THE ROLE OF THE ARTIST
IN THE WORK OF EVELYN WAUGH

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By

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ABSTRACT

This study of the work of Evelyn Waugh aims to analyze his concept of the role of the artist in his society. His fiction, diaries, letters and journalism have all been examined in an effort to articulate what Waugh thought that the artist, literary or graphic, should try to achieve. Secondary sources of biography and criticism have also been studied. The thesis follows a chronological approach in order to demonstrate changes in Waugh's thought as he matured and areas in which the same ideas persisted throughout his career.

The results of this study show that an important consideration was the artist's duty to use his gifts to praise God. Another was the writer's role as a craftsman, producing a fine product which made the best use of the beauty of the English language. Social comment, personal integrity and individuality were also part of the mature Waugh's artistic code. His was a minority opinion in his time but one which should be studied to enlarge our understanding of the literary history of his era.

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INTRODUCTION

The role of the artist, either graphic or literary, is often a matter of some controversy and, in the three decades following 1930, this was particularly true. Evelyn Waugh produced most of his writings in these years and was a vigorous exponent of a view that went sharply against contemporary fashion. The passing of time has proven that he was right; he is one of the few writers of the thirties who is still widely read. It is too soon yet to pronounce the final verdict but the chances are very good that his works will endure while those of most of his contemporaries will be relegated to the shelves of the specialist in literary history.

Waugh began his career as a graphic artist and always regarded it as a higher calling than the literary one which he later followed. His views on what was good in both painting and writing changed over the years as he matured, but some of his basic ideas persist throughout his writings. This study will examine the most important aspects of Waugh's thought about the role of the artist in his society. It will trace the development of these

concepts from their beginnings in his youth to their final form in his later career.

The thesis will begin with a brief examination of Waugh's background and of the formative influences that helped shape his later career. It will then survey, in chronological order, his work of the years following the publication of his first novel until his death. His diaries and the recently published letters will be used extensively as will his numerous and varied journalistic works. These sources provide us with explicit statements about Waugh's opinions on what an artist, either painter or writer, should consider as important. The novels sometimes contain statements about the place of the artist but, more often, this message is implicit in the form of the novel itself.

A reading of all these sources, combined with a study of various critics such as Frederick Stopp, James Carens, Jeffrey Heath and Christopher Sykes gives us a clear picture of what Waugh saw as the most important aspects of the role of the artist. In his own works, and in what he said about that of others, he emphasized the importance of personal integrity, objectivity, precision of expression, individuality, beauty of language, social

comment and man's spiritual dimension as a creature of God. How these elements were combined to form a coherent artistic code as Waugh's career evolved is the theme of this thesis.

CHAPTER ONE

FORMATIVE YEARS

The year 1903 was an important one for the English literary world. In that year were born George Orwell, Cyril Connolly and the subject of this study, Evelyn Waugh. Their early years were to be overshadowed by the threat and eventual outbreak of a world war - a war in which they were too young to serve but old enough to be deeply affected by it. The war years were followed by the unsettled times of the twenties. They came to manhood in an era which seems to have been peculiarly unstable, an era which provided Waugh with much of the material for his first novels. In the depression and the war that followed he was to hearken back often to those halcyon days with great nostalgia for a lost Arcadia.

Evelyn Waugh was, in many ways, very fortunate in his home and family background. His father, Arthur Waugh, as man of letters and director of Chapman and Hall Publishing Company, was able to provide a milieu in which literary men and matters were daily concerns. In the most painless and natural way, the boy come to accept literature as a normal part of life. In his autobiography, A Little

Learning, he wrote that his father's dramatic readings were so good "that I never thought of English literature as a school subject, as matter for analysis and historical arrangement, but as a source of natural joy. It was a legacy that has not depreciated."[1] His father also provided a stable home where the boy grew up under the loving care of a devoted mother and a beloved nurse. The opportunity to go to a day school and continue living at home until he was thirteen extended this period of stability. Summer visits to his maiden aunts' home in Midsomer Norton in Gloucestershire introduced him, through its old-fashioned surroundings, to another era which Waugh recognized as superior to his own. He wrote: "I was instinctively, even then, drawn to the ethos I now recognize as mid-Victorian".[2] This experience, along with family readings in Dickens, Trollope, Arnold, Tennyson and Browning,[3] early established in Waugh a preference which was to last all his life.

Arthur Waugh had gone to Sherborne and had sent his older son Alec, five years Evelyn's senior, to the same institution. Evelyn would have followed their footsteps had not Alec been expelled for homosexual behaviour and further alienated the school authorities by writing his autobiographical novel, The Loom of Youth, about life at

Sherborne. Both father and son were struck from the school's alumni lists and the younger son was barred from entrance there. Evelyn, from eleven years old onward, had shown great religious piety and devotion to High Church practises. Lancing, a school with High Church leanings, seemed the best choice, and he went there in May, 1917. While there he kept a diary which makes him, according to Michael Davie, the only writer of first, or any, rank to keep a day-to-day journal of his school experiences as he was living them.[4]

Rereading this diary as he wrote his autobiography, Waugh was appalled by the sort of boy who emerged from its pages. He declared:

> if what I wrote was a true account of myself, I was conceited, heartless and cautiously malevolent. I should like to believe that even in this private journal I was dissembling a more generous nature; that I absurdly thought cynicism and malice the marks of maturity. I pray it may be so. But the damning evidence is there in sentence after sentence on page after page, of consistent caddishness. I feel no identity with the boy who wrote it. I believe I was a warm-hearted child. I know that as a man my affections, though narrow, are strong and constant. The adolescent who reveals himself on these pages seems not only cold but quite lacking in sincerity. This may have been in part the result of a peculiar intellectual fermentation which developed in us at the time. [5]

He was certainly very severe in his judgement on his adolescent revelations, probably overly severe. The diary is, after all, the work of a schoolboy, not of an adult. Actually many entries indicate intelligence, sensitivity and self-condemnation; these Waugh seemed not to consider. Perhaps he was often "dissembling a more generous nature" - a common enough practice among boys of his age who create a tough outer shell to hide their real selves. The overall inpression, to the more impartial reader, is that of a very intelligent, often confused and unhappy, teenager trying to work out a life view.

Two men greatly influenced Waugh at Lancing, each representing a way of life which was the exact opposite of the other. Their influence is important to any discussion of his concept of the artist. One of these men was Francis Crease. He was a scribe who also did black and white decorations, apparently for his own enjoyment. Waugh was interested in script and had practiced the art himself, winning a prize for it at Lancing. His house-tutor arranged a weekly lesson for him with Crease. These visits at Lychpole Farm were , for Waugh, happy peaceful interludes away from the school. After several lessons, he wrote in his diary: "It is such a relief to get into refined surroundings, if only for an afternoon".[6]

His initial fascination with Crease cooled but the friendship continued and the influence was a lasting one. The refinement of the scribe's surroundings and the unworldliness of his ambitions appealed to one side of Waugh's personality. The idea of the artist withdrawn from the world and living for his art was one that persisted in his thought throughout his life. The nature of script can be linked with Waugh's later beliefs about the work of the writer. It requires meticulous and exact use of the pen and allows for no carelessness. In later life, Waugh emphasized the precise use of words and correct grammar in his writings. This may be seen as related to an early interest in script. Another aspect of the scribe's work is objectivity; it is the product of an exact discipline, one which, the boy early admitted, would require giving one's life to it. Here already we see an indication of the importance of objectivity, so central to Waugh's later work, and the realization that perseverence and discipline, at least in the graphic arts, were all-important.

The other mentor who influenced Waugh at Lancing was J. F. Roxburgh, one of the masters, and, in many ways, the direct opposite of Crease. He came to teach there after serving in the army and was the embodiment of all that was most admirable to adolescent boys - virility, energy,

sympathy, intelligence, good grooming, panache. The boys imitated him and took his comments to heart. He required a weekly writing assignment on a wide range of topics and sternly insisted on precision of grammar and avoidance of cliché. A sceptic in religious matters, he encouraged questioning and independent thought. His high opinion of Waugh is expressed in a letter written in 1921. "If you use what the gods have given you, you will do as much as any single person I can think of to shape the course of your own generation".[7] In his autobiography Waugh concluded that he realized Crease and Roxburgh were opposites and added, "I transferred my allegiance to the more forceful and flamboyant person. I do not yet know which of the lessons these two sought to teach me was the most valuable nor to whom I have proved the most faithful".[8] In any case, the tension within Waugh between reclusiveness and action was to be evident in many of his novels and in his own life.

No diary and few letters survive from Waugh's Oxford years; much that happened there cannot be known. Certainly serious scholarship was given a low priority as he attempted "to taste everything Oxford could offer and consume as much as I could hold".[9] He wrote to a Lancing friend, Tom Driberg, in 1922:

> Life here is very beautiful. Mayonnaise and punts and cider cup all day long. One loses all ambition to be an intellectual. I am reduced to writing light verse for the Isis and taking politics seriously. .... Do let me most seriously advise you to take to drink. There is nothing like the aesthetic pleasure of being drunk and if you do it in the right way you can avoid being ill next day. That is the greatest thing Oxford has to teach. 10

A letter written in 1924 to Dudley Carew, another Lancing friend, gives us rather a different picture:

> my dull brain was wrought with things forgotten. I have been living very intensely the last three weeks. For the last fortnight I have been nearly insane. I am a little saner now. I may perhaps one day in a later time tell you some of the things that have happened. It will make strange reading in the biography. Apart from my own tragedy I have nothing to say. 11

These letters hint at an experience at Oxford that was both exhilarating and deeply disturbing. The influence of Harold Acton and his aesthetes was a very important factor.

Waugh later summed up his beliefs about his university experience in an article for the Daily Mail in 1930 "Was Oxford Worth While?". He decided that, as a way to a lucrative position in the world, Oxford was a definite waste of time. As places where a tradition of genuine

culture is maintained the two great universities also failed. However, as a beautiful place in which to grow up, Oxford was invaluable. It gave boys of eighteen a place where, for four years, segregated from the rest of the world, they could make fools of themselves, learn to drink or not to, express their opinions, learn what really amuses or excites them. He concluded, "After that they can begin on the dreary and futile jobs that wait for most of them, with a great deal more chance of keeping their sense of humour and self-respect".[12] In a letter to his son Auberon, in 1956, urging him to stay on at school, he wrote, "Most of the interest and amusement of life comes from one's friends. All my friends are those I made at Oxford and in the army. You are condemning yourself to either a lonely manhood or one among second-rate associates".[13] The chance to grow up and to form life-long friendships seems to have been the main reason, in Waugh's mind, for going to university. He earned a third in his final examinations and left without his degree. This is probably an important reason for his disparagement of other possible gains from Oxford.

Although he contributed poems and stories to Oxford publications, Waugh saw himself mainly as an artist, a creator of designs and illustrations, rather than as a pot-

ential novelist. As he reported in his autobiography:

> it was many years before I despaired of myself as a draughtsman. My meagre gift had been over-praised at home, at school, and at Oxford. I never imagined myself a Titian or a Velasquez. My ambition was to draw, decorate, design and illustrate. I worked with the brush and was entirely happy in my employment of it, as I was not when reading or writing. [14]

According to his biographer, Christopher Sykes, Waugh never saw himself as a writer of genius and was wont to refer to his large hands as those of a craftsman.[15] He even enrolled, after failing to make progress at a London art school, in a school of carpentry. Perhaps the world has gained a fine novelist and lost a great cabinet-maker. At any rate, it was only under the pressure of expectations from a future mother-in-law, and after failure to thrive at such diverse occupations as prep school master, art student, newspaper reporter and even parson (this last was not encouraged), that he came to the point where he could write in his diary: "It seems to me the time has arrived to set about being a man of letters".[16] This appears to have been his last resort.

His earliest writings and his first major work, Rossetti, deal with painting and painters. At fourteen,

he wrote a quite remarkable short article entitled "In Defence of Cubism". He declared that art should represent "surely the impression that objects give". The cubist needed a means "of putting down his sensations". In most cases, he believed cubism "is far superior to any medium in use" and had "a glorious future". Nevison and Picasso, he concluded, "will take their well-deserved places among the masters who paved the way for their coming".[17] This was published in Drawing and Design in November, 1917, and expressed what was, for Waugh, an enthusiastic but passing fscination with cubism. He was to repudiate totally this eulogy of Picasso and modern painting.

In 1927 Francis Crease published a book of his decorative designs for which Waugh wrote a preface. Much of this deals with his own relationship with the scribe and, he confessed later, expresses more enthusiasm than he really felt.[18] However, it contains some observations on the work that might be applied to his own literary code later. He points out that his kind of art "is not part of a fashion". It was meant to please a small circle of friends and contained little that was capricious, "nothing that is mannered or superficial, nothing assertive, nothing crude, nothing debased. It is just for these reasons that they are noticeably unsympathetic to the present period".[19]

He was later to apply many of these criteria to his own writing and there is a hint, also, that his love for modern art was diminishing.

It is in his biography of Dante Gabriel Rossetti that we first become aware of what Sykes calls "the confident authority of the voice".[20] Still under the influence of the moderns, Waugh wrote, "aesthetics must inevitably be a deductive study, and it gives a stimulating frisson to one's aesthetic standards to turn, if only for a few hours, from contemplating the pellucid excellencies of Picasso to the turgid and perverse genius of someone like Rossetti".[21] From this inauspicious beginning, he goes on to produce an interesting, well-researched, and generally unbiassed view of the Victorian painter. He gives high praise to Rossetti's "Beata Beatrix" and to his "Marriage of St. George", and casts doubt on the modern school of art criticism which quite condemns Rossetti. He explains Roger Fry's notion of art based on the presence of an aesthetic emotion aroused in the viewer, and questions whether this is indeed valid. He clearly considers that art and criticism are two separate enterprises and speaks of Rossetti's treatment of Ruskin as expressing "the contempt that artists always feel for the critic".[22] He questions whether the modern censure of literary painting

is necessarily fair. He later collected many examples of such art. He concludes that, "by no means the least of the advantages to be gained from a study of Rossetti is the stimulus it gives in an era of competent stultification", at a time when the rigid demands of critics on artists "are making bores of all but the very greatest".[23]

Waugh's assessment of Rossetti as a person expresses an opinion about great artists that appears, implicitly or explicitly, throughout his lifetime. The Victorian ideal of the artist as "romantic, melancholy, a bit deranged"[24] was perfectly embodied in the unstable Rossetti. For Waugh, however, this was a spurious ideal, expressing the romance of decay but ignoring a very important issue. Rossetti was not a great artist because "he lacked that <u>essential rectitude</u> that underlies the serenity of all really great art". His problems arose, not from his genius, but from his mediocrity. "There is a spiritual inadequacy, a sense of ill-organization about all that he did".[25] His great works, such as "Beata Beatrix" were done when he temporarily transcended his inadequacies.

The same sort of opinion is found in Waugh's denunciation of the paintings of D. H. Lawrence. When they appeared in 1929, to be immediately confiscated by the pol-

ice, Waugh went to the exhibition. He wrote to the Editor of the Spectator in November, 1960, during the controversy over Lady Chatterley's Lover:

> I had never found his books readable ... Then I saw the miserable pictures. The poor fellow couldn't paint at all and had no idea he couldn't, and the people who applauded his books were equally enthusiastic about his paintings. I began to understand that a work of art is not a matter of thinking beautiful thoughts or experiencing tender emotions (though those are its raw materials), but of intelligence, skill, taste, proportion, knowledge, discipline and industry; especially discipline. No number of disciples compensate for lack of that. 26

It is true that this is an assessment of an early experience from the point of view of a middle-aged man, and may not accurately reproduce the younger Waugh's actual response on the occasion, but it does repeat the notion that discipline and organization are necessary for great art.

Until he became known as a novelist, after the publication of Decline and Fall, Waugh wrote little about the society around him, a society in which he roved freely, despite his frequently impecunious state. His diary of the post-Oxford years is filled with reports of parties and drunkenness and makes for very unedifying reading. He frequented the haunts of the High Bohemian set in London,

where Lady Cunard, Lord Berners and the Sitwells were prominent.[27] He had no connections with Bloomsbury. We get the impression that he did not become totally involved with the others, however, but remained on the fringes where he could observe and record the peculiarities of behaviour and conversation of his often bizarre and eccentric companions. Sykes regards the diaries of this time as highly suspect, containing material of dubious accuracy.[28] The important thing is that he was acquiring a wealth of material that was to turn up later in his novels. In these, factual accuracy was not important so long as the essence of the society and the characters was communicated, and at this kind of accomplishment Evelyn Waugh has few peers.

One more aspect of Waugh's formative years seems to me to have had a very decisive influence on his later development, and to have contributed in no small way to his later work and to his evolving notions of the role of the artist. This was his rejection of his home and everything that his family, especially his father, stood for. Arthur Waugh came to represent all that he abhorred and he especially rebelled against his father's old-fashioned sentimentality. His brother Alec suggests that Evelyn was very much like his father and was always on guard against the emotionalism that he saw in himself.[29]

In a recent book on Waugh, Jeffrey Heath maintains that he recognized his father's good qualities but "chose to dwell on his shortcomings, which he generalized into the failings typical of the entire older generation and eventually made the central targets of his satire".[30] We might add that he greatly exaggerated these shortcomings. Later he was to formulate theories about the need for objectivity in the writer that were directly contrary to the practices and beliefs of his father.

Any attempt to outline the important influences and events of a writer's early years in such a short space as I have done here is necessarily superficial and leaves much out. It has, however, included the principal factors that helped form Waugh's perceptions of and attitudes to the role of the artist as painter or writer. The remaining chapters of this study will deal with his years of literary production and show how, from the early beginnings described above, his mature artistic creed developed.

NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

1. Evelyn Waugh, A Little Learning (London, 1964), p. 72.

2. Ibid., p. 48.

3. Alan Pryce-Jones, "Escape from Golders Green", in David Pryce-Jones, ed., Evelyn Waugh and His World (London, 1973), p. 11.

4. Michael Davie, ed., The Diaries of Evelyn Waugh (London, 1976), p. 16.

5. A Little Learning, p. 127.

6. Diaries, p. 55.

7. A Little Learning, p. 161.

8. Ibid., p. 162.

9. Ibid., p. 170.

10. Mark Amory, ed., The Letters of Evelyn Waugh (London, 1980), p. 10.

11. Ibid., p. 12.

12. Evelyn Waugh, "Was Oxford Worth While?", in Evelyn Waugh, A Little Order, (London, 1977), p. 17.

13. Letters, p. 464.

14. A Little Learning, p. 190.

15. Christopher Sykes, Evelyn Waugh: A Biography (Boston, 1975), p. 3.

16. Diaries, p. 281.

17. Evelyn Waugh, "In Defence of Cubism", in A Little Order, p. 55.

18. A Little Learning, p. 152.

19. Evelyn Waugh, "Preface to the Decorative Designs of Francis Crease", in A Little Order, p. 56.

20. Sykes, p. 80.

21. Evelyn Waugh, Rossetti: His Life and Works (London, 1931), p. 14.

22. Ibid., p. 66.

23. Ibid., p. 226.

24. Idem.

25. Idem.

26. Letters, p. 553.

27. Sean O'Faolain, The Vanishing Hero (London, 1956), p. 28.

28. Sykes, p. 56.

29. Alec Waugh, My Brother Evelyn and Other Profiles (London, 1967), p. 166.

30. Jeffrey Heath, The Picturesque Prison: Evelyn Waugh and His Writing (London, 1982), p. 13.

CHAPTER TWO

THE EARLY NOVELS

By 1928 Waugh had accepted his fate, and, with the publication of Decline and Fall, he joined the literary elite. Vile Bodies in 1930 was an instant success and requests for articles from this audacious young novelist poured in. The thirties saw the appearance of three more novels, three books of travel and several short stories. Fear of fascism and the widespread notion of the "Century of the Common Man" led many writers of the decade to espouse the republican cause in Spain and social issues at home. Waugh was one of a minority of writers which was not caught up in these trends, and, because of this, incurred accusations of irresponsibility, snobbery and fascism. However, there is more than one way to comment on one's society and an important question about his thirties novels is concerned with the presence or absence of a social message in them. The concept of the artist as social critic is an important one and it will be clear that Waugh considered it so, even in the apparently lighter works of the thirties.

The Left Review, in 1937, published a pamphlet containing the answers of writers in the British Isles to this

question: "Are you for or against the legal Government and the People of Republican Spain? Are you for or against Franco and Fascism? For it is impossible any longer to take no side." Waugh replied:

> If I were a Spaniard I should be fighting for General Franco. As an Englishman I am not in the predicament of choosing between two evils. I am not a Fascist nor shall I become one unless it were the only alternative to Marxism. It is mischievous to suggest that such a choice is imminent. [1]

This response, along with his travel book, Waugh in Abyssinia, which was condemned by Rose MacAulay as "a fascist tract"[2] because it praised the Italian aims in Abyssinia, earned him a reputation that was quite repugnant to the writers of the Liberal Left. His views were often facile and short-sighted but, as Sykes points out, not totally wrong as those of his fellow writers were not totally right. He was to change his mind in the later thirties. Already, in August 1936, he could write to Katharine Asquith:

> Off to Africa full of the gloomiest forebodings. I am sick of Abyssinia and my book about it. It was fun being pro-Italian when it was an unpopular and (I thought) losing cause. I have little sympathy with these exultant fascists now. [3]

Here we find an important clue to the reason for

much of Waugh's pugnacity of statement - he loved to swim against the current of popular opinion. We must admit, with James Carens, that his political stance was often poorly chosen. Carens writes: "Never a consistent political thinker or a shaper of immense symbolistic structures, Waugh was moved by the strength of disgust and prejudice to adopt positions which did him little honor."[4]

For the writers of the thirties, social consciousness was of vital importance. The Pylon Poets, followers of Auden and Isherwood, proclaimed their belief that social issues were the real concern of the writer. Not surprisingly, there was little sympathy between them and Waugh, who steadfastly refused to follow their dicta. His scorn for them, and especially for Auden, was unmistakeable in a letter he wrote to the Spectator in 1930. He had reviewed Journey to a War by Auden and Isherwood, and Spender had leapt to their defence and criticized the review. Waugh wrote that he found Auden to be "a very dull and awkward writer", and denied any malice of motivation, contending that he could be more objective than the intimate friend of the authors was likely to be. He objected to Spender's opinion that bad reviews were a sure indication of literary merit. He blamed Auden's friends for helping him become "a public bore". With their uncritical adulation, he

wrote, "a group of his friends have conspired to make a booby of him". What made the whole thing intolerable was that Auden's friends imputed malice to anyone who disagreed with them.[5]

Waugh continued to object to this "chumminess" of the thirties writers, and, by continuing to "walk his wild lone", he indicated his belief that the true artist must be an individual unhampered by commitment to a literary group. He expressed his scorn of the Left Book Club in his book about Mexico, Robbery under Law:

> Readers, bored with the privileges of a free press, have lately imposed on themselves a voluntary censorship. They have banded themselves into Book Clubs so that they may be perfectly confident that whatever they read will be written with the intention of confirming their existing opinions.[6]

His dislike for literary coteries would probably have led him to condemn, in like manner, a Right Book Club.

In the title of his article on Waugh's fiction in 1944, "Never Apologize, Never Explain", Edmund Wilson came close to expressing Waugh's attitude towards his own work, especially towards his early novels. Only rarely did he elucidate the meaning of these works and the reader is

left to come to his own conclusions. The question which has divided readers and critics is this one - are the thirties novels serious in intent or are they meant, as Cyril Connolly wrote in 1930, "purely to amuse the reader"?[7] Waugh did not enlighten us on this or on many issues in his later work, and, as Frederick Stopp points out, "in some degree Mr. Waugh has created his own adverse publicity by his reticence about his works".[8] It is left to us, as readers, to decide on the question of whether the novels have a serious meaning or not.

An important secondary issue concerns the use of satire. If it can be seen that Waugh was using those early works to satirize his society, then we may safely say that they contain a serious social message, however obliquely it may be expressed. He certainly denied that he was writing satire. In "Fan-Fare", written in 1946 for American readers of Brideshead Revisited, he declared:

> Satire is a matter of period. It flourishes in a stable society and presupposes homogeneous moral standards - the early Roman Empire and 18th Century Europe. It is aimed at inconsistency and hypocrisy. It exposes polite cruelty and folly by exaggerating them. It seeks to produce shame. All this has no place in the Century of the Common Man where vice no longer pays lip service to virtue. The artist's only service to the disintegrated society of today is to create little independent systems of order of his

> own. I foresee in the dark age opening that the scribes may play the part of the monks after the first barbarian victories. They were not satirists. [9]

Given the many forms in which satire may appear, and the diverse ages in which it has been written, we must take issue with the premise that only stable times can give birth to it. The real question is this - is there a moral centre in the early fiction, a firm set of values against which the various aspects of the society it describes can be measured?

For some critics, such as Cyril Connolly and Edmund Wilson, this is not a relevant issue. The latter saw Waugh as "likely to figure as the only first-rate comic genius that has appeared in English since Bernard Shaw".[10] He admired the "breathtaking spontaneity" of Decline and Fall and the audacity he saw in characters such as Grimes and Brenda Last.[11] Carens, on the other hand, sees Waugh as a great satirist, but does not perceive much that has positive value to oppose the negative elements of the early fiction. "In effect, then," he concludes,

> as products of a rebellion (which in Waugh's personal life may have been fulfilled), the early novels remain generally negative and destructive; and, consequently, Waugh is criticized for lacking a high

> moral purpose and writing satire without a moral center. [12]

An interesting and relevant consideration here is some idea of Waugh's own attitude to the society which he describes in Decline and Fall and Vile Bodies. For a while he seems to have supported the fashionable cult of youth of the twenties. In "Too Young at Forty", published in the Evening Standard in January, 1929, he called on the middle-aged to make way for the younger generation.[13] However, in April of the same year, he took a hard look at his peers to try to analyze the causes for their failings. Growing up during the war when everything was a "substitute for something else and there was barely enough even of that", children had developed no "sense of qualitative value". The schools had encouraged too much thinking for themselves and had not preserved the standards of civilization. The consequences of all this was a kind of chaos.

> Freedom produces sterility. There was nothing left for the younger generation to rebel against, except the widest conceptions of mere decency. Accordingly, it was against these that it turned. The result in many cases is the perverse and aimless dissipation chronicled daily by the gossip writers of the Press. [14]

Here he was still laying some blame on the older generation

but he was criticizing the behaviour of the younger one as well.

A basic problem with the young people of his time is expressed in a diary entry in February, 1925. He mentions the engagement of his friend, Richard Greene, and comments: "It makes me sad for them because any sort of happiness or permanence seems so infinitely remote from any of us".[15] In May of the same year, another entry reads: "I shall have to regard all my friendships as things of three to six months".[16] In September, 1924, he had written: "I am sure now that it will be the last night I shall spend in Oxford for a long time. Everything was inexpressibly sordid."[17] The freedom, which had seemed so precious in his college days, had now shown itself to produce nothing but sterility. Nowhere was there a sense of permanence. These were themes that were to appear again and again in his fiction.

It is not surprising that moralists have condemned the author of Decline and Fall as amoral, irresponsible, irreverent and even cruel. The work presents us with a world where traditional values are turned upside down and where evil triumphs over good. Many of the sacred cows of British life are attacked and ridiculed. The death of

a small boy, after a needless mishap, is usually treated as a tragedy; here it is only casually mentioned because it has caused some trifling inconvenience to his mother. The plot, which catapults its hapless hero from undeserved disgrace through bewildering vicissitudes of fortune and deposits him back where he started, expresses no apparent moral message but rather the futility of the ordinary man's attempt to control his destiny. For those who can suspend judgement, and fortunately most can, the story is hilariously funny; for the very serious-minded it is really too awful.

In Vile Bodies, Waugh dealt, in a more direct way, with the Bright Young Things, represented by Margot Beste-Chetwynde and Alistair Trumpington in his first novel. He wrote to Harold Acton in July, 1929: "I am sure that you will disapprove of it. It is a welter of sex and snobbery written simply in the hope of selling some copies. Then if it is at all a success, I want to try and write something more serious".[18] It was very successful and truly launched him on his career, as Decline and Fall, though well received by the critics, had not. In his preface to the 1965 edition of Vile Bodies, Waugh credited its popular acclaim to its subject matter, the young people who were constantly appearing in the newspapers, and to the fashionable jargon

which it helped spread. He pointed out that a private tragedy, the breakdown of his first marriage which occurred while he wrote the book, had changed the gay mood of the beginning to the bitter one of the conclusion. He admitted: "It is not a book I enjoy re-reading but there are one of two funny scenes which redeem it from banality".[19]

Like Decline and Fall, the second novel presents us with a world where everything seems to be in a state of whirling chaos. The Alice in Wonderland excerpts at the beginning are entirely appropriate to a world where everyone seems, like Miss Runcible in the racing car, to be spinning around in ever more headlong frenzy, and where Chance, in the figure of the drunken major, appears to play so large a part. At the end the major, now a general, sums up our impression of the world of Vile Bodies: "Damn difficult country to find one's way about in. No landmarks ...".[20] Adam, who has moved about on the edges of the sensation-hungry bohemian set, finds himself on a great desolate battlefield while, back in England, everyone carries on without him, profiting by the war and undisturbed by any revelation that their lives are entirely futile.

A very important quality in these two novels, and a major attribute of the writer for Waugh, is the object-

ivity of the author's viewpoint. He ridicules every facet of the society he describes without fear or favour. His treatment of the old traditional aristocratic crowd at Anchorage House, as James Hall points out,

> is another face of the absurd. Nina's distaste for sex undercuts the ideal of fun, but Lady Ursula's fright over her engagement to colourless Edward Throbbing caricatures the older ideal of duty. In Waugh a cheerful distaste for sex is better than a stuffy one. The presence of royalty at Anchorage House merely sanctions an absurd conspiracy. 21

Because of the writer's detachment, the reader must closely examine what he says, or implies, about the multitude of situations, institutions and people in these two novels. We conclude that he has decided that everything is absurd. We are inclined to agree with Sean O'Faolain who maintains that Waugh presented his picture of the Bright Young People more with "brotherly exasperation" than with "paternal bitterness". He understood their revolt but he rebelled against it because he saw their beliefs as spurious. He could see that they were wasting their lives.[22] This comes out very clearly in the second novel.

In a review for the Spectator in 1938, Waugh wrote: "it cannot be said too often that in a novel the interest

of the conversations must not depend on the interest of the views expressed. No great novelist has ever allowed this, nor ever will".[23] On rare occasions, he disobeyed this rule. Otto Silenus' rather ambiguous delineation of the division between static and dynamic people is one; Father Rothschild's explanation of the malaise among young people is another. The latter instance has been criticized as weak and sentimental; Sykes considers it so and reports that Waugh himself later said it was silly.[24] The Jesuit explains to Mr. Outrage and Lord Metroland, who are both deploring the irresponsibility of the younger generation:

> Don't you think that perhaps it is all in some way historical? I don't think people ever want to lose their faith either in religion or in anything else. I know very few young people, but it seems to me that they are all possessed with an almost fatal hunger for permanence. I think all these divorces show that. People aren't content just to muddle along nowadays .... And this word "bogus" they all use .... They won't make the best of a bad job nowadays. My private schoolmaster used to say, "If a thing's worth doing at all it's worth doing well." My Church has taught that in different words for several centuries. But these young people have got hold of another end of the stick, and for all we know it might be the right one. They say, "If a thing's not worth doing well, it's not worth doing at all." It makes everything very difficult for them. [25]

Whether this is sentimental and later repudiated by its author is not important. The indications are that he did

believe it at the time; diary entries express some of the same notions. Like Father Rothschild, Waugh saw all the problems of his own society and described them. And, like the Jesuit, he did not in those early novels offer any solutions. He left that up to the reader. He had fulfilled a role as social critic by pointing out how "bogus" the world of the twenties was.

It was in connection with Black Mischief, his zany novel about the clash of civilizations which was published in 1932, that Waugh wrote his most sustained apologia for an early work of fiction. It had been reviewed in the Roman Catholic Tablet by Ernest Oldmeadow, who had judged it "a disgrace to anyone professing the Catholic name".[26] He condemned the novel as obscene and blasphemous, and Waugh undertook, in an open letter to Cardinal Bourne, Archbishop of Westminster, to protest this judgement; he would not apologize but he would explain, at least enough to clear himself of the charges.

The accusation of blasphemy concerned a very funny list of relics cherished by a superstitious group of Nestorian monks. Waugh wrote that the reviewer, "may have misunderstood the slightly facetious form of the sentence and with a literal-mindedness that is scarcely sane, thought

they were genuine relics to which I am referring. It is painful to have to explain one's jokes".[27] He could have been much more explicit about the relics and qualified each item. "But really; one must in courtesy postulate some intelligence to one's readers. No doubt my publishers were at fault in sending a copy of the book to The Tablet, but how were they to know that a once leading Catholic paper was under such ingenuous management?"[28] The other possibility was plain ignorance on the part of Oldmeadow, which has led him to believe that the Nestorians were a respectable religious order.

On the question of obscenity, Waugh pointed out that he had kept within established literary conventions. He regarded Birth Control as "a personal sin and an insidious social evil" but he realized he was in a small minority here. Freely discussed in England, he did not see why it should not be treated in a novel. He further explained:

> There are two ways of meeting an evil of the kind - either by serious denunciation which is fitting for the clergy (and possibly for the journalists who regard Catholic employment as giving them authority to speak as though from the pulpit) or by ridicule. I chose the latter course as more becoming to a novelist and regarded and still regard my "silly" pages as an attempt, however ineffectual, to prosper the cause we all have so closely at heart. [29]

He also objected to the idea that Prudence and Basil's relationship, as he described it, could be in the least pornographic - quite the contrary as it was set in the most squalid conditions. These very conditions were condemned by the reviewer. Waugh concluded, "What a picture this editor draws of himself as one avid to nose out impurity yet doubly enraged to find it in an unattractive guise."[30]

The last criticism he countered was concerned with the climax of the story, where Prudence is eaten by Basil and the cannibals. He said he had hoped to lead up to that by early portents and by keeping the dark powers of savagery present to the reader's consciousness throughout. He admitted that he might have failed to bring it off but surely that was an artistic lapse and not one against personal honour and moral conduct.[31] He closed the letter with a plea to the Cardinal to deny further patronage to this "base man".[32]

Ronald Knox persuaded Waugh not to make this letter public[33] so, presumably, the squeamish Mr. Oldmeadow was spared its invective and retained his position until 1936. However, the document is of great interest as a partial statement of Waugh's literary aims in the early thirties. It shows him as a writer with a message to disseminate, but

one who proceeded by indirection, preserved an objective stance, and depended on the intelligence of his readers. Critics such as Carens and O'Faolain, who compare him to Aldous Huxley, point out that he is superior because his detachment is more genuine[34] and he is not, like Huxley and Wyndham Lewis, "vexed by the demon of didacticism".[35]

With A Handful of Dust, Waugh was attempting something very different from the first three novels. His friend, Christopher Hollis, saw it as a transitional novel, one in which we could believe in some of the characters, such as Tony Last, but where much was still unreal.[36] Waugh wrote to Katharine Asquith in January 1934:

> I peg away at a novel which seems to me faultless of its kind. Very difficult to write because for the first time I am trying to deal with normal people instead of eccentrics. Comic English character parts too easy when one gets to be thirty. [37]

The result was a novel that many consider his highest achievement. Carens calls it "a tour de force of irony. .... No ambivalence of attitude mars its perspective."[38] William Cook sees in it "the incipient tragedy which is present but suppressed in the previous works."[39] Sykes believes, "There are only five or six novels of the century that can seriously challenge it."[40] Of course, there were some

negative voices. Oldmeadow objected to a Catholic writing on such a disturbing subject and J. B. Priestly thought the people in the novel were not serious enough; it was time Waugh stopped writing about "the world of society light-weights".[41] Left-wing criticism, quite predictably, protested that he should write more edifying books on socially significant topics.[42]

For the first time we feel that Waugh is really identifying with one of his characters. This does not mean that he abandons his ironic view of Tony Last and sentimentalizes him. He allows himself moments of profound sympathy, it is true, in the scene where Tony berates himself for his drunkenness in London, sitting alone in his library and going alone to Brenda's room to sleep.[43] When Brenda's letter comes, asking for a divorce, Tony's grief and dismay are beautifully understated but all the more poignant: "It was several days before Tony fully realized what it meant. He had got into the habit of loving and trusting Brenda".[44]

His bizarre fate, which brings him to the depths of the Amazon jungle, where he is kept prisoner reading Dickens to a madman, is, nevertheless, to be seen as appropriate. Tony, despite his admirable qualities, does not fit into the world to which he must adapt and retreats to Hetton, to his

room full of childish trophies, hoping to avoid life. Hetton itself is not a genuine old family seat, but a Victorian Gothic monstrosity which drains his resources for its upkeep. In "Fan-Fare", Waugh stated his aim in writing A Handful of Dust. He had written the ending first, a short story entitled "The Man who liked Dickens", and he wanted to find out how the prisoner came to be there. He continued: " ... eventually the thing grew into a study of other sorts of savage at home and the civilized man's helpless plight among them".[45] The so-called happy ending, which he tacked on to please the American audience, is very much inferior. It is not consistent with the inner logic of the book and not at all convincing. Both Tony and Hetton were doomed from the start; the wild foxes being raised at the manor at the end are a fitting symbol of the savagery that, combined with Mrs. Beaver's chromium plating, will drag it down.

In "Fan-Fare", Waugh declared that his favourite novel before 1944 was A Handful of Dust. By this time he had declared himself as a serious Catholic writer and he spoke of the earlier novel as dealing "entirely with behaviour. It was humanist and contained all I had to say about humanism".[46] Judging by Tony's fate, Waugh does not seem to hold out much hope for mere humanism. Its followers may be less culpable than rogues such as Basil Seal and

exploiting women such as Brenda and Margot but their success in life is not greater; in fact they lose while the scoundrels seem to win.

Scoop, which was published in 1938, may be seen as Waugh's pleasantest novel in that very little that is truly destructive or murderous happens in it. Like Paul Pennyfeather, William Boot is whirled through a bewildering series of events and changing fortunes but at least he attains to some sort of victory and chooses to forsake the world for the only place where he feels secure - the crumbling manor at Boot Magna. If the book has a serious core, it is in its indictment of the popular press. Waugh explained:

> This novel is a light satire on modern journalism, not a schoolboy's adventure story of plot, counter-plot, capture and escape. Such incidents as provoke this misconception are extraneous to the main theme which is to expose the pretensions of foreign correspondents, popularized in countless plays, autobiographies and films to be heroes, statesmen and diplomats. ... [In Scoop] a potentially serious situation is being treated frivolously, sensationally and dishonestly by the assembled Press. [47]

Drawing on his experience in Abyssinia, Waugh knew whereof he spoke and used much that had really happened there for this novel. He also had a few weeks as an unsuccessful employee of the Daily Express to call upon. Again he was

using ridicule to condemn a kind of injustice; this book too has an element of social criticism.

The question still remains - what is there, if anything, in Waugh's novels to counter the disorder he saw all around him. Jeffrey Heath has one suggestion and what he says about Decline and Fall may be extended to all five early novels.

> But Waugh's most effective silent touchstone is his own style. The outrageous events of the novels seem even more outrageous because they are narrated in a suave and urbane prose of technical perfection. This prose is impeccable, modulated, nuanced, dandified, and it never flags or falters, thereby providing in itself a lucid and continuous model of good taste against which the events it describes are measured and found wanting. "Mildly censorious detachment" was how Waugh described his tone. 48

The use of such an impeccable style indicates an author who does have a system of values, even if he does not express them in words. Choice of words is another way in which he hints at his own values and condemns those of his characters. His good taste is obviously offended by the lack of taste, illustrated in descriptions of rooms, clothing, possessions that abound in his works. He juxtaposes events to bring out the particular kind of disorder that he is trying to evoke. He creates an effect in a few

sentences that might take Wyndham Lewis many pages of unpleasant, often cruel, imagery to produce. Where Huxley rails at the reader, Waugh merely suggests and the reader, flattered by this compliment to his good taste and intelligence, is gratified.

The system of order from within which Waugh attacks disorder all around him is not implicit in his early works. For Heath the answer is his Catholic faith, which is conspicuous by its absence here. Waugh's conversion in 1930 was an extremely important event in his life and it would hardly be surprising if he came to see all of life afterwards in a different light. When religion is mentioned in the novels of the early years, it is either ridiculed as superstition, as it is in Black Mischief, or it is shown to be rather empty as it is for Tony in A Handful of Dust. No one seems to have any real sense of faith or to see himself as the possessor of an eternal soul. This lack, Heath asserts, is what makes all their lives futile.[49] It is an interesting thesis and, given Waugh's later writing on Catholic matters, a quite feasible one.

The first five novels, then, are a satiric attack on many of the injustices Waugh saw in the world around him. He wrote them in isolation, with none of the group

commitments and political strictures that hampered many of his fellow authors. In his own way he was using his art to express social criticism but avoided the cult of the Common Man so dear to the hearts of the Pylon Poets. He believed that something should be left to the reader's intelligence and found good reason to believe, in cases like that of Oldmeadow, that he had overestimated that intelligence. Faith and good taste were evoked by their absence and the idea of the only complete man being a Christian gentleman, so important in his later works, is already implied here.

NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

1. A Little Order, p. 123.

2. Sykes, p. 166.

3. Letters, p. 109.

4. James F. Carens, The Satiric Art of Evelyn Waugh (Seattle, 1966), p. 127.

5. Letters, p. 120.

6. Sykes, p. 184.

7. Calvin W. Lane, Evelyn Waugh, (Boston, 1981), p. 53.

8. Frederick J. Stopp, Evelyn Waugh: Portrait of an Artist (London, 1958), p. 50.

9. Evelyn Waugh, "Fan-Fare", in A Little Order, p. 33.

10. Edmund Wilson,"'Never Apologize, Never Explain': The Art of Evelyn Waugh", in Classics and Commercials (New York, 1955), p. 140.

11. Ibid., p. 141.

12. Carens, p. 70.

13. Evelyn Waugh, "Too Young at Forty", in A Little Order, p. 7.

14. Evelyn Waugh, "The War and the Younger Generation", in A Little Order, p. 12.

15. Diaries, p. 202.

16. Ibid., p. 212.

17. Ibid., p. 178.

18. Letters, p. 37.

19. Evelyn Waugh, "Preface" to Vile Bodies (London, 1965), pp. 7 - 8.

20. Vile Bodies, p. 219.

21. James Hall, The Tragic Comedians (Bloomington, 1963), p. 51.

22. O'Faolain, p. 59.

23. Evelyn Waugh, "Fiction", Spectator 160, June 24, 1938, 1162.

24. Sykes, p. 99.

25. Vile Bodies, pp. 131 - 2.

26. Letters, p. 72.

27. Ibid., p. 74.

28. Ibid., p. 75.

29. Ibid., p. 76.

30. Ibid., p. 77.

31. Idem.

32. Ibid., p. 78.

33. Heath, p. 102.

34. O'Faolain, p. 50.

35. Carens, p. 70.

36. Christopher Hollis, Evelyn Waugh (London, 1954), p. 8.

37. Letters, p. 84.

38. Carens, p. 81.

39. William J. Cook, Masks, Modes and Morals: The Art of Evelyn Waugh (Rutherford, 1971), p. 143.

40. Sykes, p. 141.

41. Ibid., p. 143.

42. Idem.

43. Evelyn Waugh, A Handful of Dust, (NY, 1945), p. 102.

44. Ibid., p. 172.

45. A Little Order, p. 33.

46. Ibid., p. 34.

47. Heath, p. 124.

48. Ibid., p. 78.

49. Ibid., p. 120.

CHAPTER THREE

THE WAR YEARS AND AFTER

Too young to fight in the First World War, Waugh was considered rather old, at thirty-six, for active duty in the Second. However, he did manage to enlist in late 1939 and achieved a reputation for bravery and enthusiasm despite a marked aversion to discipline and an inability to relate to the men under his command. He had steadfastly refused to discuss the international situation in the summer of 1939, but he applied immediately for work in the Ministry of Information when war broke out. He was refused and decided that the writer's proper place was not in an office but on active duty as a private. He wrote in his diary on August 28, 1939:

> I have to consider thirty years of novel writing ahead of me. Nothing would be more likely than work in a government office to finish me as a writer; nothing more likely to stimulate me than a complete change of habit. There is a symbolic difference between fighting as a soldier and serving as a civilian, even if the civilian is more valuable. [1]

In an unpublished essay, "Writers at War", he elaborated this theme of the writer's place:

> He has no duty to glorify the cause of his rulers. He is their natural enemy. He is immune from the emotions of the crowd. But he battens on the individual lives of his fellow-men. .... Army life with its humour, surprises and loyalties, its ferocious internal dissensions and its lack of all hate for the ostensible enemy, comprises the very essence of human intercourse and in an age of scant opportunity for adventure serves to dissipate literary vapours. [2]

The short satiric novel, Put Out More Flags, was a product of the first years of the war when England waited for the real action to begin. Although there is a definite sense of idealism and patriotism, the novel also shows up the disorganization and futility of much of the war bureaucracy. In Ambrose Silk and Basil Seal we see represented the aesthete and the man of action. The conflict between the two kinds of man within Waugh himself is thus once more externalized and resolved as Ambrose Silk becomes a luxury that England can no longer afford.[3] People like Alistair Trumpington and Cedric Lyne, after lives of idleness and waste, decide to "pay their dues" and do something for their country. The shift to the side of the aristocracy is quite apparent here as Waugh credits these prople with admirable patriotic principles. Even Basil Seal decides to reform and the book ends on a note of optimism.

A diary entry on August 29, 1943, however, sounds

a very different note. Waugh wrote:

> I dislike the Army. I want to get to work again. I do not want any more experiences in life. I have quite enough bottled and carefully laid in the cellar, some still ripening, most ready for drinking, a little beginning to lose its body. I wrote to Frank [Pakenham] very early in the war to say that its chief use would be to cure artists of the illusion that they were men of action. It has worked its cure with me. I have succeeded, too, in dissociating myself very largely from the rest of the world. I am not impatient of its manifest follies and don't want to influence opinions or events, or expose humbug or anything of that kind. I don't want to be of service to anyone or anything. I simply want to do my work as an artist. [4]

Four months later he obtained leave to write Brideshead Revisited which seems, in many ways, to fulfil the aims he mentions above. Sykes says that Charles Ryder's "love affair with the army" was not Waugh's,[5] but there is evidence to believe that it was at least partly the case. The experience in Yugoslavia did little to change Waugh's negative view and the whole war experience seems to have had a deadening effect on him. He wrote to Nancy Mitford in 1950: "You still have the delicious gift of seeing people as funny which I lost somewhere in the highlands of Scotland circa 1943".[6] Heath sees the short work, Scott-King's Modern Europe, as indicative of "the mood of cynicism

and rage which settled on its author after 1945".[7] Certainly his habits of seclusion and animosity towards any intrusion on his private life became amplified from that time on.

When war was declared in 1939 Waugh was at work on a book which some believe might have become his finest achievement. He abandoned it, having completed only two chapters, which were later published as Work Suspended. It represented a radical departure from his earlier method of writing fiction. He chose to use a first person narrator for the first time and a style that was more metaphorical than before. The story had almost no action and dealt with a serious love relationship; something new in his writing. Fragment though it is, it presents us with an important insight into Waugh's view of the writer and the painter, besides indicating the direction he was to take later in his fiction.

The painter in Work Suspended is John Plant's father, a member of the Royal Academy, who produces, year after year, the same sort of narrative painting that was so popular in the middle of the previous century. Every year he has an exhibition of his work when the dry tasteless food served and the gloomy atmosphere appropriately reflect

the spirit of the occasion. Towards the end of his life, fashions in art change and he is actually in vogue. He also has a profitable little sideline - copying portraits by Old Masters which are sold mainly to Americans. He defends this dubious trade thus: "It is a great deal better for them to look at beautiful pictures and enjoy them under a misconception about the date, then to make themselves dizzy by goggling at genuine Picassos".[8] We sense a kind of ambivalence here in Waugh; he does not agree with the old artist but he does not entirely condemn him. The subject of Picasso was to loom large a few years later. He concludes that the old painter "had a historic position, for he completed a period of English painting that through other circumstances had never, until him, come to maturity".[9]

One of Waugh's greatest interests was in architecture and this is also important in Work Suspended. In February, 1938, his article, "A Call to the Orders", was published in Country Life. He considered it his best to date on such a topic.[10] In it he pointed out that modern methods of building were not withstanding the English climate and that there was a move back to older styles and materials. He hoped that the Georgian style would not, like Elizabethan half-timber, become debauched, and insisted that all details, such as columns and urns, must fit the total design. The

important consideration was respect for the classical orders - those ancient canons which were the basis of the best in Georgian architecture. Builders, he felt sure, were no longer drilled in the Orders and ought to be "until the mind was conditioned to move automatically in the golden proportions". Once this was achieved, designers could "indulge the most exuberant fancies. By studying 'the Orders'," he concluded, "you can produce Chippendale Chinese; by studying Chippendale Chinese, you will produce nothing but magazine covers".[11]

John Plant in Work Suspended is very interested in architecture as are all his generation, who, he believes, have substituted a love of buildings for that of poetry. They give to buildings the place that their fathers would have given to Nature, "to almost any building, but particularly those in the classical tradition, and, more particularly, in its decay".[12] Roger Simmonds encourages Plant to consider buying a "composed hermitage in the Chinese taste" - a monstrosity of insanely inappropriate decoration from every known Eastern source built "in a wild ignorance of oriental forms".[13] The narrator wryly comments: "It was just the house one would want someone else to have", and Lucy interjects a note of sanity with her remark, "I can't think why John should want to have a house like that".[14]

Waugh's own dislike for this sort of tasteless architecture is very clear here, a reflection of his belief in the importance of classical proportions and coherent over-all design. It is of a piece with his condemnation of Otto Silenus' hideous structure at Kings Thursday in Decline and Fall. Both it and the "composed hermitage" sin against the "golden proportions".

At this time, Waugh's taste for things Victorian was rapidly developing, especially his love of narrative painting by such artists as Augustus Egg. His dislike for modern artists, on the other hand, became more and more pronounced. In Brideshead Revisited, Cordelia asks Charles if this modern art is "all bosh" and he replies, unhesitatingly, "Great bosh".[15] A fuller statement of Waugh's real opinions comes out in the controversy inspired by the opening of an exhibition of Picasso and Matisse at the Victoria and Albert Museum in December, 1945. In a letter to the Editor of the Times, Waugh explains why Picasso is so popular. The terms used by his admirers to praise his paintings are much like the kind of thing the fans of an American crooner mean when they say, "he sends me". Modern art, he continues,

> whether it is Nazi oratory, band leadership, or painting, aims at a mesmeric trick and achieves either total success or total failure.

> The large number of otherwise cultured and intelligent people who fall victims to Señor Picasso are not posers. They are genuinely "sent". It may seem preposterous to those who are immune, but the process is apparently harmless. They emerge from their ecstacy as cultured and intelligent as ever. We may even envy them their experience. But do not let us confuse it with the sober and elevating happiness which we derive from the great masters. 16

Writing to Robin Campbell, nine days later, he qualified this statement. He referred to a letter to the Times by a Mr. Hobson, who claimed that the exhibition "dazed" him and that it left him hardly able to bear to look at great works of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Hobson was wrong to think this was purgation, because purgation would have sharpened his perceptions. "An experience which dazes and leaves one blind to other beauties must be brutish", he decided, so the excitement may not be so harmless as he had thought.

The hit-or-miss quality of Picasso's work was one major objection; another arose out of its supposed content. His "addicts" claimed that "his message is one of Chaos and Despair". Waugh objected that this was not the message of art. "If it were, any issue of the Daily Mirror would be a supreme aesthetic achievement". Picasso failed then in content; he also failed in communication

because his work was hit-or-miss. "The only criticisms valid for him are: 'Ooh, doesn't it make you feel funny inside' or 'the fellow's a charlatan'".[17] The youthful enthusiasm that spoke of Picasso as the culmination of all that had preceded him and of his "pellucid excellencies" had quite disappeared in a complete reversal of artistic opinion. Waugh retained this attitude towards modern art for the rest of his life.

The protagonist of Brideshead Revisited is also a painter and, in Charles Ryder, we find embodied some of Waugh's most important notions about the artist. Ryder is obviously not a great painter He produces competent pictures of stately homes, often just before they are demolished. His three splendid folios are very successful. As he says, "I seldom failed to please, for there was no conflict between myself and my patrons; we both wanted the same thing".[18] He feels, however, that something is missing. He seeks it in the wilds of Latin America and his exhibition, on returning to London, seems to be a huge success. The critics ecstatically announce that "Mr. Ryder has at last found himself" but he knows that they are wrong.[19]

It is with respect to Ryder's art that Anthony Blanche assumes his importance in the novel, a significance

often missed by those who see him merely as comic relief in a somewhat sombre tale. Despite his brief appearances, he is an influential figure, both to Charles and to his Oxford friends. Without Blanche, his set broke up "and became a bare dozen lethargic, adolescent Englishmen" needing his presence to single them out from the crowd and make them unique.[20] Early in the story he warns Charles against the fatal charm of the Flytes - a charm which can strangle his career as an artist. He follows Charles' career, hoping that he will do something really good and, hearing of the Latin American show, he arrives in great excitement to view the pictures. He pronounces his verdict:

> and what did I find? I found, my dear, a very naughty and very successful practical joke. It reminded me of dear Sebastian when he liked so much to dress up in false whiskers. It was charm again, my dear, simple creamy English charm, playing tigers. ...Charm ....spots and kills anything it touches. It kills love; it kills art; I greatly fear, my dear Charles, it has killed you. [21]

Charles entirely agrees and there is no further mention of attempts to paint the homes of the aristocracy. He says "I needed this voice from the past to recall me",[22] and he heeds what it says, recognizing its essential truth.

Anthony Blanche's opinion may be seen as the

criticism of the judicious aesthete and Waugh agrees with it, as far as it goes. There is another level of criticism, however, that is not comprehended in the aesthete's judgement. This is the one, ultimately, that decides the real worth of Ryder's paintings and shows why they are not great art.

In his biography of Rossetti, Waugh proclaimed that the painter had not achieved greatness because of a spiritual inadequacy, a lack of the essential rectitude that underlies the serenity of great art. The great works, such as "Beata Beatrix", were only possible because he had managed somehow to transcend his normal state. With Charles Ryder we find something of the same thing. He has his moments of inspiration, such as that afternoon in Marchmain House when he can do no wrong, and he feels the brush take life in his hand and he becomes, for a brief time, "a man of the Renaissance".[23] He continues to paint English mansions and his work attracts more praise than it deserves even though it has "nothing to reccommend it except my growing technical skill, enthusiasm for my subject and independence of popular notions". However, he misses what he had felt at Marchmain House, "the intensity and singleness and the belief that it was not all done by hand - in a word, the inspiration".[24]

Ryder's real problem, one that was to appear very often in Waugh's later fiction, is his neglect of his spiritual development. He does not see that, as a creature of God with an immortal soul, he must use his talent to praise his Creator, not just to glorify man-made objects which have been his sole concern. What Blanche sees as mere "charm" and not great art may also be seen as the absence of a spiritual dimension, of the sense of the work of art as an offering and a hymn of praise to God. As Heath puts it, both Rossetti and Ryder represent "the best that art can do without religion".[25] It is significant, in the latter's case, that he seems to have given up art after his conversion to Catholicism.

Waugh's own conversion in 1930, at the age of twenty-seven, must be seen as a major event in his life, one that profoundly affected his views from then on. He wrote about it in an article in the Daily Express in October, 1930, and there maintained that the real issue of the day was not a choice between Catholicism and Protestantism but one "between Christianity and Chaos". In the time of Gibbon, he believed, one could "accept the benefits of civilization and at the same time deny the supernatural basis upon which it rests". There would no longer be a place for the polite sceptic nor for "that purely fictitious fig-

ure, the happy hedonist". Of the Christian religions only the Catholic Church had the necessary coherent and consistent teachings, the competent organization and discipline, and the universality to combat the chaos that threatened the world order.[26]

Although this world view may be seen behind all the novels of the thirties, where lack of faith and a spiritual dimension made life seem chaotic and futile, it was not until the publication of Brideshead Revisited that Waugh seriously suggested a way out of the impasse. When he wrote it, this was his favourite book and on it he lavished all his enthusiasm and nostalgia for that lost era of the twenties. Writing during the dark days of the war, he maintained that it was a worthwhile service at such a time to provide entertainment, as well as propaganda, in a written work. He also believed he should be given leave to write it because the idea of the book was ripe for development and must be written now before it deteriorated.[27]

From its inception, Brideshead Revisited was very important to its author. To his publisher, A.D. Peters, he wrote in February, 1944, "It would have a small public at any time. I should not think six Americans will understand it. .... I should like this book to be in decent form

because it is very good".[28] He was in Yugoslavia when it was published and his anxiety about it is reflected in a letter to his wife. She had written that Eddie Grant liked Brideshead. He replied: "Can you not see how it disappoints me that this book which I regard as my first important one, and have dedicated to you, should have no comment except that Eddie is pleased with it".[29] In "Fan-Fare" he admitted that he thought it his best book to date.

The critical world was sharply split on the question of the merits of Brideshead Revisited. Some of its members would say that it is his greatest achievement.[30] For others, such as Edmund Wilson, it was a regrettable lapse into snobbery and sentimentality at the expense of objectivity. It certainly surprised its author by being a best-seller in America despite his earlier predictions. It cost Waugh his place among the critical elite, however; in a 1959 preface he wrote that it had "lost me such esteem as I once enjoyed among my contemporaries".[31] His biographer maintains that Waugh was disappointed by the desertion of the intelligensia. What made it worse was that he came to dislike the novel himself.

Without meaning to, Waugh had written a novel which appealed to a vast audience that had hitherto been

quite untouched by his work. He expressed his uneasiness in a letter to Robert Henriques in February, 1946: "I am delighted that you liked Brideshead. I was pleased with it at the time but I have been greatly shaken by its popularity in U.S.A."[32] He responded to the flood of letters from readers in America by composing "Fan-Fare" for Life in 1946, writing it, he told his publisher, "expressly for the American lower-middle-classes".[33] The tone of the article suggests that these were not the people he most wanted to impress. His anti-American sentiments were most virulently and rudely expressed on one occasion when an American woman told him that she had enjoyed Brideshead so much. He replied: "Oh, did you? I thought it was a good book but if a common boring American woman like you says it's good, it must be very bad".[34] The fact that the Hollywood producers, who proposed to make a film of the book, were only interested in the love story aspect and completely missed the more complex religious matter, probably embittered him even more.[35] It is not surprising that the book had no sequel; Waugh had had all he wanted of undiscriminating popular acclaim.

Quite predictably the leftist element among the literary critics condemned Brideshead Revisited for the kind of society portrayed in it - the haunts of the rich. Its

treatment of Hooper in the Prologue and Epilogue was nothing short of blasphemous to these champions of the workers of the world. This kind of opinion had little effect on Waugh. As he explained in "Fan-Fare" on the question of snobbery in his novels: "I reserve the right to deal with the kind of people I know best".[36] In a letter in May, 1945, to Ronald Knox he explained:

> The sad thing is that "Metroland" is my world that I have grown up in & I don't know any other except at second hand or at a great distance. It would be as false for me to write about Maurice's world as when Thomas Hardy tried London drawing rooms & Virginia Woolf successful business men. [37]

Most readers would agree that a novelist must indeed write about the kind of society he knows at first hand because only then can he achieve a valid and convincing picture. However, other classes must be handled in at least a neutral fashion, and James Carens is not alone, surely, in protesting, much as he admires Waugh's work, that Hooper has a soul too, just as valuable in God's eyes as Lord Marchmain's.[38] Waugh had praised the Catholic Church in 1930 because it welcomed people from all classes; this was one of his adopted faith's virtues which he failed to make his own.

In the main theme of Brideshead Revisited, Waugh was enunciating what was for him the most important concern of all - the conflict between the will of God and the will of man. Most of its major characters - Ryder, Sebastian, Julia, Lord Marchmain - strenuously oppose God's will and try to direct their own lives without his help. Although many see it as a purely Catholic treatise, convincing only to believers, a case can be made for it as taking in a much wider area than the Roman Catholic community. O'Faolain believes it could have been written by "a fervent Congregationalist",[39] and William Cook maintains that the "twitch upon the thread" becomes "a universal need for 'divine guidance' in its fullest implication".[40] This opinion is certainly in line with the belief expressed in the Daily Express in 1930 where Waugh saw the real conflict as one between Christianity and Chaos. Writing, as he was, of Catholicism in a predominantly Protestant country, it was perhaps inevitable that many would be reminded of historic religious differences in England and lose sight of the larger issue. For Waugh it remained the important one and he saw his responsibility as an artist to make others aware of it.

The short works, Scott-King's Modern Europe (1947) and Love Among the Ruins (1953) indicate an author greatly

at odds with his times. The drab new world of post-war England and Europe held little that attracted him and he expressed his dislike of socialism, psychology, penal reform, modern education and other issues in a style that bordered on invective. Gone was the light touch and ambiguity of the early novels. He wrote in his diary in November, 1946, "The French called the occupying German army 'the grey lice'. That is precisely how I regard the occupying army of English socialist government".[41] He stubbornly resisted the trends of the day. As he explained to Julian Jebb in an interview in the Paris Review:

> An artist must be a reactionary. He has to stand out against the tenor of his age and not go flopping along; he must offer some little opposition. Even the great Victorian artists were all anti-Victorian, despite the pressures to conform.[42]

The two short works express most clearly this contempt for the English politics and the times. Although both works contain funny passages and sometimes express cogent opinions, the over-all effect is one of flagging creative powers and the loss of objectivity and of a saving sense of humour. The stubborn refusal of the author to see anything good in his world makes them gloomy reading.

Between these two books, however, came one of un-

questionable merit which proved that Waugh had not lost his old vigour. When he was at Lancing he had formed a Corpse Club "of those who were weary of life".[43] An attempted suicide at twenty-one and some rather foolhardy behaviour during the war show that he was no stranger to the idea of death. On a visit to California in 1946 he was introduced to Forest Lawn Cemetery and recognized in it "a deep mine of literary gold".[44] His imagination became completely engrossed; he wrote to A. D. Peters in March, 1947: "It is an entirely unique place - the only thing in California that is not a copy of something else. .... Morticians are the only people worth knowing".[45] In a letter to Cyril Connolly in 1948, he explained why he had written The Loved One.

> The ideas I had in mind in writing were: 1st and quite predominantly over excitement with the scene of Forest Lawn. 2nd the Anglo-American impasse - "never the twain shall meet", 3rd there is no such thing as an American. They are all exiles uprooted transplanted & doomed to sterility. The ancestral gods they have abjured get them in the end. I tried to indicate this in Aimee's last hours. 4th the European raiders who come for the spoils & if they are lucky make for home with them. 5th Memento mori, old style, not specifically Californian. [46]

Here, and in an article published in the Tablet, entitled "Half in Love with Easful Death", Waugh elaborated on what

Forest Lawn meant to him. The article shows that even the most bizarre details in the description of Whispering Glades are not an exaggeration of the original. It expresses, in an amused, sardonic manner, the author's feelings about the travesty of death perpetuated at Forest Lawn; The Loved One is a savage condemnation of the same subject full of the blackest humour in Waugh's fiction.

The writer's Catholicism is always in the background of this short novel as it explores the wastes of southern California and denounces the "bogus" world he found there. As in his early works, every aspect of that world comes under attack and his antipathy towards both the British expatriates and the undiscriminating Americans is equally strong. Dennis Barlow moves through its landscape as a kind of Fortune figure, dealing with both groups and clearly, in Waugh's opinion, treating them as they deserve to be treated. He escapes the fate of Sir Francis Hinsley when he severs his ties with Megalopolitan Studios and does not scruple to take money from the expatriates when he leaves. He cooly takes advantage of Mr. Joyboy, even if it does mean an undignified end for his dearly beloved Aimée in the pet cemetery's crematorium. He is an artist and he now has material which he can use for future creative endeavour. Waugh concludes that Dennis was leaving a place

where many like him had come to grief, and

> was adding his bit to the wreckage, something that had long irked him, his young heart, and was carrying back instead the artist's load, a great shapeless chunk of experience; bearing it home to his ancient and comfortless shore, to work on it hard and long, for God knew how long. For that moment of vision, a lifetime is often too short. [47]

Despite the despair, prevailing throughout the novel, there is some hope in this rather ambiguous ending. Dennis has the instincts of a true artist who, in Waugh's belief, gives an orderly shape to chaotic material. The mention of God here may be a hint that Dennis, like Charles Ryder, may yet find his way through this earthly experience to an understanding of the artist's true role - to praise his maker.

The forties, then, were a time of great upheaval and change in Waugh's life and in his writing. The patriotism of Put Out More Flags disappears in the nostalgia and escapism of Brideshead Revisited. The latter enunciates his serious concern that the artist be a man with his eye fixed on his eternal destiny and with the intention of using his talents to glorify God. The duty to be a reactionary comes out in Scott-King's Modern Europe and Love Among the Ruins. In The Loved One explicit Catholicism returns to the background and the short novel can be enjoyed without

a knowledge of, or sympathy with, the author's religious views. They do, however, add a most important dimension to the work. The war had convinced Waugh that he was not a man of action but it had also led him to reject the world of the aesthete in Ambrose Silk. What remained for him were his faith, his work and his family. They were to preoccupy him for his remaining years.

NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

1. Diaries, p. 438.

2. Stopp, p. 39.

3. Heath, p. 155.

4. Diaries, p. 548.

5. Sykes, p. 200.

6. Letters, p. 348.

7. Heath, p, 184.

8. Evelyn Waugh, Work Suspended (London, 1950), p. 150.

9. Ibid., p. 165.

10. A Little Order, p. 60.

11. Evelyn Waugh, "A Call to Orders", in A Little Order, p. 64.

12. Work Suspended, p. 184.

13. Ibid., p. 209.

14. Ibid., p. 185.

15. Evelyn Waugh, Brideshead Revisited (Boston, 1954), p. 152.

16. Letters, p. 214.

17. Idem.

18. Brideshead, p. 227.

19. Ibid., p. 229.

20. Ibid., p. 108.

21. Ibid., p. 273.

22. Ibid., p. 270.

23. Ibid., p. 222.

24. Ibid., p. 227.

25. Heath, p. 172.

26. Evelyn Waugh, "Converted to Rome: Why it Happened to Me", Daily Express, 20 October, 1930, 10.

27. Diaries, p. 557.

28. Letters, p. 177.

29. Ibid., p. 195.

30. These are mainly Catholic critics such as A.A. De Vitis, Roman Holiday: The Catholic Novels of Evelyn Waugh (London, 1958), p, 42. Kurt F. Reinhardt, The Theological Novel of Modern Europe (NY, 1969), p. 216. Christopher Hollis, Evelyn Waugh (London, 1954), p. 21. William J. Grace, "Evelyn Waugh as a Social Critic", Renascence I, Spring 1949, 35.

31. Sykes, p. 258.

32. Letters, p. 222.

33. Heath, p. 48.

34. Ibid., p. 52.

35. Diaries, p. 673.

36. A Little Order, p. 34.

37. Letters, p. 206.

38. Carens, p. 108.

39. O'Faolain, p. 63.

40. Cook, p. 234.

41. Diaries, p. 663.

42. Evelyn Waugh, "The Art of Fiction", Paris Review vol VIII, no. 30, Summer-Fall, 1963, 84.

43. A Little Learning, p. 138.

44. Diaries, p. 675.

45. Letters, p. 247.

46. Ibid., pp. 265 - 6.

47. Evelyn Waugh, The Loved One (London, 1948), p. 144.

CHAPTER FOUR

MATURE VIEWPOINTS

The last fifteen years of Evelyn Waugh's life were spent mainly at his home, Piers Court, near Stinchcombe, Gloucestershire, and, after 1956, at Combe Florey, near Taunton, Somerset. As he moved farther away from London, he also became increasingly reclusive to the point where, in September, 1963, he could write in his diary: "It was fun thirty-five years ago to travel far and in great discomfort to meet people whose entire conception of life and manner of expression were alien. Now one has only to leave one's gates".[1] He managed to avoid the worst of the English winter by going abroad to warmer climes, expeditions financed by newspapers in return for travel articles. His literary output included Helena, The Ordeal of Gifford Pinfold, and the Sword of Honour trilogy, bearing witness to undiminished creative power. However, as with Sebastian in Brideshead Revisited, "the shadows were closing"[2] around him, and his mental and physical health deteriorated rapidly. In a letter to Anne Fleming, in January, 1966, he quoted, from Father Hubert van Zeller, a passage that expressed "beautifully" how he felt. "Dying is just growing up. I am not unhappy. I just do not like much being alive".[3] He died three months later.

In 1944, Waugh had written in his diary, "English writers, at forty, either set about prophesying or acquiring a style. Thank God I think I am beginning to acquire a style".[4] This question of style was very important to him; it is discussed at length in an essay written for Books on Trial in October, 1955 - "Literary Style in England and America". Here Waugh outlined his beliefs about the importance of style to the writer, not as "a seductive decoration added to a functional structure" but "of the essence of a work of art". In writing, style "is what distinguishes literature from trash". The three necessary elements of style, he believed, were lucidity, elegance and individuality; "these three qualities combine to form a preservative which ensures the nearest approximation to permanence in the fugitive art of letters."

One judges the lucidity of a statement by asking whether it "can be read as meaning anything other than it intends". Without lucidity there is a failure to communicate. James Joyce was guilty of this in Waugh's eyes; so was Gertrude Stein, whom he designated in another essay as "the first writer of absolute gibberish".[5] A lucid style need not be simple: Henry James was a case in point.

A work of art has elegance when it "imparts pure

pleasure". This was a quality sadly lacking among Waugh's contemporaries. Because they had a small vocabulary, the majority of readers were suspicious of any word not in vulgar use and, "in ignoble deference to their susceptibilities .... there has been a notable flight from magnificence in English writing". Perhaps the only consolation lay in the fact that the "modern school of critics are unable or unwilling to compose a pleasurable sentence. It greatly limits the harm they do".

Individuality did not need explaining and, combined with the other two, made for a permanence that endured even after what was said was proven wrong. The false judgements of Gibbon, Voltaire and Lytton Strachy remain with us because they come to the reader "not merely as printed words but as a lively experience, with the full force of another human being encountered". He named some contemporary masters of style - Osbert Sitwell, Winston Churchill, Ronald Knox, Max Beerbohm. He praised Hemingway but dismissed Faulkner as having individuality but nothing else. He saw a knowledge of Latin as necessary to acquire "a basic sense of the structure of language". English boys learned Latin at school but most Americans did not.

He concluded by saying that the writer must interest

himself in improving his style for his own sake to keep from becoming bored with his work. High spirits carry the young man along but only for a while.

> Later the writer must face the choice of becoming an artist or a prophet. He can shut himself up at his desk and selfishly seek pleasure in perfecting his own skill or he can pace about, dictating dooms and exhortations on the topics of the day. The recluse at the desk has a bare chance of giving abiding pleasure to others; the publicist has none at all. [6]

There can be little doubt about which of these alternatives Waugh chose for himself.

The idea of "giving abiding pleasure" was central to Waugh's view of his role as an artist. For him this was best accomplished through being a master craftsman who strove to perfect his use of the writer's principle resource - his language. He told Julian Jebb, in the Paris Review interview of 1963, that he saw writing, not as a study of character, "but as an exercise in the use of language" which obsessed him. He added, "I have no technical psychological interest. It is drama, speech and events that interest me".[7] Much of his criticism of other authors was of their use of language; he saw few who could manage it properly. Of Stephen Spender's World Within World, he wrote that to see

this writer "fumbling with our rich and delicate language is to experience all the horror of seeing a Sèvres vase in the hands of a chimpanzee".[8] He extolled Angus Wilson's Old Men at the Zoo as a great technical achievement. He wrote to the Editor of the Spectator: "There are not so many master craftsmen among the post-war novelists that we can afford to neglect them".[9]

The writer as craftsman should not, according to Waugh, have to explain himself; his own life should be quite private. As Stopp puts it:

> .... the writer is a man who has set up to sell the products of his craftsmanship in writing the English language; all other aspects of his life are as inviolate as if he were selling boots, and his opinions on matters far removed from the technicalities of the trade are unimportant. [10]

Stopp quotes Waugh as saying that, reading a master writer, "one has the same delight as in watching a first-class cabinet maker cutting dovetails; in the days of bakelite this is a bewitching experience".[11] He clearly despaired of his age, which he saw as one of vanishing standards. "This is the century of the common man," he wrote. "Let him write as he speaks and let him speak as he pleases".[12]

The emphasis on the need for privacy led to one of Waugh's major complaints about the literary criticism of the day. In July 1953, he wrote a reply to the various reviews of Love Among the Ruins that had appeared in the newspapers and magazines. He saw a regrettable fall in standards. He wrote:

> Where the reviewers of even the well-mannered papers seem to have deteriorated, in a way my father would have thought intolerable, is in their tendency to write about the author, rather than the book, and in assuming a personal intimacy with him which in fact they do not enjoy. [13]

Of the young lady in the New Statesman who questioned his religious faith and compassion for the poor, he said: "No doubt she has no conception of the deadliness of her accusation. If at all true it would be a matter for my confessor and not for her".[14] He had nothing but scorn for the Beaverbrook press. The reviewer for the Evening Standard imputed Waugh's hypothetical feelings of inferiority to his short stature. Waugh wonders how the reviewer knows this. "Has he seen me tripping about Shoe Lane on stilts? Has he held an eye to the keyhole of a gymnasium while I was engaged in stretching exercises?"[15] These intrusions into his private life were as brusquely countered as was the attempt of Nancy Spain and Lord Noel-Buxton to physically invade his home at Piers Court.

Although he granted several interviews to the BBC and others Waugh had a lifelong suspicion of journalists and interviewers. He wrote to Nancy Mitford in October, 1951, concerning a proposed profile of himself that Cyril Connolly wanted to do for Time magazine. To Waugh, such a profile "always means a collection of damaging lies. He approached me obsequiously with a series of fatuous psycho-analytical questions - did I suffer from jealousy because my father loved him [Alec] more than me. That sort of rot".[16] To Nancy Mitford he wrote again, in July 1955, on the same subject:

> I find about journalists that even when one has been hospitable to them and quite liked them and thought they quite liked one, they invariably put some awful statement in one's mouth. Politicians have to face the risk because they live on popular votes, but for novelists it would not affect the sale of a single copy if we were never mentioned in the Beaverbrook press. The editors know this and it riles them. [17]

Clearly then, the writer should avoid journalists; it was no part of his role to cater to their vagaries. The extent of Waugh's dislike is evident in the fact that he imagined, during his breakdown in 1954, that he was being persecuted by a BBC interviewer.

For Waugh, journalists were not the only source of irritation. He seems to have found it very difficult to deal with his fellow man in general. He wrote in his diary in November, 1955, "Resolved to regard humankind with benevolence and detachment, like an elderly host whose young and indulged wife has asked a lot of people to the house whose names he does not know".[18] Despite such good intentions, there are many instances recorded where he failed in "benevolence and detachment". He had no patience with those people who did not observe the niceties of civilized intercourse which he considered essential. His neighbour and fond admirer, Frances Donaldson, felt sure that she and her husband would never have been invited again to Piers Court if they had not arrived in evening dress the first time they went there.[19] She believes that Waugh really yearned for human company but, because of his eccentric habits and rules, he cut himself off from nine tenths of the interesting people whom he might have enjoyed. His inability to spend more than a few hours with other people without being bored worsened, and the move to Combe Florey, farther away from his friends and London, marks, for Mrs. Donaldson, the end of the happy times.[20]

As he grew older, Waugh lost touch with what was current in the literary world. He remarked in a letter to

David Wright in August, 1960, that he had read Wright's recent article on young authors and found most of the names wholly unfamiliar to him. He did not, however, think that this was a bad thing in the older writer. He continued:

> There are flibbertigibbets who in middle age attend international cultural congresses and busy themselves with the latest fashions. Few of them are notable for their literary production. A writer should have found his metier before he is 50. After that he reads only for pleasure; not for curiosity about what others are doing. Please do not interpret this as scorn or jealousy of the young. It is simply that their tastes and achievements are irrelevant to his work. [21]

Since David Wright had mentioned the "predicament" of the younger writer, Waugh went on to describe the position of the elderly one. Usually a man with a family, the older man had to earn a certain amount; need often led him to write for the popular papers. These paid twenty times as much as did papers of small circulation but the work was "mutilated by sub-editors and scrawled over with inappropriate titles".[22] When he wanted to express an opinion on a general topic that interested him, the older author wrote to the Times. He would submit reviews of books to "one of the weekly papers which is read by his friends and acquaintances because it is they primarily with whom he

wishes to communicate."[23] He closed the letter with a suggestion that Mr. Wright was not interested in his opinions but wanted the name of a well-known writer on the cover of his literary magazine to attract more readers.

Certainly the need to earn more and more money was always with Waugh as his family grew and as income tax took away great chunks of his earnings. He was constantly on the lookout for libellous statements about him in the press that might give him grounds for sueing those responsible. His most successful foray into the law courts netted him five thousand pounds in the case against Nancy Spain and the Daily Express. Being tax free, this was a substantial triumph for Waugh. His astuteness in money matters is also apparent in a letter to Nancy Mitford in October, 1962, telling her to have her letters saved. He wrote, "There is a nice nest egg for us all in our senility in our correspondence. American Universities are buying them at extravagant prices".[24] The artist, then, must be a man of practical affairs as well, and ensure his financial security even when it meant intrusion on that precious privacy that he fought so hard to maintain.

Waugh's interest in painting continued. He considered the narrative picture school, founded by Hogarth,

to be the only indigenous British school of painting.[25] He admired the works of Frith, Holman Hunt and Augustus Egg and his collection of pictures grew. In an essay in 1956, he maintained that the great masters had always tried to represent what they saw in a more or less realistic manner. The perfection of photography had led to the rejection of verisimilitude in painting because it was felt that a photographer, with no effort or talent, could produce a realistic picture. Non-representational art had come to the fore and, in Waugh's mind, was generally quite worthless. A new Ruskin was needed to demand some standards:

> First, that the painter must represent visual objects. Anatomy and perspective must be laboriously learned and conscientiously practised. That is the elementary grammar of communication. Secondly, that by composition, the choice and arrangement of his visual objects, he must charm, amuse, instruct, edify, awe his fellow men, according as his idiosyncracy directs. Verisimilitude is not enough, but it is the prerequisite. That is the lesson of the photographer's and the abstractionist's failure. [26]

His artistic creed is very much like his literary code in that it stresses the need for communication. He faulted both Gertrude Stein and Picasso on this score and lamented the fact that the latter had succeeded in the "final attack on the visual arts".[27]

In a letter to the Times, in July 1954, Waugh referred to another question - who should support the artist? He declared that the secretary general of the Arts Council "seems, no doubt unwittingly, to suggest that a young person who sets himself up as an artist imposes a moral obligation on society similar to that owed to an aged pauper or a lunatic".[28] In an earlier article, in 1943, Waugh had pointed out the benefits of aristocratic patronage for the artist, both painter and writer. He expressed doubt that "support by the people or by enlightened groups acting in its name can ever replace the patronage of the enlightened individual".[29] He doubted the likelihood of the majority ever taking an interest in real art. He pointed out, in a reply to J. B. Priestly in 1957, that the leftist literary campaign to bring culture to the masses was a failure. "When they feel the need for a little aesthetic pleasure", he wrote, "they do not queue at the nearest experimental theatre; they pile into charabancs and tramp around the nearest collection of heirlooms and family portraits".[30] Clearly then, for Waugh, public support of the artist was not the answer; the Arts Council would be more effective if it encouraged artists to produce, as in earlier times, "works ranging from vast monuments to tiny ornaments which continue to give abiding and unceasing pleasure".[31]

Of all his novels, Waugh's favourite was Helena, which was published in 1950. It was one of his greatest disappointments that it was so coldly received both in England and America. As Sykes puts it, Waugh thought it was his finest work, "combining good construction, permissable invention, grasp of the period dealt with and authorities upon it, in a satisfying work of fiction".[32] However, few would agree with him. It is a very short work in which to deal with a very large topic - the times in which St. Helen lived. The character of Helena herself is not satisfactory but seems to be used, as De Vitis points out, "merely as an excuse for Waugh to portray his theme of divine grace making itself apparent in the real world despite the pettiness and absurdities of men".[33] The character remains shadowy and inconsistent. Constantine as an example of power without grace is effective, but as a character he is also unsatisfactory.

Waugh makes a point about literary style in Helena that is echoed later in his essay on literary style in England and America. Helena, in the presence of a pet monkey, questions Lactantius about his fellow Christians and asks him why he fled Nicomedia and possible martyrdom. He replies:

> "It needs a special quality to be a martyr - just as it needs a special quality to be a writer. Mine is the humbler role, but one must not think it quite valueless. One might combine two proverbs and say: 'Art is long and will prevail'. You see it is equally possible to give the right form to the wrong thing, and the wrong form to the right thing. Suppose that in years to come, when the Church's troubles seem to be over, there should come an apostate of my own trade, a false historian, with the mind of Cicero or Tacitus and the soul of an animal," and he nodded toward the gibbon who fretted his golden chain and chattered for fruit. "A man like that might make it his business to write down the martyrs and excuse the persecutors. He might be refuted again and again but what he wrote would remain in people's minds when the refutations were quite forgotten. That is what style does - it has the Egyptian secret of the embalmers. It is not to be despised." 34

Sykes deplores the pun contained within this passage, and we are inclined to agree that it rather obvious, but the idea that style can be used for wrong purposes is important. Certainly Waugh thought he was using his own gift for good in this novel and the book's failure was necessarily a disappointment.

Waugh always maintained that his work was something quite exterior to himself and emphasized the need for objectivity in the writing of fiction. Of course one can make a case for finding facets of the author in most of his novels but in The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold we find a very

detailed self-portrait. The book is a revelation to any reader who might believe that Waugh did not know himself or realize how he appeared to others. He was very open in admitting that the book was autobiographical, referring to it as an account "of my going off my rocker".[36] Frances Donaldson reports that on his first night home, after the harrowing experience described in the novel, he regaled them with a lively account of his late lunacy and "quite clearly regarded his misadventures as outrageously funny".[37] This attitude of looking at life as a source of material for his art was one that prevailed throughout his lifetime. His love of gossip, the more bizarre the better, was another aspect of this search for material. He felt very fortunate that he now had an experience of insanity that he could make into a novel.

Gilbert Pinfold is like his creator in many ways. He is a craftsman regarding his books as external to himself and has nothing to say when writers of theses on his works ask him for assistance. He abhors most things modern - plastics, jazz, sun-bathing. His religion enables him "only to temper his disgust and change it to boredom".[38] Waugh felt much the same. He once told Nancy Mitford, who had reproached him, as a Catholic and a Christian, for cruelty to a young admirer: "You have no idea how much

nastier I would be if I was not a Catholic. Without supernatural aid I would hardly be a human being".[39] Like Waugh, Pinfold looked at the world sub specie aeternitatis and found it quite flat except when personal annoyance intruded, caused by "a bad bottle of wine, an impertinent stranger, or a fault in syntax".[40]

Waugh admits, through his portrait of Pinfold, to his creation of a character of burlesque for himself, a mask to wear before the public which was "a combination of eccentric don and testy colonel".[41] He admitted also that his eccentric ways now annoyed other people but he was too old to change. Pinfold also has moments of guilt over his treatment of his mother and asks a question that must often have occurred to Waugh: "Why does everyone except me find it so easy to be nice?".[42] Pinfold cares little what the village or neighbours say about him, accepting his rather unpleasant reputation as part of the price of his privacy.[43] He admits that he has no social conscience but he believes that his love of family and friends, his basic kindliness to people who do not annoy him, and his patriotism are sufficient.

The first part of The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold is, then, a fascinating glance into the personality of its

author and shows that Waugh was able to see himself as he appeared to others and to criticize that self - in the interests of his art. In his descriptions of his adventures on the boat he does not hesitate to depict his own absurd behaviour. For him, as for Gilbert Pinfold and Dennis Barlow of The Loved One, his disturbing experience had yielded up "a hamper to be unpacked of fresh rich experiences - perishable goods".[44]

This account of his breakdown came in between the publication of the second and third volumes of the Sword of Honour trilogy. The first of these, Men at Arms, appeared in 1952, the second, Officers and Gentlemen, was published in 1955. The trilogy was completed in 1962 with Unconditional Surrender. David Lodge accords great merit to the last major work.

> Sword of Honour has gradually won recognition as the most distinguished British novel to come out of World War II: no other work has approached its grasp of the multiple ironies - some absurd, some tragic - of that war. [45]

In its protagonist, Guy Crouchback, we witness the progress from romantic illusion, through repeated disillusion and disappointment, to a final realization that "quantitative judgements don't apply". He learns that one unselfish act

performed without compulsion or hope of reward can restore to him the sense of wholeness and vitality that he has been lacking for so many years.

Waugh told Julian Jebb in the Paris Review interview what he had tried to express in writing the trilogy. "I imply that there is a moral purpose, a chance of salvation in every life".[46] In Guy's father we find for the first time in Waugh's fiction a complete man - the Christian gentleman. To Frederick Stopp, Waugh explained the elder Crouchback's function in the work:

> to keep audible a steady undertone of the decencies and the true purposes of life behind the chaos of events and fantastic characters. Also to show him as a typical victim (parallel to the train-loads going to the concentration camps) in the war against the Modern Age. [47]

The old man is always in the background reminding Guy of what he should be doing and quietly giving of himself in this time of national upheaval. His religious faith comes before all else, and he is willing to see his name die out rather than have Guy marry outside the Church. His piety is deep and comforting and his example leads his son to find real peace, the reconciliation of his soul with God, which is the only peace that Waugh valued.

A BBC interviewer, in February, 1964, asked Waugh if he regarded his life's work as over. He replied, "I wish I could say so....writers have to go on until they drop".[48] As early as 1958 he had begun to dread the time when he could no longer do original work. He told Jack MacDougall then that he probably had only a year or two of writing novels left and must not waste time on hack-work. He continued: "Soon I shall have to jump at every chance of writing the history of insurance companies or prefaces to school textbooks".[49] Fortunately, he was not reduced to these expedients. He finished the first volume of his autobiography, A Little Learning, in 1964, and was working on a second, to be entitled A Little Hope, when he died in 1966.

NOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR

1. Diaries, p. 791.

2. Brideshead, p. 140.

3. Letters, p. 636.

4. Diaries, p. 560.

5. Stopp, p. 54.

6. Evelyn Waugh, "Literary Style in England and America", A Little Order, pp. 106 - 110.

7. Paris Review, p. 79.

8. Evelyn Waugh, "World Within World", A Little Order, p. 91.

9. Letters, p. 574.

10. Stopp, p. 51.

11. Idem.

12. Ibid., p. 53.

13. Evelyn Waugh, "Mr. Waugh Replies", Spectator 191, 3 July 1953, 24.

14. Idem.

15. Idem.

16. Letters, p. 358.

17. Ibid., p. 447.

18. Diaries, p. 747.

19. Francis Donaldson, Evelyn Waugh: Portrait of a Country Neighbour (London, 1968), p. 6.

20. Ibid., p. 78.

21. Letters, p. 536.

22. Ibid., p. 537.

23. Idem.

24. Ibid., p. 596.

25. Evelyn Waugh, "The Forerunner", A Little Order, p. 69.

26. Evelyn Waugh, "The Death of Painting", A Little Order, p. 74.

27. Stopp, p. 54.

28. Evelyn Waugh, "Painter and Patron: Responsibilities to One Another", Times, July 17, 1954, 7.

29. Stopp, p. 55.

30. Evelyn Waugh, "Anything Wrong with Priestly?", A Little Order, p. 139.

31. A Little Order, p. 7.

32. Sykes, p. 318.

33. De Vitis, p. 65.

34. Evelyn Waugh, Helena (NY, 1962), p. 81.

35. Sykes, p. 318.

36. Letters, p. 476.

37. Donaldson, p. 62.

38. Evelyn Waugh, The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold (London, 1973), p. 126.

39. Sykes, p. 334.

40. Pinfold, p. 126.

41. Ibid., p. 127.

42. Ibid., p. 143.

43. Ibid., p. 128.

44. Ibid., p. 269.

45. David Lodge, "Evelyn Waugh", in G. Stade, ed., Six Modern British Novelists (London, 1974), p. 85.

46. Paris Review, p. 82.

47. Stopp, p. 165.

48. Lane, p. 36.

49. Letters, p. 507.

CONCLUSION

"Compassion for him was just another foible of an absurd age", wrote a Newsweek editor after Evelyn Waugh's death.[1] The New York Times proclaimed that in Waugh's fiction, "all the elementary decencies are spoofed. The world's cruelties are accepted, never protested against".[2] Many reviewers wrote in this vein at the time, with only a few friends, such as Christopher Sykes, and Waugh's eldest son Auberon, countering their negative, and often unperceptive, opinions. Many had enjoyed his writings but could not appreciate the satiric stance behind them.

Looking back over his literary career, it is obvious that many of his ideas developed, changed and matured as he did. The early enthusiasm for cubism, which appears to have been as much a reaction against artistic values of the previous generation as anything else, disappeared as he grew older and he came to dislike modern art intensely. He briefly supported the youth cult in the late twenties but soon came to value a more mature outlook. Writers whom he greatly admired in his youth and imitated in his early works lost favour with him as he grew older. Ronald Firbank is an example. He was highly praised by Waugh

in an article in 1929 but in 1962 he replied to a request from Anthony Curtis to review Firbank's latest book by saying that "the invitation reaches me thirty years too late. In youth I was fascinated by Firbank. Now I can't abide him".[3] He suggested to Julian Jebb, in the Paris Review interview of 1963, that "there would be something wrong with an elderly man who could enjoy Firbank".[4] For him, then, the artist must reflect his own development and, as he pointed out in his letter to David Wright about the place of the older writer, had no business trying to imitate the latest fashion of younger men.

Many of his basic principles concerning the role of the artist, however, did not change. One of these was the importance of craftsmanship. He saw himself as a craftsman making pleasing objects to entertain others. Failing to prosper as a graphic artist, he carried the same attempt over into his writing. As the products of a craft, he saw his novels as things external to himself and resented any attempt to get at the inner life of the writer through his work.

Another important factor was communication. The viewer of a painting or the reader of a work of fiction must be able to understand what is being expressed in a work

of art. This required lucidity that was often the result of painstaking care on the part of the artist. At the same time it was necessary to impute intelligence to viewers and readers; catering to the uneducated and limiting one's vocabulary to suit them was not the concern of the writer. One wrote for persons of some discrimination, for the people one liked and wished to impress.

The need for objectivity was also very important in Waugh's literary creed. His insistence that his novels were external to himself, as shoes were to a shoemaker, indicates this. He carefully avoided taking sides in his novels, presenting his characters in an unbiassed fashion. His own portrait in The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold is a masterpiece of detached mockery. His success as an objective writer is reflected in the number of readers who find him irreverent, immoral and cruel. The subtlety of the implicit message, in tone, word choice and juxtaposition of scenes, often led to misunderstanding. The best way to expose foolishness and malice was to let the character damn himself and leave it up to the discerning reader to perceive the real meaning of his words and actions.

A very important aspect of Waugh's beliefs about the role of the artist lies in his emphasis on precision.

In architecture and in painting he stressed the need for a solid knowledge of proportion and perspective. In writing he believed that a basic knowledge of sentence structure, often learned through a study of Latin, was very important. He declared his own obsession with the use of language and often excoriated other authors who were less meticulous than he was.

The tension between the man of action and the recluse, present in Waugh himself and personified at Lancing by Francis Crease and J. F. Roxburgh, is an important part of his concept of the artist. As a young man he appears to have stayed more on the periphery of his social world where he could observe and record for his fiction. His arduous, often dangerous, expeditions in the thirties and his eagerness to be a soldier, however, indicate a yen for a life of action. The tension seemed to be resolved in Put Out More Flags with the banishment of the aesthete, but the war apparently convinced Waugh that writers were not men of action. His retreat to the West Country and increasing reclusiveness indicate that he had decided that the life of the hermit was the better alternative.

Although he did not take part in the form of social critcism popular in the thirties and forties, Waugh's work

does criticize his society in a different way. The failure to live up to one's reponsibilities is sharply censored, from the example of Dr. Fagan in Decline and Fall to that of Ivor Clair in Sword of Honour. The duty of the writer to be a reactionary is clear in many of Waugh's denunciations of modern life. His use of ridicule, as in Black Mischief, to point out abuses is frequently encountered. He was a social critic even if he did not follow the fashions of his fellow writers. For him, clearly, the artist must make a comment on what he perceives as wrong but should do so on his own terms. Here, as in many other aspects of his work, the artist must be an individual.

Increasingly as he grew older Waugh emphasized the importance of man as a creature with an immortal soul. His Roman Catholicism, with its clearly defined standards affecting every aspect of one's life, stands behind all his works, even those of blackest humour and most negative outlook. Without a view of himself as a man glorifying God, the artist is incomplete. Both Rossetti and Charles Ryder failed to be great painters because they lacked this spiritual outlook. Implicitly in his earlier works, and often explicitly in his later ones, Waugh attempted to fulfil what he saw as his vocation - to use his God-given talents to glorify his Maker. When Julian Jebb asked him whether

there were other books he would like to have written, Waugh summed up his own view of his accomplishments: "I have done all I could. I have done my best".[5]

NOTES TO THE CONCLUSION

1. Lane, p. 159.

2. Idem.

3. Letters, p. 588.

4. Paris Review, p. 81.

5. Ibid., p. 85.

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