Thus, the Evelyn Waugh who chafed against the stout timbers of Underhill becomes the Evelyn Waugh who created an alternative paradise at Brideshead. Similarly, the act of creating Brideshead reaffirms Waugh’s hatred of the change and decay which marks out the decline of Underhill’s prominence and the rise of suburbs such as Betjeman’s Slough or Waugh’s Golders Green. Finally, an effort is made to preserve the best of the old, both by writing about it and by harnessing its best features to Waugh’s writing style, placing architecture in a position of prime importance in the background, symbols, and structures of Waugh’s writings.

Appendix: Underhill and environs, 31 January 2009



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## Ronnie's Niece

Jeffrey A. Manley

Penelope Fitzgerald (*née* Knox) (1916-2000) was a writer and schoolteacher. She was from a distinguished intellectual family. Both of her grandfathers were Anglican bishops. Her father was E.V. Knox, poet and editor of *Punch*. One of her uncles was Ronald Knox—theologian, writer, and friend of Evelyn Waugh, who was also his biographer and literary executor. Penelope began her writing career in the 1930s with literary journalism at *Punch*. After the war (during which she worked at the BBC), she and her husband, Desmond, became editors of a literary journal known as *World Review*. This ceased publication about 2½ years after they took over.

Her husband, an Oxford-educated barrister, tried to return to a legal practice after the magazine folded but was unable to thrive, perhaps due to the stresses to which he was exposed during extended front-line combat duty in the war. He also had a serious drinking problem. After being forced out of his chambers, he was able to secure steady work in menial clerical positions at travel agencies but was unable to earn enough to support his wife and three children. Penelope was forced to work in various low-paying teaching positions in private schools and crammers, but middle-class housing in London proved beyond the family's means. At one point, they were living in a houseboat anchored off the Chelsea embankment. After that sank, they moved into public housing in a South London council estate (between Streatham and Clapham).

Despite their financial difficulties, all of their three children managed to graduate from Oxford. Once their educations were safely launched, Penelope returned to her literary career. In the 1970s, she began with a mystery novel and then moved on to biographies. The first of these was of the artist Edward Burne-Jones. The second recounted the lives of her father, her Uncle Ronnie and their two siblings: *The Knox Brothers* (London, 1977). She later turned to novels, and in her first four wrote about the world she knew from experience: a village bookstore, the BBC, teaching in London, and a family of reduced means on a houseboat. She later wrote several historical novels. See Hermione Lee, *Penelope Fitzgerald: A Life*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 2014, *passim*.

There was at least one meeting between Penelope and Evelyn Waugh. This was reported in Penelope's own biography of the Knox brothers. It took place at Ronnie Knox's 60<sup>th</sup> birthday party in 1948. This was shortly after he moved to Mells to live in the house of Katharine Asquith. The party was held not in Mells but at a dinner convened by Ronnie's friends in London. According to Waugh, who was present, the party was on 30 September 1948, several months after Ronnie's actual birthday in February (*Diaries*, 702). This was before Penelope, who was also invited, was launched on her career as a novelist and biographer. She apparently excused herself early to return to her home (at that time in Hampstead) to mind her young son, then aged 1. Waugh was reported to have scornfully remarked of her early departure, "Children!



Nonsense! Nothing so easily replaceable” (*The Knox Brothers*, p. 265). Perhaps Waugh was browned off at Penelope’s departure before the birthday speech, which he tried, but was unable, to avoid giving. He doesn’t mention in his published diaries or letters either Penelope’s presence or her early departure, although he does note that “everyone had a good time chiefly Ronnie” (*Diaries, ibid.*).

The literary journal she edited with her husband in the early 1950s was intended in part to fill the void created by the loss of Cyril Connolly’s *Horizon*, which ceased publication in 1950. Although Waugh contributed to *Horizon*, he does not seem to have had anything published in *World Review*. Among Waugh’s contemporaries whose work appeared in the journal were T. S. Eliot, Orwell, Connolly and L. P. Hartley. Penelope’s biographer is at pains to point out the several literary connections she made during her short tenure at the journal, but Waugh was not among them. The only mention of Waugh in the journal, so far as appears in the biography, is a reference to the “good alcoholic” from *Brideshead Revisited*, who is dismissed in an article written by Penelope as an example of “You-Can’t-Take-It-With-You-ism.” (Lee, *supra*, p. 112).

Waugh was dead by the time Penelope started her own book writing in the early 1970s. He would have probably reviewed *The Knox Brothers* had he lived to see it and might well have boosted her early novels as he did those of her contemporary, Muriel Spark, which are not dissimilar. Spark was a late starter at age 39 in 1957 but not as late as Penelope whose first book appeared in 1975 when she was 59. Penelope was given the opportunity to compare her own biography of Uncle Ronnie to Waugh’s earlier effort when she reviewed the final volume of Martin Stannard’s biography of Waugh. “The Only Member of His Club,” *New York Times Book Review*, 13 September 1992; reprinted in Penelope Fitzgerald, *The Afterlife: Essays and Criticism*, ed. Terrence Dooley, *et al.*, New York, 2003, pp. 232-35. (In the UK entitled *A House of Air: Selected Writings.*)

The review is overall favorable towards Stannard’s scholarship, but she takes issue with him on several points. She objects to his assessment of Ronnie Knox as a “country-house priest with a keen enjoyment of upper-class society” and to his view of Waugh’s biography of Knox as reflecting a “certain dishonesty of tone.”

Waugh’s aims are certainly very different from Mr. Stannard’s. He was not a scrupulous collector of facts but an artist who gave to every book he wrote a strong and elegant pattern. Ronald Knox’s family—he was my uncle—knew that [Waugh’s book] was inaccurate in places, and that it had proved impossible (for instance) to get Waugh to grasp the deep, wordless affection between Ronald and his brothers. But they admired his courage in criticizing the Catholic hierarchy where he thought fit, and they welcomed the book, which, in its very dryness and melancholy, gave a living likeness of Knox. (*Afterlife*, 234.)

She also criticizes Stannard for his analysis of the characters of both Waugh and his wife, blaming his “day-by-day, pile-‘em-high accumulation of details which makes it hard to stand back and see exactly where he is.”<sup>1</sup> She thinks it unfair for the biographer to conclude that Waugh “died, as he had lived, alone.” In her view, despite what could be difficult behavior on Waugh’s part, he “was never without a sympathetic friend, and by his family he was offered more love than he was ever able to accept. I don’t call that loneliness.”

She also leaves her own assessment of Waugh’s complex personality, formed independently of Stannard’s book. In her view,

Waugh became a victim of his own game, not of Let’s Pretend, but of Let’s Pretend To Pretend. He was impatient when others didn’t understand his rules, and impatient with the game when it didn’t--as games should do--provide a satisfactory alternative to real life. It was played en travesti--with embarrassingly loud tweed suits, weird ear trumpets, and a house full of Victorian bric-a-brac, with the tiny Master threateningly aloof in his study, emerging with the message: I am bored and you are frightened...He was asking, it seemed, to be judged severely, as he has been. No one condemns Robert Louis Stevenson for playing king in Samoa, but Evelyn Waugh, it seems, can hardly be forgiven for his nineteen years as the tyrannous squire of Piers Court, his country house.  
(*Afterlife*, 232)

Penelope wrote several novels, to increasingly successful popular and critical receptions, especially after she won the Booker Prize in 1979 for *Offshore*. By the time of her death in 2000, she was living comfortably off her earnings and was much in demand for lecturing, literary prize judging, interviews and reviewing. Her works have remained in print and her literary reputation is well established.

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<sup>1</sup> Penelope, for her own part, trips up on at least one of the details of Waugh’s life. She refers (*Afterlife*, 213) to Piers Court as the “house [Waugh] had bought” for his wife and children. In fact, the house was a wedding present from Laura’s grandmother. If Penelope had read Stannard’s text more carefully (v. 1, p. 449), she would not have fallen into error on this point.

## **A Purposeful Aesthetic in *Brideshead Revisited*: The Role of Art and Tradition in Charles' Conversion**

**Ellen O'Brien**

The following is an excerpt from a Master's dissertation submitted at Royal Holloway College, University of London. The aim was to explore the relationship between art, tradition and religion in *Brideshead Revisited*, and to consider the ways in which art and aesthetics contribute to the success of the conversion story.

It was Waugh's early career, promising artistic rather than literary success, which suggested the idea that art in *Brideshead* should be credited with more importance. The beauty of *Brideshead* is one of the defining aspects of the text, but arguably, it has become caught up in the subsequent film and TV reproductions, confined to majestic scenes of Castle Howard and opportunities for 1920s costume design. However, the artistic endeavours of Waugh's youth, his identification with the Pre-Raphaelites and his interest in illumination, medievalism, craftsmanship and his illustrations at Oxford (Stannard 58, 223. Waugh *ALL* 189) encouraged the idea that art in *Brideshead* was intended to be more specific, to form a pattern and to work towards the end point of Charles' conversion. This study covers Charles' early days at Oxford and his encounters with the aesthetes, Decadence and modern art, his time at *Brideshead* and his introduction to architecture and arts and crafts, his professional period and his artistic vocation, and his final reincarnation (or resurrection) as a soldier and convert.

The resulting conclusion is that Charles' movement through artistic styles parallels the conversion narrative: his artistic encounters bring him closer to the ultimate rejection of a single aesthetic, and the realisation that art lacks the permanence offered by Catholicism.<sup>1</sup> Generally, more modern styles are deemed inappropriate or somehow lacking by him, and are rejected in favour of the more traditional (the evolution of his room décor at Oxford reflects his changing tastes and aesthetic experimentation). Throughout the novel there is a conflict between modernity and tradition, as Charles' preferences slowly shift from Decadence and modernity to classicism and purposeful art, culminating in his eventual abandonment of aesthetics in favour of faith.

A key suggestion of this study is that Waugh presents his faith as a source of permanence and order that contrasts with the disruption and uncertainty of the inter-war period. Stable and ancient, Catholicism is aligned with tradition, and its value lies in its continuity and coherence. Waugh, like Charles, and many of his young male characters, was brought up on pre-war ideals that were no longer tenable in the inter-war period. They had been effectively cut off and were

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<sup>1</sup> The term Catholicism refers specifically to Roman Catholicism unless otherwise stated.

left to negotiate the unique spiritual yearnings and concerns of their age. At this time it was not unusual for “the intelligentsia to commit themselves to ideologies,”<sup>2</sup> such as Catholicism or pacifism, in order to cope with the “supreme problem of an intelligent man in [their] time: how to preserve sanity in a world of madness” (Robson 32). As Waugh himself put it, the world at that time was “unintelligible and unendurable without God” (Waugh *EAR* 367). The Catholic faith offered much-needed structure, and a logical way to look at the world.

In 1949 Waugh explained his choice of Rome:

England was Catholic for nine hundred years... The Catholic structure still lies lightly buried beneath every phase of English life; history, topography, law, archaeology everywhere reveal Catholic origins... It was self-evident to me that no heresy or schism could be right and the Church wrong. (Waugh *EAR* 367)

The sentiment expressed here is vital to the ideas being put forward in this study. The idea that Catholicism, for Waugh, embodies continuity, tradition, history and absolute structure, defines the quality of religion in *Brideshead*. Charles initially searches for meaning and structure in the “thin veil” layer – architecture, art, career and country estates – but only after he rejects aestheticism in favour of religion does he locate that “solid and strong and unchanging” quality. This tension between beauty, tradition and religion has been manipulated to emphasise the association between religion and a sense of permanency. As such, the disagreement between modern and traditional art is not easily resolved, and is representative of Charles’ struggle to find meaning in the modern world.

Skimming over the Decadence thread of the early chapters, which is already a strong and familiar presence, particularly in the on-screen versions, I found that a consideration of Charles as an artist– someone who has dedicated his life to aesthetic pursuits– enhances discussions about Good Art, functionality and purpose, just as his artistic vocation enriches his final decision to abandon worldly beauty for older, more traditional values. Tradition has a deep, inward appeal for Charles, and in this respect, there is an overlap between artistic vocation and religious calling. His vocation is the preservation of architectural tradition through painting. He paints England’s great houses, just as they were being “deserted or debased” (217), “abandoned or pulled down... deemed in the post-war world to be redundant symbols of privilege” (Mulvagh 42). Although he is a modern artist, in the sense of living in the twentieth century, he is a traditionalist at heart. During Charles’ professional period, he and Cordelia have a conversation about modern art, which, however brief, is worth noting. While painting Marchmain House in London, the now-teenage Cordelia approaches him. “‘Charles,’ said Cordelia, ‘Modern Art is all bosh, isn’t it?’”

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<sup>2</sup> Robson 32. The word “ideology” is used as an umbrella term, meaning a general system of belief, or creed by which a person lives. It is acknowledged that there is a difference between a belief system and faith, and that for some practicing Catholics the term “ideology” may not apply to both.

‘Great bosh,’” he replies. “‘Oh, I’m so glad. I had an argument with one of our nuns and she said we shouldn’t try and criticize what we didn’t understand. Now I shall tell her I have it straight from a real artist, and snubs to her’” (142). On a superficial level, Charles’ unthinking response marks him as a traditionalist, but Cordelia’s response adds another layer of meaning. The exchange has the appearance of two people debating the role of the critic and the value of Modern art, but what is important is the nun’s maxim that people should not criticize what they do not understand. Of course, Charles thinks both religion *and* modern art are “great bosh,” deeming religion “an awful lot of nonsense” (78). But, as Cordelia’s nun says, he should not criticize what he does not understand. Waugh has framed this piece of wisdom within a debate about art. We, in hindsight, can see its true application, but Charles will not understand it until the end of the novel. It is a small reference, admittedly, but it contributes to this sense that religion is linked to a rejection of modernity, and equally, that it is sometimes unintelligible. Catholicism, for Charles, turns out not to be great bosh after all, and actually connects with, or provides an outlet for, his love of tradition.

Charles’ paintings are created in a period of creeping modernity, and his artwork both highlights his affinity for tradition, and the contrast between twentieth-century degeneration and England’s architectural legacy. As he leaves behind the naivety of youth, his aesthetic shifts from gushing imitation to commercial opportunism. He is still a traditionalist, but he has also cornered the market in immortalising the homes of England’s upper class, establishments that were rapidly disappearing. The act of painting these houses is in itself an effort to preserve order, to create something solid and unchanging in a world that is changing so rapidly. Charles was always enchanted by the architecture of these houses, and his preservation of them on canvas could be interpreted as an attempt to save or protect the artistic achievements that he holds in the highest regard. The results of modernism are never more pressing or terrible than in the opening and closing sections of the novel. Here we are confronted with encroaching suburbia, a panorama of “half an acre of mutilated old trees,” and are first introduced to Hooper, Ryder’s “alloy test” for Youth for the Future (7). From the outset, this establishes an idea of what the world is moving towards, lending ensuing scenes of degeneration painful significance. In the final chapter, Ryder laments the future of the country house:

...year by year, generation after generation, they enriched and extended it; year by year the great harvest of timber in the park grew to ripeness; until, in sudden frost, came the age of Hooper; the place was desolate and the work all brought to nothing. (325)

He is expressing the very real, contemporary fear that the country house was going to disappear. Waugh later described it as a “bleak period of present privation and threatening disaster,” when the English country house, “our chief national artistic achievement” was “doomed to decay and spoliation...” (ix, x). The social mobility of the inter-war period was reducing the currency of the country house as symbol of class and converting it into a symbol of wealth: many country house owners were sending “their younger and sometimes even elder sons to the City,” while “the new rich were setting up in country houses, being given titles and continuing to take the train to their

offices” (Girouard 301). In this climate, Charles’ act of painting becomes an act of preservation, restoration and rehabilitation. It is the work of a traditionalist, someone who considers the homes of the upper classes worth preserving, and a way of maintaining some kind of stability in the financial, social and cultural deterioration of the ‘thirties.

Perhaps the continuing demise of the country house was too disheartening, or the prospect of owning Brideshead with Julia rendered painting obsolete in comparison to actual custodianship. Whatever the reason, Charles’ shift from architecture to portraiture is one of the many rejections of art as a belief system. In the latter part of the novel— the exact moment is difficult to pinpoint— Charles relinquishes this vocation, preceding his shift to Catholicism. At his Latin exhibition, Celia says, ““after all, he has said the last word about country houses, hasn’t he? Not I mean, that he’s given it up altogether. I’m sure he’ll always do one or two more for *friends*”” (249). Apart from the implicit snobbery, she renders his painting a commercial effort, less about the preservation of a greater artistic achievement, and more about the promotion of his own comparatively poor facsimiles. More importantly, it suggests that he has slowed or stopped the painting of England’s houses. When Anthony Blanche materialises at the exhibition, he suggests that however Charles tries to paint in his own style, he will never improve upon England’s greatest achievement: the charm embodied in the houses of people like the Flytes. The observation clearly unsettles Charles, or perhaps voices what he already knows: he describes the incident as “half and hour’s well-reasoned abuse” (255), and apart from the occasional comment— ““I suppose it’s a change from architecture”” (265)— his architectural paintings disappear from the book.

Following his architectural period, he experiments in portraiture. This is no large-scale professional venture, but rather something we are aware of in the background during his affair with Julia, an expression of his infatuation. Throughout the novel, Charles sees people as objects of art, and is criticised for it. From the outset, he is attracted to Sebastian’s “epicene beauty which in extreme youth sings aloud for love and withers at the first cold wind” (26), a sentiment which conveniently underlines the fleeting nature of beauty. He even views the Flyte family as a tableau or composition, a study of family life: “Julia sat with a stool covered with manicure things and carefully revarnished her nails; Cordelia nursed Julia’s Pekinese; Brideshead played patience; I sat unoccupied studying the pretty group they made” (122). This love of people as aesthetic figures is problematic for several reasons: it is a form of idolatry, vanity, lust, and not least, irksome to the people being objectified. Charles eventually learns from his mistakes, but in a way that reinforces “Waugh’s position that Charles’ aesthetic point of view leads him to fail spiritually and morally” (White 189). Charles had always seen Julia in terms of artwork— an Italian muse or *quattrocento* beauty— but once in love, he begins to see her differently, “not all Florentine, not connected in any way with painting or the arts or with anything except herself” (227-28). He does make the occasional slip, by referring to their life in terms of art, for which he is criticized. In a single evening, Charles twice describes life in terms of art, first, as Hunt’s *Awakened Conscience*, and second, as the setting of a comedy, drama, or farce. It was a mistake

to do so, on an evening “of swift veering moods” (273), as this outlook offends Julia. “Don’t talk in that damned boulderish way. Why must you see everything second hand? Why must this be a play? Why must my conscience be a Pre-Raphaelite picture?’/‘It’s a way I have.’/‘I hate it’” (273). Julia rejects art as a way of understanding human nature, relationships and emotions, in short, as a system of belief. This is convenient for her, as her religion is an alternate system to rely upon, but Charles has no alternative. In the 2008 film, Rex gives up Julia for two of Charles’ paintings: it is a very literal interpretation of the idea that Charles equates Julia with a piece of art, but it captures the sense that people are only worth what they can inspire. It is an ideology that Julia rejects, and in their final exchange, we see why. She explains to Charles that the worst crimes, “so bad they were unpunishable,” are to “set up a rival good to God” (319). Charles’ art is a sort of rival good: he judges the world through an unsustainable system of artistic merit. He sets up Julia as a deity during his spate of portraiture, and is obsessed with reproducing her *quattrocento* loveliness, “unable to look away for love of her beauty” (291), “forever finding in her new wealth and delicacy” (259). Although Charles’ shift from landscape and architecture to the human figure could be considered a positive development or maturation, the problem remains that “idolatry, whether artistic or sexual, constitutes—especially for Julia—the unforgivable sin of setting up ‘a rival good to God’s’” (Manganiello 160-161).

One possible objection to the theory that Charles has exchanged aestheticism for religion is Waugh’s failure (or deliberate omission?) to specify the role of art in his life post-conversion. Waugh never explicitly states that Charles has given up painting. We are not given many particulars about his life in its converted state, except that he is “homeless, childless, middle-aged and loveless” (325). There is a noticeable shift towards practicality, cynicism and even resignation in his demeanour, but the particulars are left to supposition. There is a new detachment in the way he describes Brideshead, expressed by his sigh of, “Vanity of vanities. All is vanity” (325), which contrasts with his earlier enthusiasm. It would be reasonable to assume that, as it was for Waugh, the war was merely an interlude in Charles’ career, and that art continued to play a role in his life, perhaps resulting in a similar “Catholic period” of output. Given another ten pages, would Charles have gone on to paint religious icons, or to restore war-blasted Italian churches? We are told he did not want to be a war artist, preferring to negotiate “for a commission in the Special Reserve” (298), which suggests that art no longer holds an appeal for him. Perhaps preservation through art seems futile, on the eve of war. Why chronicle humanity’s greatest failure?

The failure of beauty to last and art to preserve in *Brideshead*, suggests that Waugh has constructed his narrative “so as to make his artists fail.” The multitude of styles supports the theory that taste and art are fleeting and hold limited value beyond their representation of a particular period. In short, artwork may contain universal and timeless themes, but the aesthetics are branded by the time period. There is a sense that the passing of time both detracts and lends value, but the timelessness of God proves constant, and the novel “ends with Charles finding ultimate value, not in beauty, but in God” (White 182). Waugh himself experienced a shift in

artistic ambition and output, which was “virtually completed with his adoption of Catholicism, and altered very little during the rest of his life” (Stannard 232). In a manner highly reflective of Waugh’s own circumstances, Charles rejects the plethora of artistic movements in favour of an unchanging outlook and aesthetic.

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## REVIEWS

### Sublime Inadequacy

*Authoring War: The Literary Representation of War from the Iliad to Iraq*, by Kate McLoughlin. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011. 232 pp. \$89.99/\$29.99 (hardback and paperback editions, respectively).

Reviewed by Seth Holler, Universitas Pelita Harapan

The argument of Kate McLoughlin's *Authoring War* is that "the representation of war is inherently anxiogenic." The sources of this anxiety are complex: "authorial powers," "the nature of the subject matter," the "medium of representation," "the reader's response," and "other intangible variables" (6). These sentences are representative of the book's style: jargon, abstractions, and final ambiguity. It is a book to use rather than enjoy, but Waugh scholars can put it good use.

The subtitle and publisher's summary boast the author's coverage of a variety of different kinds of writing: epic verse, lyric, drama, war memoir, journalism/reportage, the essay, the novel, and the short story "from Homer to the 'War on Terror.'" Six thirty-page chapters follow a helpfully programmatic Introduction. With three millennia to cover in 200 pages, the analysis of individual works is inevitably thin. Each chapter title makes a pun on military terminology. "Credentials" discusses the difficulties of "war reporters" in communication and persuasion (McLoughlin calls this epistemology, but *rhetoric* is more accurate), "Details" considers the problem of imagining the enormous numbers involved in war, "Zones" discusses the "warscape," the *sui generis* site of active battle (84). "Duration" is devoted to "wartime" (111), "Diversions" addresses the insufficiencies of language for telling the truth about war, and "Laughter" reveals "affinities with the Absurd" (176). The Conclusion, subtitled "to perpetual peace" in a nod to Immanuel Kant, considers the "extratextual impact" of war literature: it may encourage or spark animosity, but is powerless to stop it. In two startling paragraphs, McLoughlin also asserts that war literature can "reveal and recommend love" (192).

McLoughlin's M.O. in each chapter is to introduce the topic (epistemology, scale, space, time, language, humor), name the texts selected for analysis, and work through each text with digressions on philosophical, cultural, and linguistic topics (the nature of time, the Kantian sublime and the Kantian incongruous, Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of carnival, Roman Jakobson on aphasia). The analysis consists mostly of identifying technical and rhetorical tropes: autopsy, or eyewitness testimony (42); taliation nominatim, the exhaustive naming of persons killed, or items in a list, or stages in an event (53); amphibrachic meter in Tennyson (56); boustrophedonic imagery in Edward Thomas (89); adynaton ("mother of all diversionary tactics"), in which war reporters disingenuously announce their inability to report (152). Kant, Leo Tolstoy, Joseph Heller, and Tim O'Brien are the writers to whom she returns most often and to greatest effect. The longest and most engaging analysis of fiction is on Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*

and Ian McEwan's *Atonement* (Chapter 4). Her best work with verse treats Henry Reed's six-part "Lessons of the War," though unaccountably she omits Parts IV and V (Chapter 3). One of the more interesting literary devices is the *gelotopoi* ("laughter-maker") in war culture: Falstaff, Yossarian, Spike Milligan, Good Soldier Schweik (178ff.).

Some of McLoughlin's judgments are unconvincing: she calls Book 6 of *Paradise Lost* a "nuanced" (79) depiction of "mass warfare." What precisely is "subtle" (81) about Abdiel knocking down Satan, or the metaphor of "jarring Sphears"? McLoughlin's pedagogy is also doubtful: not all of us find analogies from fluid dynamics terribly illuminating (167, 179).

McLoughlin is editing *Black Mischief* for Oxford's *Complete Works of Evelyn Waugh*. Given her expertise, it seems a surprising choice. Wouldn't *Brideshead* or *Sword of Honor* have been more appropriate? Waugh is absent from *Authoring War* except for the first chapter, where William Boot is listed as part of a tradition of comic war figures, including Sterne's Uncle Toby, Tolstoy's Prince Andrei, and Dickens's Mr Jingle.

How can Waugh scholars use this book? "Compassion" and its parallel passages in *Unconditional Surrender* dovetail nicely with the author's striking (though brief) allusion to charity and war literature. The *gelotopoi* is useful for some of Waugh's comic characters. Glorious Aphorpe does not appear in this section, perhaps because laughter-makers always emerge from war unscathed. Grimes ("of the immortals") is a better example, with his numerous escapes from martial and civil dangers.

McLoughlin's exposition of Edmund Burke and Kant on the sublime (153ff.) might be useful for understanding the disastrous invasion of Crete dramatized in *Officers and Gentlemen*. According to Burke, one "source" of the sublime is "whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror" (qtd. 154). Burke illustrates with a quotation from Shakespeare, showing he is thinking of sublimities both natural and artificial. In *Critique of Pure Judgment* (1790), Kant confines his attention to a narrower field, the "properly sublime":

What is properly sublime cannot be conceived in any sensible form, but concerns only ideas of reason, which, though no presentation adequate to them is possible, are provoked and called to mind precisely by this inadequacy, which does allow of sensible presentation. (qtd. 155)

Kant is thinking primarily of natural phenomena and mathematics, but McLoughlin points out he allows for at least one artificial sublimity: war. "Even war, if it is conducted with order and reverence for the rights of civilians, has something sublime about it" (154n77). Since "sensible presentation" is one of the chief virtues of fiction, McLoughlin seems justified in applying Kant's idea to war literature. Not all parts of human life are susceptible to imaginative representation; words fail in the face of striking beauties and enormities. The unexpected

bombing of the Cretan beach is an example of the latter. Guy and Ludovic escape watch the bombs fall from a safe distance in the sapper's fishing boat: "Then the bombs began to fall among them." In a clear instance of what McLoughlin calls the "suggestive power of the absent referent," Waugh narrates the attack in one short paragraph, takes Guy and Ludovic "out of the picture," then retreats to the silence of white space by concluding the penultimate part (§8) of Chapter 7. Guy also retreats to silence for much of §9, refusing to speak from his hospital bed. Guy's silence comes from witnessing so many deaths (the soldiers on the beach) and presuming the death of a friend (Ivor Claire), from his knowledge of their sordid context (Allied incompetence, German betrayal), and from his memory of the scene and spectacle (watching helplessly from the boat). "A reader informed that a battle is too shocking to be described is likely to envisage horrors exceeding anything that straightforward description could invoke" (McLoughlin 156).

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## **Mrs. Stitch in the First World War**

*The Secret Rooms: A True Story of a Haunted Castle, a Plotting Duchess and a Family Secret*, by Catherine Bailey. New York: Penguin, 2013. 465 pp. \$16.00/£9.99 (paperback editions)

Reviewed by Jeffrey A. Manley

The author of *The Secret Rooms* started out to write a history of how WWI affected the lives of those living in towns and villages around Belvoir Castle. This was the home of the Manners family where Waugh's close friend Diana Cooper (née Manners) spent her early years. In the course of researching her intended book in the Belvoir Castle archives, Catherine Bailey was sidetracked by some curious gaps in the archival material, and the result is the present book.

The records she was initially interested in were those relating to the North Midlands Division in which John Manners, Diana's brother, who later became 9<sup>th</sup> Duke of Rutland, had served and which his father the 8th Duke had helped to organize. Many of the workers on the estates and farms owned by the Manners family served in the North Midlands. As Bailey made enquiries into the archival gaps, she found that John had taken a personal interest in the archives and was, in fact, at work on sorting through, cataloguing and, as it turned out, purging them at the time he died in 1940.

After John's death, the rooms in which these archives were kept (and in one of which he had died) were closed and the archival work he had been conducting was suspended. Bailey was granted access to these files and soon found that the gaps in the records covered three distinct periods, all involving critical events in John's life. While searching in one of the previously closed rooms, she found a cache of letters that he had apparently not sorted through at the time of his death. These included correspondence of his mother Violet that contained, *inter alia*, items written during the gaps. Using these as well as outside sources where available, Bailey was able

to draw some conclusions about the missing documents and the secrecy surrounding the mysteriously closed rooms at Belvoir. These take up most of the book.

The first gap in 1894 occurs at the time of the childhood death of John's older brother Haddon, who would have been heir to the title and estate. The documents missing and presumed destroyed related to a cover up of his cause of death. The public story explained that he had died of illness. But his death was actually the side effect of an accident that occurred while he and John were playing some sort of childish game. This seems to have caused some of the blame to fall on John. Certainly, his parents shunned him for a considerable time after his brother's death and consigned him to live with a maternal uncle. Guilt arising from his parents' actions probably explains why John may have destroyed the archives for this period.

The second gap occurred in 1909 during a period when John and his father were corresponding on the terms of a reorganization of the family's finances required to settle the large debt John's grandfather had allowed to accumulate. As heir to the estate and title, John's agreement was needed. Bailey comes to no definite conclusion as to what John may have wanted to cover up in this period but suspects it may have had to do with his desire to maintain his own personal ownership of Haddon Hall in Derbyshire (which was not part of the entailed properties). What that may have cost him in terms of compromising with his father, and their possibly acrimonious correspondence on that matter, may explain why he wanted to hide details that could have proved embarrassing.

The most important and potentially controversial archival gap relates to the period in 1915 during which John was serving on the Western Front. About half the book is devoted to the explanation of this. It is of greater interest to readers of this publication because Diana Cooper played an important role, as did her mother Violet.

Based on Bailey's research, Violet Manners might well be characterized today as an extreme control freak. The book describes the extraordinary lengths she went to in pulling strings among various officials to secure John's transfer from service in the front lines. Most of these were thwarted by John himself, when he discovered his mother's hand in attempts to secure his reassignment. He preferred to stay with his regiment, even if that meant serving in the front lines. Why he ultimately allowed himself to be removed seems rather obvious in retrospect, but Bailey makes quite a meal out of the story and builds up suspense to such an extent that it would be unfair to reveal the ending.

Diana's role in her mother's scheme was part of an effort to pressure Sir John French to reassign John to his staff. At the time, French was commander of the British Expeditionary Force on the Western Front. This facet of Violet's manipulations involves the most interesting character in the book—a sinister American financier named George Gordon Moore. He moved from Detroit to London, where he was living just before and during the early stages of the war. He befriended French by inviting him to share a large house at Lancaster Gate in Bayswater in

which they convened lavish parties during this period. Although he was married and of a highly dubious social background (Diana and her mother thought he was descended from “Red Indians”), Violet encouraged Diana to have an affair with him so that he could be used as a channel to General French.

Diana despised Moore but went along with her mother’s schemes in recognition that her brother would be better off away from the killing fields where so many of her close friends were dying. In any event, Moore played the part he was given and successfully pressed French for John’s reassignment, which John himself (after considerable resistance) ultimately, and somewhat shamefully, accepted. His posting to the home front was covered up by medical reports that were, according to Bailey, wholly fraudulent.

Violet also managed to keep Diana herself away from the front. Diana had wanted to serve in a Voluntary Aid Detachment in the war zone made up by the Duchess of Sutherland and staffed by several of Diana’s debutante friends. When her mother blocked that by using her influence with her friend and “fellow” duchess, Diana enrolled as a nursing student at Guy’s Hospital in South London over her mother’s objections. This would allow her to acquire a nursing position on the basis of her own training, independent of her mother or her mother’s friends. After unsuccessfully trying to set up a hospital in France in which Diana could serve under Violet’s control, Violet finally persuaded Diana to remain in London by having the family’s Arlington Street mansion in St. James’s converted into an officers’ hospital. Diana seems to have accepted an assignment on the staff of the Arlington Street hospital to show support for the family’s efforts.

Moore continued to attract attention even after he returned to the U.S. He successfully defended himself in court against British press reports that he was acting as an enemy agent during his friendship with French. He is said to have met Scott Fitzgerald in the post-war period, and Bailey joins in with earlier speculation that Fitzgerald used him as the model for Jay Gatsby in his 1925 novel (419-20). But Sarah Churchwell, in a recent study of *Gatsby*, gives no credit to George Gordon Moore as a contributor to Gatsby’s character (*Careless People: Murder, Mayhem and the Invention of ‘The Great Gatsby,’* [New York, Penguin Press, 2014, pp. 36, 128-29, 144-45, 155-57, 210-12, 351]).

The story of Diana and George Gordon Moore has been told elsewhere, for example, in Philip Ziegler’s 1981 biography. Bailey, however, uses previously unavailable sources from the Belvoir Castle archive, including Violet’s letters to her brother (who had joined in her campaign to secure his nephew’s reassignment). One of these letters revealed that she once found Moore in Diana’s bedroom while he was on a visit to their home in aid of the reassignment project (304-05).

Bailey’s book tells an interesting story about Violet’s protracted efforts to save her son from almost certain death in the trenches. It is not a pretty story and no one comes out of it with

much credit, including Diana and John himself. There is, however, too much material quoted in its entirety from the archive to make for an easy read. Bailey seems to be reluctant to summarize and extract from the letters, perhaps because they have not been printed elsewhere. But at 450 pages the book is too long by half for the story it has to tell. This is too bad because that story is worth reading.

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## **Mrs. Stitch as a Flapper**

*Flappers: Six Women of a Dangerous Generation*, by Judith Mackrell. New York: Farrar. London: Macmillan. 2013. 512 pp. \$28.00/£20.00.  
Reviewed by Jeffrey A. Manley

A recent book includes a short biographic sketch of Diana Cooper, among those of five other women of her times: *Flappers: Six Women of a Dangerous Generation*. The others featured are Nancy Cunard, Tallulah Bankhead, Josephine Baker, Zelda Fitzgerald and the somewhat darker horse, Tamara de Lempicka, who was primarily known as a painter.

This book retells the story of Diana's life during WWI, covering much the same territory as Catherine Bailey in *Secret Rooms* (reviewed above), including a shorter version of the George Gordon Moore "affair." Mackrell's book continues Diana's life on into the 'twenties, that is the period when the flappers prospered. This is mostly taken up with Diana's marriage to the "unsuitable" Duff Cooper, by which she declared her independence from her family. She also spent most of the decade on the stage, appearing in *The Miracle* as a means of supporting Duff's political career. It is her spirit of independence that qualifies her as a member of the flapper generation.

Waugh enjoys a few mentions in *Flappers*. Perhaps the most interesting takeaway from this book is that two of its subjects also make appearances as characters in Waugh's novels. One is, of course, Julia Stitch, who was based on Diana. The other is Nancy Cunard, who is said to have contributed to the character of Virginia Troy. This identification apparently derives from a 1979 biography of Nancy Cunard by Anne Chisholm and was noted by Paul Doyle in *EWN* 14.1 (Spring 1980) p. 3. He also commented on that biographer's failure to note the "more likely" identification of Nancy Cunard and Henry Crowder with the characters of Margot Beste-Chetwynde and "Chokey" in *D&F*.

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## **“Called to the Summit of Perfection.”**

*Merton & Waugh: A Monk, a Crusty Old Man & The Seven Storey Mountain*, by Mary Frances Coady. Brewster, MA: Paraclete P, 2015. 160 pp. \$22.

Reviewed by D. Marcel DeCoste.

In a letter dated September 3, 1948, Evelyn Waugh professes his desire to make a detailed study of the Catholic Church in the United States. This interest in his American coreligionists stems from his belief that “the history of the Church for the next few centuries will be determined in America” (*Letters* 282). This is a prospect in which Waugh claims to take heart, because he deems it “likely that American monasticism may help save the world” (282). One might be forgiven some surprise at such sentiments, given that *The Loved One*—with its skewering of Forest Lawn Memorial Park and an America populated by so many mass-produced dolls, with their “sterilized rubber privacies” and “light irrefragable plastic head[s]” (*Loved* 70)—had first appeared in Cyril Connolly’s *Horizon* only seven months before. Indeed, in his attempts to convince Connolly to surrender a whole issue to his work, Waugh made explicit this novella’s critique of a soulless America. In a January letter, Waugh claims as his theme the proposition that “there is no such thing as an American. They are all exiles uprooted, transplanted & doomed to sterility” (*Letters* 265).

What had intervened to soften Waugh’s view of America, to so inspirit the barren world of *The Loved One*? Martin Stannard argues that the key to this shift, and to that interest in American Catholicism which would bear fruit in the 1949 essay, “The American Epoch in the Catholic Church,” was Waugh’s reading of the memoir of a monk from Kentucky named Thomas Merton (Stannard 224). Approached by Robert Giroux to provide a dust-jacket endorsement for *The Seven Storey Mountain*, Waugh not only did so—“No one can afford to neglect this clear account of a complex religious process” (qtd. in Coady, 14)—but soon undertook the “enthraling” task of editing the manuscript for British publication under the title *Elected Silence* (*Diaries* 700). From this considerable literary favor—Stannard reports Waugh cut the American text by fully a third (222)—was born a consequential, if brief, friendship between two Catholic bestsellers. “What did two such dissimilar characters have in common?” asks Paraclete’s press release for *Merton & Waugh*. Mary Frances Coady’s elegant little book, it declares, will reveal all.

As it turns out, this is a promise that this engaging volume doesn’t (quite) keep. Covering a period of just over three and a half years and an edited correspondence comprising some twenty letters, Coady’s narrowly focused work is nonetheless sure to repay the attention of students of either writer or, indeed, of midcentury Catholic culture. While few of these letters have gone unpublished and some have been published more fully elsewhere (the Waugh estate granted permission for the inclusion here of no more than two thirds of any letter), Coady’s framing of this archive as an epistolary conversation is inviting, innovative, and illuminating. She delivers a readable, humane, and deftly economical account of this relationship between two

celebrated authors. In the process, she offers an unprecedented and valuable account of Waugh's first meeting with Merton at Gethsemani Abbey on November 28, 1948, and, in chapter 4's remarkably lively examination of Waugh's cuts to *The Seven Storey Mountain*, a welcome testament to his ample talents as editor. Coady here praises his respect for his fellow writer, noting that, because "Waugh's editing technique was to cut rather than rewrite," none of Merton's unique voice is lost, even as the text is dramatically reduced (Coady 69). The fruit of her empathetic interest in both of her two principals is, ultimately, a plausible answer to that question posed above. Reading Merton's memoir, she contends, Waugh could not help but discern similarities with his own experience. Both men's lives were marked by "early precociousness, desire to become an artist, a dissolute youth [...], serious emotional setbacks in early adult relationships, a drift toward a literary career, and, finally, conversion to Catholicism" (15). That Waugh should find his biography mirrored in a man whose spiritual fate was so different, Coady suggests, could not help but captivate him during what Donat Gallagher has dubbed his "Catholic Epoch" (*Essays* 287).

The book is not, however, free from error or dubious speculation. It is a surprise, for example, to learn that Waugh's eager instruction in the Roman catechism made him "a somewhat reluctant Catholic in 1930" (Coady 23). Coady's reading of Waugh's published view that the religious life is far more important than the literary as "a barb directly aimed at Merton" is also less than charitable or convincing (100). Yet this volume, more given to narrative than interpretation, most tantalizes the reader in its gesturing toward an explanation for the bond these two men shared which it never quite fully articulates. To its credit, Coady's account makes plain how Merton—addressing Waugh, in his very first letter, as "about the best living writer we've got" (33)—valued Waugh as a literary mentor. In rather freighted language for a religious man, he expresses gratitude that he should "get such valuable [...] direction" (98). If Merton's thirst for writerly guidance sounds, in Coady's words, like the "outpouring of pent-up frustration to a father confessor" (35), so too, she makes clear, did Waugh make his own confessions—regarding his failures of compassion, the poverty of his penitence—to a correspondent he treated as his "spiritual director" (45), as much as his literary pupil.

Such evidence is revealing of both men's characters and aspirations. But it points to conclusions slightly different from those Coady reaches. She suggests that the fact this relationship waned had less to do with Merton's failure to progress as a writer, or indeed with his growing sales and confidence, than with Waugh's disapproval of Merton's "decision to combine the vocation of a monk with that of a writer" (115). Yet it is at least as credible an answer to the question of what these two had in common to emphasize precisely that shared commitment to pursuing the writer's work as a religious vocation which Coady's text has helped to foreground. Waugh's Foreword to *Elected Silence* emphasizes this idea in such a way as to indicate its centrality to the book's appeal for him. Calling the memoir "the record of a soul experiencing, first, disgust with the modern world, then Faith, then a clear vocation to the way in which Faith may be applied to the modern world" (*Elected* 5), Waugh might almost be speaking of his own



conversion and his post-war desire to have his writing be a vocation in just this sense, an application of his faith to the modern world in work that would, as he promised in 1946, marry “a preoccupation with style” to “the attempt to represent [...] man in his relation to God” (*Essays* 302).

As Waugh sought to make his art a Catholic vocation by having it testify to faith, so he gravitated to a writer plainly engaged in doing just that. As Merton strove to make what he himself dubbed his “second rate” prose worthy of service to his God (Coady 40), so he leapt at the chance to learn from a writer his memoir had itself numbered among the modern greats (*Elected* 63). What Coady’s chronicle makes plain, even if it doesn’t explicitly acknowledge it, is these two men’s sense of a shared vocation, of their being both called, in Merton’s words, “to the summit of perfection” which is the contemplation of God in their daily works (297). And if their common imperfections—Merton’s remaining mired, in Waugh’s eyes, in “the faults of *The Seven Storey Mountain*” (*Letters* 308), Waugh’s inability to shake his “general bad temper” and attain the contemplative life (Coady 123)—led to their drifting apart, their sense of pursuing similar callings was clearly important to both of them, validating their commitment to pursue the craft of writing, on the one hand, and the kind of Christian testimony that would lead to a book like *Helena*, on the other. By offering us so sensitive and readable a rendering of this pivotal moment in these writers’ careers, however, Coady has done a favor to all those who would better understand their attempts to wed the literary and the religious life.

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## NEWS

### **John H. Wilson Jr. Evelyn Waugh Undergraduate Essay Contest**

Submissions are welcome for the (newly re-dedicated) 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 2015. Email submissions to [jpitcher@bennington.edu](mailto:jpitcher@bennington.edu) or [Patrick.Query@usma.edu](mailto:Patrick.Query@usma.edu)

## **Trevor-Roper/Lord Birkenhead Correspondence**

In response to Jeffrey A. Manley's "Destroy After Reading: Selected Correspondence of Hugh Trevor-Roper and Lord Birkenhead" (EWS 45.3), one reader commented that there was no evidence in the Adam Sisman biography of Prof. Trevor-Roper of any flirtation with Roman Catholicism. Manley has reread the relevant parts of the biography and would have to agree that the flirtation, such as it was, would have been with High Anglicanism, sometimes referred to as Anglo-Catholicism, not with the Roman variety.

## **Notecards and Letters**

Mr. Andrew Brown ([abrown\\_430@btinternet.com](mailto:abrown_430@btinternet.com)) informed *EWS* that he has approximately ten notecards written from Piers Court and Combe Florey House, including the three Waugh wrote to Hugh Burnett during the infamous "Face to Face" interview. He also has a postcard written to Angie Laycock from Sweden, and three letters, including one from the early 1930s from The Easton Court Hotel in Chagford.

## ***The Tablet's* 175<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**

*The Tablet*, one of the UK's oldest publications is celebrating 175 years of uninterrupted publication in 2015, with a programme of lectures, concerts, liturgies and debates to reflect nearly two-centuries of cutting edge coverage.

Acclaimed novelists David Lodge, Lady Antonia Fraser and Andrew O'Hagan will be among the speakers debating faith and fiction at the *Tablet* Literary Festival in June, while in October pianist Stephen Hough will perform a specially commissioned "Tablet Sonata" at the Barbican Centre.

Other events planned for 2015 include an interfaith seminar considering whether Catholics, Jews and Muslims remain outsiders in British society, and a panel event on the road to women bishops involving the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Lord (Rowan) Williams.

*The Tablet*, founded in 1840 by Catholic convert and former Quaker Frederick Lucas, is today read across the globe and reports on events of Catholic and wider significance in the UK and further afield. Since its establishment, contributors to *The Tablet* have included esteemed

intellectuals, thinkers and writers, including Evelyn Waugh and Graham Greene, as well as Popes Benedict XVI and Paul VI.

For further information on the events, to apply for tickets, or for any other queries, visit the dedicated side: [www.thetablet.co.uk/tablet175](http://www.thetablet.co.uk/tablet175)

## **Evelyn Waugh Society**

The Waugh Society has 163 members. To join, please go to <http://evelynwaughsociety.org/>.

The Evelyn Waugh Discussion List has 81 members. To join, please visit

[http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Evelyn\\_Waugh](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/>.

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## **End of *Evelyn Waugh Studies*, Vol. 46, No. 1**

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