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***ROSE MACAULAY***

# EVELYN WAUGH

Most novelists set themselves to explore the world, or some corner of the world, in which they believe themselves to live; they weave their dreams, imaginations and tales within their apprehensions of the life they perceive about them, composing variations on the theme. Other writers step aside, turn an oblique glance on the world they know, reject it, and, half deliberate, half instinctive, compose one of their own making, a world within a world, in which they can move and invent with greater felicity, sureness and ease. Among the world-creators of our time Evelyn Waugh is the most entertaining, and perhaps the most gifted. The world he invented and decorated with extravagant *jeux d'esprit* is a comic world. In it he moves with the blandest security and ease; from within its circumference he can utter any commentary on life, create and manipulate any beings who inhabit there. Brilliantly equipped to direct the radiant and fantastic circus he has called into being, he can stand within it cracking his whip while his creatures leap through his paper hoops with the most engaging levity, the gravest fantastic capers. His command of verbal style is adept and skilled, his characters admirably irresponsible, his wit unflinching. Like Anthony Blanche in *Brideshead Revisited*, he does more than entertain, 'transfiguring the party, shedding a vivid, false light of eccentricity upon everyone', so that prosaic people seem to become creatures of his fantasy.

What would occur should he step out of his delightful baroque circus tent into a solid actual world (if indeed any world is this) was not a question which used to trouble the reader, who accepted his unique contribution as a priceless gift. It would seem that he has now stepped out of it; and the airs beyond the ropes breathe on us with something less of rarity, with a lusher, less sharp and exhilarating taste. It must be the desire of his most ardent devotees that he should speedily retrace his steps.

He did not begin with the circus. His first published works were a brief and competent essay on the Pre-Raphaelites (at the age of twenty-three) and (at twenty-five) a life of Rossetti, an able, scholarly and entertaining study, which, if it reveals nothing new about its fascinating, over-written hero or his friends, gives on them an intelligent and sympathetic slant. A serious work of interpretation and history, it did nothing to prepare the way for *Decline and Fall*, which broke on the English literary scene the following year. Sub-titled 'an illustrated novelette', it was, the author explained in a note, not meant to be shocking but funny. A redundant note: *Decline and Fall* is funny from first to last. Its bland, destructive brilliance lights up a world of comic happenings through which people move with the lunatic logic and inconsequence imparted to them by their creator's ironic vision of mankind. Though it was apparent that a bright particular star has risen in the fictional firmament, that firmament was not empty of stars that twinkled a little similarly, with something of the same bland and gay insouciance. But *Decline and Fall* carried the subversive approach further, enlarging the bounds of erratic nonsense. It opens at Oxford, with a riotous meeting of the Bollinger Club. 'A shriller note could now be heard rising from Sir Alastair's rooms; any who have heard that sound will shrink at the recollection of it; it is the sound of the English county families baying for broken glass....'

The detachment is complete. (The scene may profitably be compared with the Oxford scenes, more nostalgically and naturalistically handled, in *Brideshead Revisited*.) In the ensuing romp, the Bellinger bloods break up pianos, smash china, throw pictures into water-jugs, tear up sheets and destroy manuscripts, and debag Paul Pennyfeather, the innocuous and luckless hero of this tale, a quiet young man from Lancing who is reading for holy orders; he is sent down for running trouserless across the quad. 'I expect you'll be becoming a schoolmaster, sir,' the college porter says to him. 'That's what most of the gentlemen does, sir, that gets sent down for indecent behaviour.'

That is, in fact, what Paul does; he gets a post in a private school, perhaps the only attractive private school in modern fiction, and continues his innocent and disastrous downward career. The school staff, and in particular the headmaster and his assistant Captain Grimes, are superb figures of comedy; the climate is that of an inspired lunatic asylum, the conversations extremely and ceaselessly funny. The story is gaily, grimly and totally amoral; its vicissitudes catastrophically logical; its ingenuous hero the victim of the most shocking turpitudes and betrayals. He is landed in prison, helped out of it by intriguing friends, and ends officially dead and resuming life in disguise, a quiet Oxford

ordinand once more. The book is, apart from the sparkle of its wit and its baroque detail, an excellent and coherent story. It moves from start to finish with experienced ease. It has, I believe, been found vulgar by some critics: but it moves in a sphere where vulgarity, refinement and morality do not apply, the sphere of irreverent and essentially anarchic fantasy. The world, one might say, of Ronald Firbank, of Norman Douglas, perhaps of the brothers Marx. But it reflected none of these; it was a genuinely original comic work.

It was followed next year by *Vile Bodies*, a novel more crowded, less classic and clear-cut in plot, more dispersed in interest, more of a revue show. Disappointing at first reading to some who had looked for another *Decline and Fall*, it proved a dazzling kaleidoscope of brightest Mayfair, brilliantly fantastically. 'The action of the book', says the Author's Note, 'is laid in the near future, when existing social tendencies have become more marked.... I have assumed a certain speeding up of legal procedure and daily journalism.' Social life, too, is sped up; the parties, the racket, the vices, the chatter, the jokes. Here and there Firbank takes a hand; as in the dialogue between the two old *mondaines* on the channel crossing. But Mr. Waugh has not Firbank's butterfly irresponsibility; he is never silly; he knows what he is about; his imagination is at once more constructive and destructive. The giddy whirl of *Vile Bodies* snatches up in its dance at least a dozen separate groups of people, each with their own story, as in a ballet where groups perform in different corners of the stage, sometimes crossing one another's orbits, entangling one another's courses, flung together and lurching apart like heavenly bodies on the run. The mass effect of unsteady, extravagant fantasy and sick and squalid reaction is breathtaking. The moralist has looked in; the smell of dust and ashes hangs on the circus air; irony has become less bland, the death's head grins among the roses. Every now and then Mr. Waugh extricates himself from his tale and becomes a commentator, pointing a social moral, with 'Oh, bright young people', or 'You see, that was the kind of party Archie Schwert's party was'. When *Vile Bodies* was dramatized, a chorus of draped figures came on between acts and made lament. This damaged the play. But the comments in the book, though out of keeping, are too infrequent to damage it; it pursues its course, kaleidoscopic, various, irresistibly funny. Its wit seldom flags; situations and persons are flung on the scene with lavish extravagance; a more parsimonious or cautious novelist might have reflected that he was using up in this one book material for a dozen. As before, he has for *jeune premier* and fortune's football an ingenuous and luckless youth, see-sawed up and down by fate, roguery, and his own folly. He saunters tranquilly among sudden fortunes and catastrophes, love, loss, customs officers, dud cheques, drunken majors who welsh, young women as debonair and luckless as himself. He has no more moral sense than anyone else in the book, but a rather appealing innocence. We leave him on the battlefield, grasping in his pocket a Huxdane-Halley bomb for the dissemination of leprosy germs among the foe.

Moral scruples nowhere intrude in *Vile Bodies*. That is, no one has them except the author himself, who shows occasional signs; we discern them, apart from explicit comment, in the book's structure. Agatha Runcible, whirling to her fatal crash in a fantastic motor race, then dying among cocktails and chattering friends, and finally buried with only one of her gay companions at the funeral (the others did not bother to go, or were too uneasily alarmed at such a grim intruder on their revels as death), is a figure perhaps more menacing and exemplary than the Bright Young Person she seems; Mr. Waugh might, with a little less of artistic control, have emphasized this aspect of her, given her in her last moments a spiritual malaise more explicit and profound than her delirium of racing cars. She dies in a nightmare of skidding wheels and crazy speed, crying '*Faster, Faster*'. Symbolic, but admirable in its reticent realism. Would the later Waugh, the Waugh of *Brideshead*, have been equal to this, or would he have floundered the girl into remorse, bewildered terror of death, change of heart, perhaps introducing Father Rothschild, the priest, into her last hour? There is no such concession here: Agatha dies as she has lived, in a hectic spin.

It is noticeable that none of these people, young or older, has any interest in art, literature, drama, music, or world affairs. They are amiable nit-wits. True, one of them has apparently had abroad with him some books on architecture, economics and history, and the '*Purgatorio*', but really only to give the Dover customs officer opportunity for cracks. 'French, eh?' he says of Dante. 'I guessed as much, and pretty dirty too, I shouldn't wonder.' And, 'Particularly against books the Home Secretary is. If we can't stamp out literature in the country, we can at least stop its being brought in from outside. That's what he said the other day in Parliament, and I says Hear hear....'

A pretty scene; but one cannot believe that the traveller had ever read the books. None of the vile bodies reads anything, except the gossip columns in the papers, for which they also write. A critic has said lately in these pages that genuine tragedy at a low level of mentality is a contradiction in terms, and attempts to create it produce an impression of impertinence and moral chaos. I do not myself find this altogether true; one can think of tragedies that befell low mentalities, in Dickens, George Eliot, E. M. Forster, and elsewhere. But if it were true, there could be no tragedy in

*Decline and Fall* or in *Vile Bodies*, where the intellectual sensibility of the characters is as low as their moral and spiritual apprehension. Indeed, it is lower. It is not out of the question that the young (and old) barbarians should 'get religion'; there is a moment at a party when, under the hypnotic influence of a troupe of evangelists, Lady Metroland's worldly guests quiver on the verge of self-abandonment to religious hysteria.

'But suddenly on the silence vibrant with self-accusation broke the organ voice of England, the hunting-cry of the *ancien régime*. Lady Circumference gave a resounding snort of disapproval. "What a damned impudent woman," she said. Adam and Nina began to giggle....'

It had been, perhaps, a close thing. The catching of the Bright Young People by any exciting religious movement, whether Aimée Macpherson's Angels, or Mr. Buchman's life-changers, or a branch of an historic church, is always a possibility round the corner. What is not round any corner for them is their conversion to intellectuality, culture, artistic or literary sensibility. Sublimely uneducated, gaily philistine, blandly barbarian, agreeably funny, they reel through the book with the maximum of wit on the part of their creator, the minimum of intelligence on their own. Not for a moment does the brilliance falter or the pace slacken. More truly comic situations, the extravagance of their conception balancing the unemotional economy of their setting forth, are to be found in few novels. As a whole, *Vile Bodies* cannot compete with the more close-knit *Decline and Fall*, but the bits and pieces are as funny, the general effect as glittering. *Decline and Fall* approaches more nearly to the bland shimmer of *South Wind*, that great amoral novel whose ripe intellectual humour none of its contemporaries or successors can emulate. In *South Wind* is true ironic detachment; its author surveys the world with the amused derision of a learned elderly satyr looking on at humanity's capers from his private brake, mocking, philosophic and undisturbed. Norman Douglas deals with all ranks and kinds of person, from peasant to prince; Evelyn Waugh in *Vile Bodies* (more than in *Decline and Fall*, which includes a fantastic scholastic world) concerns himself almost entirely with the rich of Mayfair. Though some of them think themselves poor, they always have money for parties of pleasure. The professional middle classes, who live by their wits, not on inherited capital, and therefore with enforced economy, do not really engage his attention. He is amused and a little beglamoured by the gay and idle rich: too much so, for his wit can play with peculiar excellence on such small beer as seedy journalists, dingy schoolmasters, and shady adventurers.

Between this and his next (and possibly his best) novel, *Black Mischief*, Mr. Waugh produced two travel books, *Labels and Remote People*. *Labels* is an account of a cruise, slight, bright and amusing; witty bookmaking, but Mr. Waugh's is too acute an intelligence for this kind of travelogue. *Remote People* is, on the other hand, entirely up his street; it deals with an actual country which he might have invented for his comic world. Abyssinia was a gift to him. The book's first and better half is a quite brilliant description of the coronation of the Emperor Haile Selassie, which he went out to report for a newspaper. The eccentricities of Abyssinia's ancient and remarkable Christian uncivilization were near kin to his own creations; no wonder that they captured his humour and imagination, and that he made out of them three delightful books: *Remote People*, *Black Mischief*, and *Scoop*. The fantastic contradictions, myths and absurdities of the strange barbarian land, the imposing lavishness of the coronation, made of the expedition a stagey comic opera, a happy blend of the pompous, the romantic, the barbarous, the picturesque, the absurd. It was a theme nicely suited to this sardonic and relishing mind. Abyssinia is savoured with a sensibility no less keen because sharply satiric, an intelligence no less efficient because also romantic.

'It is to *Alice in Wonderland* that my thoughts reach in seeking some historical parallel for life in Addis Ababa ... it is in Alice only that one finds the peculiar flavour of galvanized and translated reality... How to recapture, how retail, the crazy enchantment of those Ethiopian days?'

However engaged his imagination was by the enchantment, his appreciation of the Abyssinian scene has sobriety and grasp. Picturesque colour and detail, extravagantly funny incidents, abound; so also does information on geography, ethnography, personalities and politics. The book is as amusing and lively an extravaganza as a Waugh novel. That is to say, the Abyssinian half of it is. The second half, which relates travel in East Africa, is less amusing, less fresh in subject, and has its sententious moments. The writer has stepped outside the circus for an excursion into actual worlds. There are a few good scenes, encounters and fiascos, but too few. The lights are down; there is an effect of writing undertaken without much zest.

The zest is all back again in *Black Mischief*, a gay tapestry woven out of the Abyssinian material; with it we are once more inside the ropes. It is an admirably funny fantasia; several of its characters are really good creations (one uses

the word to include the element drawn, in all Mr. Waugh's novels, from life, but fantasticated and dressed up in his own manner)—the ingenuous and aspiring black emperor, the helpful Armenian rascal, the enterprising English cad, the British and French envoys. There are a few London scenes of rather dreary revelry and social life, faintly and less gaily recalling *Vile Bodies*, and dealing with many of the same people; but the bulk of the story occurs in Azania, and is in the best vein of fantastic farce. All the author's gifts are in evidence: unceasing wit, precise economy of phrase, quick-fire dialogue, a background of exquisite absurdity. Basil Seal, the hero-cad, a recurrent figure in the later novels, who here makes his début, is (within the convention of the circus, and conforming to its terms) a masterly study; a bore to his friends, a cadger, a drunkard, a liar and a thief, he lacks the engaging cheerfulness of Captain Grimes, but has a quality of remorseless and resourceful vice that would fit him for the hero of a gangster novel. *Black Mischiefs*, whether or not it is Mr. Waugh's best book, is on the whole the most attractive to read.

After it, *A Handful of Dust*, two years later, seems up to a point more ordinary, for it deals with real life: it is a social novel about adultery, treachery, betrayal, tragic and sordid desolation. The gaiety has gone, and much of the wit. The characters seem to lack motive and awareness. The theme is the destruction of a simple, dull and honest bore by his wife, a cad without heart or affections; the social scene is one of dreary squalor and unkindness. Gone is the sparkle of *Vile Bodies*; it is replaced by a neat, crisp, jabbing bitterness and the tragedy of meaningless, silly lusts. Grim events succeed each other; wit is not lacking in their narration, but it has become angry and adult. The last section of the book, however, gives the tragedy a new and wholly original baroque twist; the dull and ill-used hero, born to be betrayed, is left the victim of a fate contrived with devilish ingenuity, and will pass the rest of his life a slave, reading Dickens aloud to his master in an Amazonian jungle; a brilliant and terrifying *tour de force*. Later, the author wrote an alternative ending, of a more ordinary, cynical type; more probable, less remarkable, it has a closer coherence with the rest of the book. *A Handful of Dust* seems to reach the climax of Mr. Waugh's view of life as the meaningless jiggling of barbarous nit-wits. Pleasure, sympathetic or ironic, in their absurdities has vanished: disgust has set in.

What has also gone from his view is detachment. In his next book he is no longer objective: he has come down on a side. In art so naturally ironic and detached as his, this is a serious loss; it undermines his best gifts. And it was unlucky that the first of his partisan, side-taking books should have been a work of history, where objectiveness and truth to fact should be a *sine qua non*. In *Edmund Campion* there is too little of both, though there is interest, brilliance, imagination, and sympathetic interpretation. But it is like a barrister's brief, omitting all that does not support his case. It would seem scarcely credible, for instance, that any one should undertake a serious life of Campion without familiarity with the State Papers of the time, the letters that passed between Madrid, the Vatican, the Spanish ambassador in London, Cardinal Allen of Douai, Father Parsons, Dr. Nicholas Sanders, and the others of the 'Spanish party' among the English Catholics (which included nearly all the prominent Jesuits abroad). Yet Mr. Waugh shows no signs throughout his book (or in his lists of references) of having read these, or of familiarity with the unceasing plots, intrigues and correspondence that went on about 'the enterprise of England', the plots to invade Britain, murder or depose Elizabeth, and set Philip of Spain on the English throne. The Spanish ambassador wrote continually of his hope to see his Majesty in speedy possession of his realm, that heresy might be extirpated and the Faith restored. English Catholics were absolved from their allegiance, and those who obeyed the Queen's laws put under sentence of anathema by a Bull whose provocative folly caused even Philip and Alva to protest; for, said Philip, 'it will drive the queen and her friends to oppress and persecute the few good Catholics who remain in England'. The English exiles were in perpetual intrigue—'traitors who gape daily for the death of the queen', as an agent wrote home. Madrid and Rome financed and equipped one fruitless invasion expedition after another. Yet Mr. Waugh can write almost as if Catholic plots were an invention of Cecil's. Campion was, indeed, an innocent non-political missionary; but Parsons, his chief colleague in the mission, was steeped, like Dr. Allen, in conspiracy. As an earlier biographer of Campion observes, though Campion himself disapproved of the papal policy, and laboured merely to make every Englishman a Catholic, his friends wished to make every Catholic a conspirator. Allen wrote to the Pope that English Catholics were already conspirators, and would welcome Catholic invaders of any nation, since they detested their own government more than any foreign prince, and would all join the Pope's army if it landed, and help to depose 'this Jezebel'. Such views were an exile's pipe-dream, of a kind familiar in history: their answer was the English Catholic resistance to the Armada, when nearly all Allen's fifth column let him down. But even the innocent Campion's mission was not, as has been pointed out by historians, purely spiritual; indeed, how could it be, since Catholics were contending for more than their lives?

There are other indications of bias (that natural but deadly poison to historians) than the glossing over of the political side of these heroic expeditions. That fanatical religious idealist, Pope Pius V, with his notorious record as

Grand Inquisitor, his incitement to murder and war, his rejoicing over the massacre of the Huguenots, is described as a saint; this is surely to debase the currency of words. Then Mr. Waugh's excessive hostility to the Anglican Church leads him too often into inaccuracies, as when he calls it 'the crazy, fashionable Calvinism' (ignoring the incessant war waged against it after the Elizabethan settlement by Calvinists and other Puritans) and repeats several times that it had no sacraments. What he of course means is that, in the eyes of his Church, Anglican sacraments were not valid; but, from the way he puts it, one might not gather that the deluded Anglicans believed that they were, or that they were taught that they 'verily and indeed received the body and blood of Christ' in communion. After all, the Prayer Book was mainly translated (as Milton was to complain bitterly) from Catholic missals, though mutilated; it earned the undying hatred of the Puritan party, who were persecuted under Elizabeth with cruel severity. But Mr. Waugh dislikes this wary *via media* so much that he relegates it to the outer darkness of the Protestant left wing. To dislike the deplorable outrages of the Reformation, and many aspects of the whole business, is natural enough; indeed, it is rather hard not to; but to take ecclesiastical sides is, to a style such as Mr. Waugh's, part of whose charm is in ironic objectivity and detachment, fatal. Partisanship should be left to thunderers; one cannot have it both ways, and something must be sacrificed to individual style.

Though *Campion* is a very readable and often moving book, and its brave and touching story beautifully told, greater accuracy and balance would have given it a finer urbane polish; as it is, it remains a little one-sided and shrill, and strengthens one's view that its author betrays his gifts when he deserts his own idiom and convention.

*Campion* is, however, mellowness itself compared with *Waugh in Abyssinia* (1936), a blast of triumph over the Italian conquest of that land. Mr. Waugh went to Abyssinia to write of its subjugation for 'the only London paper that seemed to be taking a realistic view of the situation', and to blow a scornful trumpet against the 'whinney of the nonconformist conscience' which had protested against the assault—the same whinney from the same conscience that protested against the Nazis, and is protesting now, though more faintly, against the enslavement of eastern Europe. Mr. Waugh disagreed with this whinney. He found that the Italians had spread order, decency and civilization, that yperite was pretty harmless, though the Abyssinians were 'bored and exasperated with a weapon to which they could make no effective return', that Graziani was a most agreeable man, that along the new Italian roads 'will pass the eagles of ancient Rome, as they came to our savage ancestors in France and Britain and Germany', and that 'the new régime is going to succeed'. He completely failed to grasp the idea behind the League sanctions applied to Italy for its aggression against another League State, and calls the British protests 'peevish and impolitic remonstrance'.

An odd and rather unchivalrous book. What is its motive? Preference for Italians over Abyssinians? That we most of us share; it should not, but perhaps does, affect the issue. Dislike of black populations? He shows no such dislike in *Remote People*, *Black Mischief*, or *Scoop*. Support of a policy endorsed by the Italian clergy? Very probably. Dislike of the League of Nations! Again, likely enough. Or merely sympathy with the big battalions? If it were that, Mr. Waugh should now be crying up the Russian domination, and he is not. This book must be pronounced a Fascist tract. Sadly we hasten away from it, to the pleasures of *Scoop*. This gay fantasy (published two years later, and also about Abyssinia) is extremely funny, entirely good-tempered, and of considerable brilliance. If any one in it is a Roman Catholic or a Protestant, Mr. Waugh does not mention it; religion does not throw its fatal apple of discord among the *dramatis personæ*; every one gets fair treatment, every one is ridiculous, and the whole scene of delicious absurdity. With it Mr. Waugh re-entered his peculiar world; it was a relief to those of us who had begun to fear that we were losing him, that the wit was being slain by the propagandist and the partisan. *Scoop* carries an ingenious plot, and a crackling of jokes only a little less good than those of *Decline and Fall*; it is a completely light-hearted *jeu d'esprit*, in which the journalistic and tourist experience gained in Abyssinia is again brilliantly used. It is Mr. Waugh's last novel for four years.

Written in the summer of 1941, *Put Out More Flags* is a war novel. The rejection of temptations, such as patriotism and public spirit, is creditable, and almost, but not quite, complete. The central character, the iniquitous Basil Seal, is more ingeniously corrupt than ever, making his fortune out of blackmail and evacuees, and alighting for a time in the Ministry of Information, that quarry for wits, where he ruins a friend and appropriates his possessions. The whole composition is gay, heartless, neat and amusing. It stands on the border between fantasy and actuality.

After it (published the same year, with a preliminary note that it dealt with a world now dead and would never be finished) came a perfectly serious fragment of a novel called *Work Suspended*. Mr. Waugh said that it was his best writing up till then. He is right that it is well written: he always (or nearly always) writes well. It is carefully composed;

it lacks the earlier sparkle; it has a seriousness of tone that might or might not have been folly justified by its theme as it developed: it did not develop, so we cannot know. In spite of a fine and delicate vein of comedy (the hero's artist father and the commercial traveller who ran him down and killed him, are both charming figures of fun), there is a sobriety, almost a solemnity, of mood that foreshadows that of *Brideshead*. Lucy, the grave young heroine, is presented with restraint, and with a new subtlety of emotion, composed and near-profound, at times a little Jamesian in slant. The style is quiet and full. That it was not finished one feels a loss. It was an experiment, a study, abandoned, in a new genre; it seems, fragment though it is, to have balance and perspective; and the key is low; if ecstasy should develop, one does not feel that it would necessarily be flamboyant. It might (or possibly not) have justified its author as a straight novelist. But it shows the warning red—or perhaps only amber—lights.

Between suspending this work and writing *Brideshead Revisited* (in 1944), Mr. Waugh underwent development. The baroque became flamboyant; the style curved and flowered; sentimentality at times cushioned it; a grave lushness bloomed. Not continuously, but at intervals, emotionalism, over-brimming the theme, swamped it. The era of brilliant farce was over; the circus was deserted. Irony and humour still remained; there are in *Brideshead* wit of character and some sharply drawn comic scenes; there is also much subtly precise and intelligent writing; but it flowers too often into an orchidaceous luxury of bloom that, in a hitherto ironic wit, startles and disconcerts. Love, the English aristocracy, and the Roman Catholic Church, combine to liquefy a style that should be dry. Like *Work Suspended*, the story is told in the first person; a mode that affords opportunities too tempting for romantic soliloquy. The Oxford section is good, its characters excellently suggested (rather than drawn), its atmosphere authentic, its period the lavish 'twenties. To each character a real-life model or two is (probably wrongly) attributed by sapient readers, always more anxious than authors for the *roman à clef*. Sebastian Flyte, mentally below normal, drunk, silly, of touching beauty, potentially a saint, has an odd, improbable existence of his own; his equally beautiful, less saintly sister Julia, on the other hand, belongs to the realms of fantasy, one might almost say of the novelette; Lady Marchmain is better, because less romanticized; Lord Marchmain will pass for a rakish eloped father and husband, until his deplorable deathbed; their elder son is a cleverly imagined puritan fantastic. None of them has the sharp actuality of some of the minor and more plebeian figures—stray undergraduates (in particular the sophisticated homosexual), the common Lieutenant Hooper, who excites the acid snob-distaste of the narrator and of Mr. Waugh, Mr. Samgrass the don, a portrait etched with dislike and wit, the narrator's scoffing father, the amiable Glasgow-Irish priest with his cheerful pertinacity, the more elaborate portraits of the Canadian millionaire and the arty, gushing wife. About the Flytes there remains to the end something phoney: they belong to a day-dream, to a grandiose world of elegance and Palladian grace, a more than mortal ecstasy. Their conversation is at times incredible; Julia's monologue about her 'sin' on pages 251-3; Lord Marchmain's about his ancestors on his deathbed; some other passages, which flower up from naturalism like exotic purple plants in a hot-house. Some of these purple passages concern love, some a romantic memory, some sin, some religion, some food and drink (which are treated with intense and almost mystical earnestness; a good meal in a restaurant becomes a sacred rite). Mr. Waugh has been charged with snobbishness. I would rather call it self-indulgence in the pleasures of adolescent surrender to glamour, whether to the glamour of beauty, food, rank, love, church, society, or fine writings. For example, love:

'So at sunset I took formal possession of her as her lover. It was no time for the sweets of luxury; they would come, in their season, with the swallow and the lime flowers. Now, on the rough water, as I was made free of her narrow loins and, it seemed now, in assuaging that fierce appetite, cast a burden which I had borne all my life, toiled under, not knowing its nature—now, while the waves still broke and thundered on the prow, the act of possession was a symbol, a rite of ancient origin and solemn meaning.'

And dinner:

'I remember the dinner well—soup of *oseille*, a sole quite simply cooked in a white wine sauce, a *caneton à la presse*, a lemon *soufflé*. At the last minute, fearing that the whole thing was too simple for Rex, I added *caviar aux blinis*. And for wine I let him give me a bottle of 1906 Montrachet, then at its prime, and, with the duck, a Clos de Bèze of 1904.... The cream and hot butter mingled and overflowed separating each glaucous bead of caviar from its fellows, capping it in white and gold.... The soup was delicious after the rich blinis—hot, thin, bitter, frothy.... The sole was so simple and unobtrusive that Rex failed to notice it. We ate to the music of the press—the crunch of the bones, the drip of blood and marrow, the tap of the spoon basting the thin slices of breast.... I rejoiced in the Burgundy. How can I describe it? ... This Burgundy seemed to me, then, serene and triumphant, a reminder that the world was an older and better place than Rex knew, that mankind in its long passion had learned a better wisdom than his. By chance I met this wine again, lurching with my wine merchant in St. James's Street, in the first autumn of the war; it had softened and faded in the

intervening years, but it still spoke in the pure, authentic accent of its prime and ... whispered faintly, but in the same lapidary phrase, the same words of hope.'

And the season:

'Some said it was the most brilliant season since the war, that things were getting into their stride again. Julia, by right, was at the centre of it... Foreigners returning on post from their own waste lands wrote home that here they seemed to catch a glimpse of the world they had believed lost for ever among the mud and wire, and through those halcyon weeks Julia darted and shone, part of the sunshine between the trees, part of the candle-light in the mirror's spectrum, so that elderly men and women, sitting aside with their memories, saw her as herself the blue-bird.

""Bridey' Marchmain's eldest girl," they said. "Pity he can't see her tonight."

'That night and the night after and the night after, wherever she went, always in her own little circle of intimates, she brought to all whose eyes were open to it a moment of joy, such as strikes deep to the heart on the river's bank when the kingfisher suddenly flames across dappled water.

'This was the creature, neither child nor woman, that drove me through the dusk that summer evening, untroubled by love, taken aback by the power of her own beauty, hesitating on the steps of life; one who had suddenly found herself armed unawares; the heroine of a fairy story turning over in her hands the magic rings; she had only to stroke it with her finger-tips and whisper the charmed word, for the earth to open at her feet and belch forth her titanic servant, the fawning monster who would bring her whatever she asked, but bring it, perhaps, in unwelcome shape.'

And the ramblings of the dying marquis:

'They dug to the foundations to carry the stone for the new house; the house that was a century old when Aunt Julia was born. Those were our roots in the waste hollows of Castle Hill, in the brier and nettle; among the tombs in the old church and the chantrey where no clerk sings.

'Aunt Julia knew the tombs, cross-legged knight and doublet earl, marquis like a Roman senator, limestone, alabaster and Italian marble; tapped the escutcheons with her ebony cane, made the casque ring over old Sir Roger. We were knights then, baronets since Agincourt, the larger honours came with the Georges. They came the last and they'll go the first; the barony descends in the female line....'

All these passages, and others, might have been pilloried in bland ridicule in the earlier novels—in Lord Copper's newspapers, for instance, along with the finny creatures plashing their lush way through the reeds.

It is part of the adolescent approach, too, to mistake a part for the whole; this, I think, Mr. Waugh does in *Brideshead*, and it gives just the effect of triviality which should have been avoided in a book alleged to be 'an attempt to trace the workings of the divine purpose in a pagan world'. No purpose can well have greater importance; no faith can be more worth asserting than that 'the human spirit, redeemed, can survive all disasters'. But Mr. Waugh seems to equate the divine purpose, the tremendous fact of God at work in the universe, with obedient membership of a church; the human spirit, if redeemed, must loyally conform to this church and its rules. It is perhaps an inevitable view for a sincere Roman Catholic, and it is not for those outside this communion to criticize it; but no less inevitably, it seems to them to reduce the formidable problems of the universe and the human spirit to a level almost parochial. Divine purpose, human redemption, must flow through channels larger than those of any church; the impression is rather of an attempt to pour the ocean into a stoup. The interest in moral issues which, as has been lately said by a critic, must in the end impose itself again on novelists, transcends (even if it often includes) loyalty to a church: in Mr. Waugh's novel, it is subordinate to and conditioned by this. (Here he differs from that equally convinced Catholic but greater and more sin-haunted moralist, Graham Greene.)

Not only does this concentration on a church narrow the moral issues, but it seems to add a flavour of acrimony, a kind of partisan contempt for other churches, about whose members acid and uncivil remarks are made by persons in the book, voicing, one would say, their author. It is the same belligerent attitude as was shown in *Campion*, but with less excuse, since Protestants and Catholics were in *Campion*'s time at war, and enmity may be part of the period approach.



They are now at peace; and great civility and respect are shown, at least in this country, towards Catholics by Protestants. Mr. Waugh's answer would perhaps be that other churches, being in schism, are unworthy of civility in return. This rather truculent and acid attitude seems to have developed some years back, showing itself partly in intemperate assaults on the writings of those from whose views he dissented, those who inclined to agnosticism in religion or to the Left in politics. Strangely fierce intolerances and phobias emerged; one gathered that he despised and hated, rather than tolerated, religious and political dissidents from his own views. Gone is the detachment, and with it the bland, amused, tolerance, of the early novels. Belief meant for him hatred of misbelievers; no sympathetic effort to understand their standpoint has been evident, still less the urbane culture which recognizes human error to be distributed among all sections of opinion, including that to which oneself belongs. This is the spirit that shows itself intermittently, and to its detriment, through *Brideshead Revisited*.

Nevertheless, *Brideshead* has remarkable qualities. When not over-written and lush, and too consciously, opulently graceful, its style is admirable; the construction (the story of the past inserted like a long reverie between the present-day beginning and end) effective; there is humour, though it dissolves helplessly before love, the church, or a delicious meal; there are some well-drawn human beings and some good talk. If Mr. Waugh would sternly root out the sentimentalities and adolescent values which have, so deplorably as it seems to many of us, coiled themselves about the enchanting comic spirit which is his supreme asset as a writer, and return to being the drily ironic narrator of the humours of his world and of his lavish inventive fancy, he would thereby increase his stature, he would be not a less but a more serious and considerable figure in contemporary and future letters. His genius and his reputation seem to stand at the crossroads; his admirers can only hope that he will take the right turning. It is possible that he may. The sentimentality that largely vitiates *Brideshead* is a common, perhaps in some degree or another a universal, weakness. There is in nearly every writer, perhaps in nearly every human being, a soft-headed romantic, who will, if allowed, get out of hand. The creature may expend himself while young in writing sentimental verse or sentimental prose; he may thus write himself out. Or he may throughout his master's life lurk, sly and only partly suppressed, in a corner of his soul, giving the pen now and then a quirk, inserting here a lush phrase, there a row of dots, spying pink roses round the porch and blue-birds on the wing, patting life and death into romantic fancy shapes. He may be thrown out early, leaving only a manageable phantom behind; he may remain, a permanent partner, either growing or dwindling in stature. In Mr. Waugh's case, this romantic being, kept well under in earlier life, would seem to have temporarily seized the pen. An unhappy and quite unsuitable partnership, overdue for dissolution.

[End of *Evelyn Waugh*, by Rose Macaulay]