

REVIEW ARTICLE

Waugh at Play

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LIKE SAMUEL JOHNSON, whom he resembled in many ways, Evelyn Waugh enacted his art in his life as well as distilling it into literature. His *viva* has the same panache as his formal writing — the same abrupt reversals, the same puzzling inconsistencies, the same irrepressible elegance. This is one reason why, since his death in 1966, we have learned little that is new about his novels, but a great deal about the man and his life. The five books considered here — Mark Amory's edition of Waugh's letters,¹ Robert Davis' study of Waugh's revisions to his manuscripts,² Jeffrey Heath's account of Waugh's ideas and their relation to his fiction,³ Paul Fussell's book about British travel writers between the wars,⁴ and Calvin Lane's reader's guide to Waugh⁵ — belong on the bookshelf of new work by and about Waugh the man, where they join his diaries,⁶ the authorized biography by Christopher Sykes,⁷ a volume of Waugh's essays and reviews,⁸ memoirs and reminiscences by those who knew him,⁹ and sixteen volumes of *The Evelyn Waugh Newsletter*.¹⁰ True, Davis and Heath provide important new readings of the novels, but both approach them within contexts drawn from the life, and, if Lane's book consists mainly of a sensible running commentary upon the fiction, he makes telling use of Waughiana throughout (particularly of Waugh's confrontations with radio and TV interviewers).

What have we learned from this posthumous material? For one thing, that Waugh did not lead a life of allegory: his novels draw much more directly upon his own experience than anyone had suspected. The diaries and autobiography reveal, for instance, that Captain Grimes of *Decline and Fall*, who seems such

a figure of fantasy, is little more than a transcription of one Richard Young, a "monotonously pederastic" (*Diaries*, p. 211) schoolmaster Waugh met while teaching at a boys' school in northern Wales; Young's *c.v.*, his personality, and even such lapidary phrases as "This looks like being the first end of term I've seen for two years" were transferred into Waugh's first novel (see *A.L.L.*, pp. 227-30, and *Diaries*, p. 213). For another, we can now define more precisely the ideas that lie behind Waugh's novels, a task more necessary by his belief that "All literature implies moral standards and criticisms — the less explicit the better" (*Letters*, p. 574); from the title of *Decline and Fall* onward, Waugh conveys his criticisms by implication — by allusion, by tone, by juxtaposition, by pace, by structural parallels, by parody. And we are now in a position to understand how completely Waugh was devoted to playfulness. "His life and house revolved around jokes," Auberon Waugh said in an essay commemorating his father,¹¹ and, in life as in art, Waugh's jokes were all the more amusing because he rarely was merely joking and because they were delivered deadpan. "It was difficult to distinguish his attitudes from his convictions," his friend Ann Fleming remarks (*Pryce-Jones*, p. 236) — since the attitudes were whimsical exaggerations on the convictions. Waugh delighted in playing the snob, the fop, the toady, the bigot, the fanatic, the patriot, the squire. As Squire Waugh, for instance, he wore tweed suits so thick and so brightly-checked that, according to Sykes, only a bookie or music-hall comedian could have worn them seriously; as a bigot, his pronunciation declared him either crazed or in jest: "Anyone whose name ended in 'don' or 'ston' or 'den' always received a rich and lingering 'stein,' while Waterman, for instance, might become Wasserman" (*Donaldson*, p. 70).

The volume of Waugh's letters is especially welcome for this last reason: it has more of this playfulness than anything Waugh wrote, apart from his novels. *The Diaries* will be of equal or greater significance to the scholar, but in literary pleasure there is no contest between the two books. Waugh's diary, meant only for himself and often simply an *aide-mémoire* for his articles and travel books, is elegantly written, but surprisingly factual and humourless. A letter, however, was a form of conversation —

during World War II, Waugh wrote to his second wife, Laura, "A letter should be a form of conversation; write as though you were talking to me" (p. 195) — and conversation was a form of play: he complained to Laura of his fellow officers, "Of conversation as I love it, with anecdote recurring spontaneously & aptly, jokes growing & taking shape, fantasy — they know nothing" (p. 191). Waugh hated the telephone as a functional, shorthand substitute for conversation and insisted on communicating by letter. Even the briefest business note affords the pleasures of composition; when his agent reports that the B.B.C. has offered fifteen guineas for a radio talk, Waugh replies, "B.B.C. L.S.D. N.B.G. E.W." (p. 92).

Serious vs. play, reality-principle vs. pleasure-principle: this difference between *The Diaries* and *The Letters* is heightened by the way each has been edited. Michael Davie chose to be complete: he excised from *The Diaries* only some 50 passages considered libellous or "intolerably offensive or distressing," about one-seventh of Waugh's diary at Lancing, his public school, and the occasional sentence from the travel diaries. Amory chooses to be selective. He includes only 840 of the 4,500 letters he located, and he cuts from them anything he considers routine or repetitious (as well as 50 or so potentially libellous passages). Thus, for instance, "If there are two accounts of the same event, the more enjoyable version wins" (p. ix). The scholar may regret not having all the data — we hear little of railway timetables and the like, few of Waugh's letters to his mother are included, and more than a thousand letters to his agent, A. D. Peters, have been rejected — but the non-specialist, dependent upon Amory's taste, benefits from it. Reading *The Diaries* is work; reading *The Letters* is sheer delight.

Waugh's prevailing attitude in *The Letters* is signalled by the playful names that appear on every page: Smartyboots, Preters, Hot-Lunch, Sexy, Whiskers, Prod, Honks, Pug, Pig, Dig, Sponger, Boom, Gloomy, Blue Feet, Pauper, Chucker, Jump, Baby, Tanker, Trim, and many more. These private names do not occur in *The Diaries*: Cyril Connolly remains Cyril or Connolly there, but is invariably Smartyboots (or Boots or Smarty or S. Boots) in the letters after 1945 — once Waugh discovered

that Virginia Woolf had so described Connolly in her journal. On the same principle, *Remote People* (Waugh's travel book about Abyssinia) and *Black Mischief* become "Remoters & Blackers" (p. 78), and *Work Suspended* is "Suspenders" (p. 148); anyone who works for the B.B.C. is an electrician; Waugh's favourite place to eat in London is Marble Halls (the Ritz); John Heygate, the man Waugh's first wife left him for, becomes "the basement boy" (p. 40). These names, not exactly nicknames since they are generally used of and not to people, sustain a play-world, one in which language is at the whim of imagination and not dictated by external reality.¹²

Play generates wit. Writing to another person gives Waugh someone to play with; he can strive for the point, the allusions and comparisons, the fantasy that make conversation an art. Compare a diary entry and a letter on the same day and the difference is clear. Waugh's war-time letters to Laura are among the least sparkling in the book, but, even here, we see the serious record being transformed into play: where *The Diaries* has, "Time passes slowly. This fortnight seems very long. I wait for the end of the war and tire of the war news. But I sleep as never before. . . ." and more of the same (p. 581), his letter to Laura reads, "Time seems to stand still here. I believe the war would have been over sooner if I had become assistant registrar of a hospital. . . . Today has lasted about a week already and it is only 4:15 p.m. We are like Chekhov characters" (p. 188). Waugh is, like Falstaff, not only witty in himself, but the cause that wit is in others. Amory gives only Waugh's own letters, but he occasionally cites gems from Waugh's correspondents in his notes. For instance, when Nancy Mitford made a mistake about Roman Catholic practice in a *Sunday Times* piece, Waugh wrote: "Would it not be best always to avoid any reference to the Church or to your Creator? Your intrusions into this strange world are always fatuous." She replied: "I can't agree that I must be debarred from mentioning your Creator. Try and remember that he also created me" (p. 359). The letters also show Waugh collecting witticisms; during the war, he notes with admiration that a soldier has scrawled on his troopship: "Never

before in the history of human endeavour have so few been so bugged about by so many" (p. 151).

The pleasure-principle also explains Waugh's characteristic activity in *The Letters*: gossip (whence the fears of libel). As play is to work, so is gossip to serious statement: like play, gossip is without concrete purpose, performed with emotional detachment, titillating, and uncertain (since it consists of conjecture building upon a few known details). As Amory points out (p. viii), serious subjects occur rarely in Waugh's letters: politics is scarcely mentioned, religious discussion is rare (and usually takes the form of consolation or upbraiding), pronouncements on *tempora* and *mores* (and even *litteras*) are few, and what literary criticism there is (apart from tactful comments on their work to friends such as Graham Greene) consists mainly of ingenious denigration — "Lawrence's reputation has been made by an illiterate clique at Cambridge" (p. 552); Waugh finds Proust a mental defective, unable to remember his hero's age (pp. 270, 274). That leaves gossip, something that, like most of us, Waugh enjoys and, unlike most of us, is never ashamed of. After all, anecdotes are essential to good conversation, "the whole intricate art" of which lies in "the proper juxtaposition of narrative and comment."¹³ Here is Waugh practising that art of juxtaposition:

I used to know Brian Howard [who had just died] well — a dazzling young man to my innocent eyes. In later life he became very dangerous — constantly attacking people with his fists in public places — so I kept clear of him. He was consumptive but the immediate cause of his death was a broken heart. His boy friend gassed himself in his house. There is an aesthetic bugger who sometimes turns up in my novels under various names — that was $\frac{2}{3}$ Brian $\frac{1}{3}$ Harold Acton. People think it was all Harold, who is a much sweeter & saner man. (p. 506)

Waugh's love of gossip is reflected in his preference for female correspondents: by rough count, just under two-thirds of the 600-odd pages of *The Letters* consists of letters to women (though virtually all business letters are written to men). His best letters are those to four women: Nancy Mitford, who receives more letters (135) than anyone else in the volume; Laura Waugh, to whom Waugh's 120 letters are surprisingly tender and affection-

ate; Ann Fleming, wife of the creator of James Bond, who receives some 50 letters; and Lady Mary Lygon, whose family served as a model for the Flytes of *Brideshead Revisited*, and whose 44 letters are the raciest and zaniest of all (a sample: "Just heard yesterday that my divorce comes on today so was elated and popped question to Dutch girl [Teresa Jungman] and got raspberry. So that is that, eh. Stiff upper lip and dropped cock" [p. 81]). Apart from the 48 notes to Waugh's agent, Graham Greene leads the men with 40 — and most of them brief postcards.

Playful, witty, and anecdotal, Waugh's letters reveal the habits of mind that produced his novels. He is clearly fascinated by stylized speech. He records the idiom of an American preacher at a Seventh-Day Adventist funeral: "O god thou hast appointed three score years and ten as man's allotted span but O god statistics go to prove that comparatively few ever attain that age" (p. 99). And if Albert St.-Clair Morford, Waugh's brigadier, did not actually deliver this speech, only Waugh could have invented it:

There's only one man in Egypt you can trust. Hassanin Bey. Luckily he's chief adviser to the King. He is a white man. I'll tell you something that'll show you the kind of chap he is. He and I were alone in a carriage going from Luxor to Suez — narrow gauge, single track line, desert on both sides, blazing heat. Ten hours with nothing to do. I thought I should go mad. Luckily I had a golf ball with me. So I made Hassanin stand one end of the corridor and we threw that ball backwards & forwards as hard as we could the whole day — threw it so that it really hurt. Not many Gypies could stand up to that. Ever since then I've known there was at least one Gypsy we could trust. (p. 138)

Collecting lingos leads to speaking through them: as in his novels, Waugh delights in mimicry. He adopts the voice of the Victorian empire-builder when he tells Mary and Dorothy Lygon that he has returned from the bush to Georgetown, British Guiana: "The delight of these simple people at my return is very touching. A public holiday has been declared and all the men & women prostrate themselves in the dust & bring me their children to bless; great banners & bonfires decorate all the streets & several elderly niggers have already died of excitement" (p. 71). To the

end of his life, Waugh wrote to Mary Lygon in a breathless, formulaic debutantesque: "So I have been to luncheon with a lot of cornish lords & ladies and they eat rather dull food & Abdy's chef has laycocked them & they have a female saint instead but goodness how badly she cooks" (p. 90).¹⁴ Mimicry is playful irony; Waugh's irony is often less benign in *The Letters*. In 1946, a Mrs. Reeve of *Life* writes asking for Waugh's help in preparing a picture article on characters and scenes from his novels; his reply begins, "Dear Madam, I have read your letter of yesterday with curiosity and re-read it with compassion" (p. 221). Ironic reserve merges with self-parody; his note to a B.B.C. producer, in the guise of a latter-day Sir Philip Sidney, strikes an attitude as much as it conveys a conviction: "Thank you for your letter of 3rd July with the kind suggestion that I should make public a conversation between myself and a friend about my writing. I am afraid that this is not practicable because I never mention my writing to my friends" (p. 330).

The volume is, of course, also valuable as a source of new information. Little has been definitely known, for instance, about the three emotional crises of Waugh's life: his three wild years at Oxford; the collapse of his first marriage in 1929; his mental breakdown in 1954. There are no diaries for these periods — probably, Waugh destroyed them — but letters exist from each, and they confirm what has always been suspected. Waugh was shattered when his first wife, "She-Evelyn," betrayed him: "Evelyn's family & mine join in asking me to 'forgive' her whatever that may mean. . . . There is no part of one that is not injured when a thing like this happens" (pp. 39, 40). Five pathetic letters from Waugh to Laura show that Gilbert Pinfold's paranoid delusions had been Waugh's own: "My Darling," one letter begins, "It is rather difficult to write to you because everything I say or think or read is read aloud by the group of psychologists whom I met in the ship" (p. 419). We have new evidence that Waugh deeply loved and depended upon Laura, that (like any good Victorian curmudgeon) he had little-known fits of generosity and charity, that he was much more excited, uncertain, and vulnerable about *Brideshead* than any of his other novels, and that he was an impassioned moralist at heart (his letters to his

children, particularly the twenty to his favourite, Meg, make this plain). And many specific puzzles about Waugh's life are solved. For instance, why did Waugh decide to sell his graceful country house, Piers Court, in 1956 and move to another one? *The Diaries* and Sykes are both silent on this point. The answer, we find in a letter written ten years later to Nancy Mitford, is that when Nancy Spain, the literary columnist for the *Daily Express*, forced her way into his house "I put it in the market the next day because I felt it was polluted" (p. 636); another letter, announcing the decision to sell to an estate agent, is dated ten days after the invasion (p. 443). Both the motive and the fact that Waugh does not mention it in *The Diaries* (where he does, however, speak of trembling with rage for two days) are significant.

The Letters also throw new light on Waugh's intentions in writing his novels. We discover, for instance, that he considered giving *Decline and Fall* the title *Untoward Incidents* (he explains: "The phrase was used by the Duke of Wellington in commenting on the destruction of the Turkish fleet in time of peace at Navarino. It seems to set the right tone of mildly censorious detachment." [p. 27]); that he found *A Handful of Dust* "very difficult to write because for the first time I am trying to deal with normal people instead of eccentrics" (p. 84); that he felt, rightly, that most readers of *Brideshead* would find Lady Marchmain hard to judge (pp. 185, 196); that the theme of the War Trilogy is "the humanizing of Guy [Crouchback]" (p. 383). Waugh *did* mention his writing to his friends, but he avoids pronouncements, and the reader must rely on occasional remarks and his own inferences — with one striking exception, Waugh's six-page defence of *Black Mischief* against the charge made by *The Tablet*, the official Catholic weekly, that the novel was obscene and blasphemous. Even that exception proves the rule, however, since it does not occur in a private letter, but takes the form of "An Open Letter to His Eminence the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster." This pamphlet was printed in 1933 and circulated to a few friends, but Waugh was persuaded by Monsignor Ronald Knox not to publish it (see *Letters*, p. 342). Waugh's apologia, one paragraph of which was published in

F. J. Stopp's 1958 study,¹⁵ deserves attention. If he hardly apologizes (he ends by asserting that morality requires that the Cardinal fire the Editor of *The Tablet*), he does, for once, explain his irony: he discusses several of the novel's wittiest passages and shows that only "a literal-mindedness that is scarcely sane" (p. 74) could ignore the clues to their true meaning.

In sum, then, *The Letters of Evelyn Waugh* will please and instruct. And Amory's editorial apparatus helps it to do both. He provides succinct sketches of Waugh, phase by phase, and of his chief correspondents; a complete and accurate index; and footnotes that tell the reader just what he wants to know, and no more. My only complaint is that the book is not longer: we get less than one-fifth of the available letters, and one wishes Amory had the space to include the letters of Waugh's correspondents (where pertinent and available). But would a complete edition in many volumes be read with the same fascination from beginning to end? Probably not.

The four remaining books also exhibit, in different ways, Waugh at play. Each is illuminating, and two (those by Davis and Heath) will prove of major importance in Waugh studies. Fussell's is by far the most readable, Lane's the most rudimentary, Heath's the most comprehensive, and Davis's the most original. It is perhaps helpful to consider them in that order.

Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975) was a strange and moving book. Fussell combined a wide knowledge of writing of all sorts about modern war, close readings of World War I memoirs and poems, and implicit reference to his own experience as a World War II infantryman to create a history that, defying Aristotle, possessed the imaginative power of fiction or poetry. *Abroad: British Literary Traveling Between the Wars* takes Fussell's history of modern British culture one stage further; he begins, in fact, by pointing out that travel, and travel books, flourished in England after the First War, since, during it, the troops stuck in the muddy trenches of northern Europe longed for the sun, and civilians were prevented from travelling by D.O.R.A. — the hated Defence of the Realm Act of 1915 that also introduced passports and pub-closing hours. As befits the change of subject, *Abroad* is a lighter and slighter than

its precursor (having perhaps one-third the number of words); it is more given to contentious overstatement and less overwhelming in documenting its claims, but it displays the same sweep and verve, the same eye and ear for detail, the same allusion to his own experience (Fussell clearly loves to travel), and the same assumption that history is simply the sum of what people much like ourselves felt and did.

Waugh wrote four entertaining and personally revealing travel books: *Labels* (1930), *Remote People* (1931), *Ninety-Two Days: The Account of a Tropical Journey through British Guiana and Part of Brazil* (1934), and *Waugh in Abyssinia* (1936).¹⁶ These books have been generally ignored; for instance, none of the three other critical books under review discusses them. Fussell has a 32-page chapter, entitled "Waugh's Moral Entertainments," which, if nothing else, should make these books better known. But Fussell has a great deal more to offer than a lively summary of each — though he does provide that. He suggests that travel writing (and especially Waugh's) thrives on the anomalous — the disordered or uncivilized; someone who seeks out anomalies and registers them keenly is thus confirming his sense of civilized order (the order that She-Evelyn had betrayed and so put in doubt). This is why, according to Fussell, travel books are inherently comic and consist mainly of misadventures; why Waugh's style, always elegant and controlled, measures as well as describes; why *Labels*, *Remote People*, and *Ninety-Two Days* end, as most travel books do, with a return home to the norm; and why Waugh's travel writing, as the title, *Labels*, suggests, constantly depicts the comic disillusionment that results when the imagined ideal is confronted by the actual. Fussell's chief insight is that Waugh creates a distinct persona in the narrator of his travel books: a tolerant, benign, decent chap very different from the actual man. By comparing Waugh's diary entries for his trip to Abyssinia with *Remote People*, he shows that Waugh transformed his own cruel and ill-tempered reactions into "a wondering image of himself as a comic character, a pretend little-Englander and a pretend-snob" (p. 191). And he shows that *Waugh in Abyssinia* and *Mexico: An Object Lesson* illustrate neatly the decline and fall of the travel book in the late

thirties, as irony disappears and politics prevails. From politics, it was an easy step to silence (as Jane Austen noted in *Northanger Abbey*).

The discussion of Waugh forms part of a tendentious larger argument. Fussell believes that the travel book, and travel itself, had a Golden Age between the wars, but that both are no longer possible. To make this case, he divides all journeys into three kinds: exploration, travel, tourism. The explorer seeks the undiscovered, the traveller seeks to form his judgment by visiting what is unfamiliar, the tourist seeks "that which has been discovered by entrepreneurship and prepared for him by the arts of mass publicity" (p. 39). Tourism has, he argues, inexorably displaced travel: the advent of Cook's Tours in the mid-nineteenth century and of efficient jet service in the mid-twentieth mark the beginning and end of this process. "The whole world is civilized now," as Brenda Last remarks in *A Handful of Dust*, "charabancs and Cook's offices everywhere." *Abroad* is thus as much an elegy for what has gone and a satire of what has taken its place as a history. Fussell outlines his thesis by allusions to a great range of between-war writing, and then pursues it by considering five travel writers in detail: Waugh, Graham Greene, Robert Byron, D. H. Lawrence, and Norman Douglas. Interestingly, all five are, in different ways, conservative and elitist, a bias that Fussell himself shares: thus, "One who has hotel reservations and speaks no French is a tourist" (p. 41). These views may allow us to see Waugh as less of a crank, or Fussell as more of one, or both. In any case, with its maps, photographs, and reliance on anecdotes, *Abroad* offers the same kinds of civilized pleasure as did the travel books it celebrates. And anyone interested in the travel book as a literary form will find Fussell's summarizing chapter on that topic thought-provoking: he argues there that the travel book is a form of fiction (a modern mutant of romance, in fact), that it enacts the experience of freedom, and that it is inherently metaphorical, since it exploits the basic figure of thought by which we conceive of the past as behind and the future as forward. The book's one exasperation is Fussell's refusal to document his references: when, for instance, he describes Waugh standing outside the second-class dining

room on an ocean liner and saying to a friend, "Can't you just *smell* the poverty?" (p. 191), he does not identify his source. Fussell ends by glancing at the different world of World War II England, one in which literary travelling has become quaint and sense of place has atrophied — and we begin to hope that a third volume, in which Waugh will play a leading role (along with Orwell, Keith Douglas, and Richard Hillary), is on its way.

Calvin Lane begins his commentary on Waugh's novels by citing the Author's Note from the first edition of *Decline and Fall*: "Please bear in mind throughout that IT IS MEANT TO BE FUNNY" (p. 44). Waugh soon decided that readers did not need such injunctions, and critics would not either, if they all shared Lane's keen enjoyment of Waugh's audacity as a satirist. Lane's argument is that Waugh is at his best in his early novels, when he writes satire "in which either seeming detachment or wild burlesque masks genuine concern for the absence of reasonableness in our lives" (p. 48). Giving full weight to Waugh's announcement in 1946 that his primary aim in subsequent novels would be to show man in relation to God,¹⁷ he believes that Waugh's imagination is less fully engaged in the novels from *Brideshead* on, just as his style is no longer so detached and understated (he points out that Cara's speech in *Brideshead* analyzing Sebastian's refusal to grow up tells us how to think about him). The book's structure reflects its thesis. After an introductory chapter surveying, in the vein of Twayne, Waugh's life and career, Chapter Two, "The Early Novels: Waugh as Satirist," covers his work through *Put Out More Flags* (1942); Chapter Three, "The Catholic Novels," includes *Brideshead*, *Helena*, and — perhaps with some strain — *The Loved One* and *Pinfold*; Chapter Four treats "The World War Two Trilogy"; Chapter Five, "The Writer as Critic," discusses Waugh's pronouncements on the art of fiction; a final chapter evaluates his achievement as a satiric novelist (its five headings summarize Lane's views: Style, Fantasy, Burlesque, Ambiguous Detachment, Conservatism).

Lane's commentary will be very helpful to the ordinary reader, especially to the undergraduate (or his teacher). The Twayne format, constricting in many ways, frees the critic: the just, but

not necessarily original, perception is what is needed. Lane thus observes that the early novels are characterized by passive anti-heroes who calmly accept their outrageous fortunes and by an equally calm narrator (p. 48). He notes that, as in *Decline and Fall*, surface order is restored at the end of *Black Mischiefs*, but that, as in *Vile Bodies*, the tone has darkened (p. 67). The rapid shifts from London to Hetton and back in *A Handful of Dust* imply, he suggests, that each provides an inadequate substitute for moral order (p. 71). He points out that *Scoop* is more purely farcical than the earlier works, partly because, unlike them, it lacks a sudden and grotesque death at its centre (p. 82); that Cedric Lyne of *Put Out More Flags* prefigures Guy Crouchback, another futile, anachronistic, and cuckolded warrior (p. 87); that *Brideshead Revisited* "stresses grim obligation rather than the enfolding grace that Waugh envisioned as its chief concern" (p. 98); that, since the Californians of *The Loved One* obliterate the distinction between life and death, their hedonistic life is really a contemporary dance of death (p. 107); that the name of Pinfold's ship, the S.S. *Caliban*, suggests antic disorder (p. 112); that Guy causes the Kanyis's death in the War Trilogy, just as he had caused Apthorpe's, by his own generosity (p. 136).

The book has its shortcomings. Lane was unable to make use of *The Letters*; he chooses not to discuss Waugh's travel writing, his biographies, his autobiography, his short fiction, and *Work Suspended* (the pivotal, but incomplete, experiment in first-person narration that preceded *Brideshead*). In fact, Lane covers much the same ground and offers much the same view of the novels as did Malcolm Bradbury some twenty years ago:¹⁸ Bradbury, himself a fine novelist of the School of Evelyn, is more subtle and penetrating, though Lane has the great advantage of up-to-date references. And Waugh rarely benefits from Lane's frequent invocations of the star turns of modern fiction: Brenda Last is another Daisy Buchanan (p. 76), Kätchen of *Scoop* a Madame Bovary (p. 79), Guy Crouchback shares the grim and terrifying detachment of Jake Barnes (p. 137), and so on. (One juxtaposition does seem rewarding, however: the retreat from Caparetto in *A Farewell to Arms* and that from Crete in the War Trilogy.) Lane does make a few mistakes of fact: the defence of

Black Mischief did not appear in *The Tablet* (p. 69); Cedric Lyne dies in Norway, not France (p. 86); the phrase from Chesterton which serves as a title and theme in *Brideshead* is "a twitch upon the thread," not "a twitch of . . ." or "a twitch on . . ." (Lane uses all three); the name of Aimée Thanatogenos in *The Loved One* means "love death-born," not "love of death" (p. 103). But, all in all, the book proves how useful the Twayne volumes can be: scholars may not give it much attention, but undergraduates everywhere will know better.

The new books by Heath and Davis deserve much higher praise. Each is more scholarly, more carefully argued, and more illuminating than any previous book on Waugh. Each is the distillation of long years in the Waugh vineyards — fifteen for Heath, twenty for Davis; each is long (Heath has 350 pages and Davis 360, compared to Stopp's 250 and Bradbury's 120); each is aimed at an audience of other scholars; each is North American in intent and tone, taking the literary pleasures of the fiction for granted and offering, not appreciation, but sober, sophisticated, narrowly focussed analysis. Yet the two books are also opposite: Heath's is of a familiar kind, a life-and-works explication of Waugh's themes; Davis' is much more unusual, a study of Waugh's revisions of his manuscripts and proofs. Heath asks what the novels have to say, Davis how they say it. Heath attempts to climb straight to the mountain-top, Davis aims at getting there by a more circuitous route, and one that leaves him much freer to attend to the playfulness that he meets on the way.

Jeffrey Heath's *The Picturesque Prison: Evelyn Waugh and His Writing* argues that Waugh, religious by temperament from the start, believed with St. Augustine that the City of Man was a tempting prison. He points out that Waugh's protagonists, like the later Waugh in his country house, reject the busy world, but seek refuge from it *in* the world, in delightful but chidlish and perverse "lush places": William Boot in Boot Magna, Paul Pennyfeather in Oxford, Tony Last in Hetton, Charles Ryder in Brideshead House, Guy Crouchback in Army life. The difference between early and late Waugh, between the writer of satires with moral implications and the novelist with religious themes, is that the later protagonists come to understand their spiritual escapism

and renounce it; for them, imprisonment has been the Providential means to true freedom. The early heroes flee, the later find, their proper vocation. Four introductory chapters and a conclusion establish this idea as a preoccupation in Waugh's life and thought; these lively and informative chapters frame seventeen chapters of interpretation, one for each of Waugh's extended works of fiction.

The book is valuable for several reasons. It provides the most closely argued and comprehensive examination of the novels yet to appear (there is a fine discussion of *Work Suspended*, fifty pages on the War Trilogy, and chapters on the post-war squibs, *Scott-King's Modern Europe* and *Love Among the Ruins*). He demonstrates that the satires, far from being entertainments with no consistent moral position (as many, even Stopp and Bradbury, have asserted), express a distinctive moral and religious vision. And many of his insights are fresh and enlightening: he notes, for instance, the absence of fathers in the early novels, the themes of excessive tolerance, waiting, and the unredeemed Waste Land in *A Handful of Dust*, and the precise function of Apthorpe as the externalization of Guy's illusions in *Men at Arms*. Heath's scholarship is even more impressive. His 44 pages of footnotes refer the reader not only to expected sources, but to his own correspondence and interviews with Laura Waugh, Nancy Mitford, Henry Green, Pansy Lamb, Diana Cooper, Father Martin D'Arcy, and other leading players in the Waugh drama (as one example, She-Evelyn breaks her long silence on the first marriage in a letter written to Heath in 1980). And Heath is comprehensive in sensibility, as well as coverage: his account of Waugh the man is alive to all the puzzling and outrageous aspects of his subject. A magnificent magpie, he brings together just about every astonishing fact, every revealing remark, that can be known about Waugh.

As a critic, however, Heath is much less responsive. Intent on regularizing the early novels into theological parables, he overlooks the playfulness and irony that make them so delightful. This tone-deafness is apparent when he begins his discussion of *Vile Bodies* by taking literally the narrator's assurance — shortly to be echoed by Mrs. Melrose Ape — that the British channel-

crossers will be seasick because they are lacking in faith (p. 81); when we are told, "At its deepest level of meaning, *Black Mischief* could be set in England as easily as in Azania; the exotic setting merely permits a more fanciful elaboration of the theme" (p. 95); when Heath treats the early satires as cantos in a Catholic *Faerie Queene*, finding an allegorical history of Britain's decline and fall into heresy within each of them (thus, for instance, "King's Thursday is the house of perverted doctrine, and perpetual 'renovation' is its inevitable destiny" [p. 69]). Chaucer and Fielding prove that an artist may be playful and still a moralist, but Heath's Waugh, if no mere entertainer, is a censor: Father Rothschild S.J. "is sharply criticized even though he is a Catholic priest" (p. 83); "the narrator pretends to approve but is in fact deeply critical" of Tony and Brenda Last's domestic life (p. 107); "Waugh sharply criticizes William and all the childish Boots for their failure to mature" (p. 138); even Sir Samson Courteney, the Envoy Extraordinary, "refuses to accept his responsibilities and grow up" (p. 96). Heath disregards the comic surface of the novels and penetrates to their cryptic core. Thus *Scoop* is only ostensibly a satire about journalists; it is actually "an artist-novel," since William Boot's newspaper column can be taken to represent escapist art, and so the novel "adumbrates Waugh's condemnation of the immature (that is, not explicitly religious) art which he himself has produced until now" (pp. 138, 140). This distortion of tone is maintained by a corresponding distortion of the evidence. One example will suggest the problem. Heath claims that "In *Brideshead Revisited* the theme of vocation moves to the fore with particular clarity," and cites as proof a sentence spoken by Cordelia about the importance of a vocation; a footnote quotes Waugh in *The Letters* saying, "I hoped the last conversation with Cordelia gave the theological clue" (p. 161). But, in its context in Cordelia's "convent chatter," "vocation" refers simply to which girls at her school might become nuns, and the passage in *The Letters* reads, "Yes, Lady Marchmain is an enigma. I hoped the last conversation with Cordelia gave the theological clue" (p. 185). But, if Heath's interpretations are factitious as well as tone-deaf much of the time, he always writes crisply. And his scholarship ensures

that even those who will end up quarrelling with what the book expounds will be enriched by what it contains.

Waugh at play is just what we see in Robert Davis' *Evelyn Waugh, Writer*. Waugh believed that "Revision is just as important as any other part of writing and must be done con amore" (*Letters*, p. 347), and he went on revising his own work long after it was necessary — from one edition to the next, for instance — out of sheer pleasure in his craft. *Evelyn Waugh, Writer* (the words are those on Waugh's tombstone) examines Waugh's decisions as he gradually refined the manuscripts, typescripts, proofs, and printed copies of his novels. The raw materials and the ingots can be compared: Waugh arranged, in his final years, for the sale of all of his papers to the University of Texas and even organized, annotated, and bound or boxed the papers for each novel. *Evelyn Waugh, Writer* marks the first time that extensive samples from this mother lode have been published (though snatches have appeared in scholarly articles, by Davis and others, from 1972 onward).

A book of parallel passages may seem uninviting, and Davis works under further limitations. He only discusses the composition of the major novels, and of these *Vile Bodies* and *Put Out More Flags* are excluded (Waugh had given the manuscripts to friends and thus they are not accessible). Further, to understand the stages by which Waugh arrived at his final text we must know that text well and have it, page by page and novel by novel, open before us. And Davis immerses us not only in detail, but complex detail: to indicate the layers of revision, he uses a code when quoting Waugh's drafts (according to which, for instance, // . . . // encloses an insertion within an insertion). Finally, Waugh's revisions prove to be discouragingly minor and verbal. He claimed once that he could hold the whole of a book in his head while composing it,¹⁹ and it turns out to have been true: in rhetorical terms, invention and virtually all of disposition were in finished form before he set pen to paper, so that what was left to polish was elocution. In Davis' summary, "Waugh devoted most of his attention to highlighting his themes by introducing or altering the actions of secondary characters" (p. 335).

But play requires limits and rules, and these limitations allow

Davis to show, and us to see, a genius playing with language. On every page, we discover Waugh transforming the serviceable, but flat, into the unforgettably vivid. A striking, almost magical, instance is William Boot's first cable in *Scoop*; the original "REPORT COMPLETELY GROUNDLESS SATURDAYS ARRIVAL WELL KNOWN SWISS RESIDENT GIRAUD EMPLOYED RAILWAY RUSSIA DIPLOMATICALLY UNREPRESENTED HERE" becomes "ALL ROT ABOUT BOL-SHEVIK HE IS ONLY TICKET COLLECTOR ASS CALLED SHUMBLE THOUGHT HIS BEARD FALSE BUT ITS PERFECTLY ALL RIGHT REALLY WILL CABLE AGAIN IF THERE IS ANY NEWS VERY WET HERE YOURS WILLIAM BOOT" (Davis, p. 102). Usually, Waugh's revisions are less radical than this; for example, he makes four small changes in Chapter Three of *Decline and Fall*, "Captain Grimes." The Captain's original description of his problem is altered from "temperament and drink" to "temperament and sex"; Waugh changes the original "one," accurate but colourless, to "the public school man" in Grimes' statement of faith, "There's a blessed equity in the English social system . . . that ensures the public school man against starvation"; "court-martial" is heightened to "shoot" in the punch line of Grimes' account of his army career, "Still, it's out of the question to shoot an old Harrovian"; the chapter originally ended with, "I've never been really attracted by women," said Grimes, which becomes the incomparable, "'Women are an enigma,' said Grimes, 'as far as Grimes is concerned'" (Davis, p. 46). Such fine tuning of meaning and rhythm make fine sentences perfect — spontaneous in their wit and effortless in making their effect, though neither to the author. In fact, Davis believes, "All of the most memorable lines in Waugh were the result of one and often of several states of revision."²⁰

Verbal changes like these are only quantitatively small, as Davis observes: Waugh discovers his design in a given novel through his adjustments to style. William Boot's revised cable changes his whole characterization and discovers a new idiom for that new person. When Grimes considers himself a public school man, a satiric theme crystallizes, and once he begins speaking of himself in the third person, his character has been sharpened and heightened. This ripple effect is clearest, perhaps, in

Waugh's development of Apthorpe, the one great comic figure of the later novels. Davis points out that Waugh's revisions all increase Apthorpe's distinctive tone of bland, obsessive certainty. Apthorpe's original approval of the Brigadier's castigation is intensified to "He might have made it clearer that there were certain exceptions"; when Guy tells him he cannot arrest a civilian, his defensive "That's exactly what I was afraid you'd say. It's what he says," becomes the accusatory "That, Crouchback, is what the prisoner maintains. I hope you aren't going to take his part," and so on through a dozen instances (Davis, pp. 249-52). Waugh is coming to see more clearly not only Apthorpe's character, but its function in the novel: the more ludicrously self-deceived Apthorpe is, the more apparent become Guy's own delusions and their child-like innocence. Similarly, Davis shows, Waugh's revisions to Anthony Blanche's relatively few speeches in *Brideshead* alter the whole novel in many subtle ways.

This book will be important as a reference work. Not only is it, by its nature, an anthology of new writing by Waugh, but Davis places the composition of each novel within the context of Waugh's life and thought, citing from essays, book reviews, unpublished letters, marginalia, and other little-known sources. As a guide to this *terra incognita*, Davis would be hard to fault. His knowledge is encyclopedic;²¹ his presentation of detail is clear and succinct; he is not blinkered by any one thesis about Waugh's development. But the book is even more impressive as a work of literary criticism. Davis has insights of at least three kinds to offer. First, there are the large perceptions that emerge about each novel from study of its composition — for instance, that Waugh developed, while revising his *Rossetti* (1928), the assured, detached, agile narrator that speaks to us in the opening pages of *Decline and Fall*; that he did not know while writing *Black Mischief* how it would end (which explains why the first two-thirds of the novel is exposition); that he discovered the theme of art redeeming experience only after writing the first half of *The Loved Ones*; that while writing *Men at Arms* he had clearly in mind the main characters and events of the whole trilogy. Second, there are incidental insights, ones not dependent on examination of the process of composition, but none the less

welcome. Davis points out, for instance, that, unlike *Decline and Fall* and *Vile Bodies*, the English characters in *Black Mischief* are aimless and complacent — vitality now resides in the Azanians (p. 68); that William Boot is the first Waugh character with sufficient inner life to have dreams (p. 102); that “English Gothic” in the titles of three chapters of *A Handful of Dust* (“English Gothic,” “English Gothic — II,” and “English Gothic — III”) has a different meaning in each case (p. 76); that Charles Ryder’s character in the Prologue to *Brideshead* is an unresolved problem, since he is still barren and alienated, even though he has already converted to Catholicism (p. 185). Third, best, and most frequent are Davis’ perceptions on matters of detail. He shows on every page how small changes of wording can raise or lower the tone, accelerate the pace or intensify a slow preparation, create or suppress a verbal echo or a plot parallel, confirm or question an emerging motive, stress one theme at the expense of another, heighten to farce or complicate to comedy. We can look into a microscope and see literary principles in action. For instance, Waugh can be seen giving more thought to endings than to any other part of his text. He revises book and chapter endings to perfect character, theme, and tone (as we saw with Captain Grimes). The last four sentences of his first novel, *Decline and Fall*, sentences so final in effect, were added in revision, and Waugh sent the poised final sentence of his last book, *A Little Learning*, to his agent by letter while the book was being printed (Davis, pp. 49, 334). Davis is an ideal instructor in this literary laboratory, setting out the equipment, but asking us to perform the experiments and formulate the conclusions.

Like Amory, then, Davis has produced a volume that receives the ultimate tribute: the reader wishes it longer. And their common source of fascination is Waugh himself, who emerges from each book as someone who takes play very seriously indeed.

NOTES

- ¹ *The Letters of Evelyn Waugh*, ed. Mark Amory (New Haven and New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1980), pp. xx, 664.
- ² Robert Murray Davis, *Evelyn Waugh, Writer* (Norman, Okla.: Pilgrim Books, 1981), pp. xv, 342.

- 3 Jeffrey Heath, *The Picturesque Prison: Evelyn Waugh and His Writing* (Kingston, Ont., and Montreal: McGill-Queen's Univ. Press, 1982), pp. xviii, 334.
- 4 Paul Fussell, *Abroad: British Literary Traveling Between the Wars* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1980), pp. viii, 246.
- 5 Calvin W. Lane, *Evelyn Waugh*, Twayne English Authors Series (Boston: Twayne, 1981), pp. 189.
- 6 *The Diaries of Evelyn Waugh*, ed. Michael Davie (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976).
- 7 Christopher Sykes, *Evelyn Waugh: A Biography* (London: Collins, 1975). Waugh's autobiography, *A Little Learning* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1964), was published shortly before his death; the first of a projected three volumes, it covered his life up to the age of 21.
- 8 *Evelyn Waugh: A Little Order: A Selection From His Journalism*, ed. Donat Gallagher (London: Eyre Methuen, 1977). This selection contains only 55 items of the more than 400 available. Eyre Methuen has announced that a *Complete Essays and Articles*, edited by Gallagher, will be published in 1983 or 1984.
- 9 Three of these are especially illuminating: Alec Waugh, *My Brother Evelyn and Other Portraits* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1967); Frances Donaldson, *Evelyn Waugh: Portrait of a Country Neighbour* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1967); *Evelyn Waugh and His World*, ed. David Pryce-Jones (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973).
- 10 This journal, which appears three times a year, has been edited since its inception in 1967 by Professor Paul Doyle of Nassau Community College, State University of New York.
- 11 Auberon Waugh, "Death in the Family," *Spectator*, 216 (6 May 1966), p. 562.
- 12 Waugh describes the practice (though he considers it nicknaming) in his autobiographical *The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold*: "The Pinfolds were addicted to nicknames and each of the surrounding families had its own private, unsuspected appellation at Lychpole, not malicious but mildly derisive, taking its origin in most cases from some half forgotten incident in the past." *The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold: A Conversation Piece* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1957), p. 4.
- 13 Ambrose Silk uses these terms when he reflects on conversation, "that most exquisite and exacting of the arts," in Chapter One of *Put Out More Flags*.
- 14 The voice of the débutante seems to have rung in Waugh's ears. Describing Paris night life, he writes, "But even in its wide variety, there breaks in on one's appreciation the still small voice of the débutante, whispering 'bogus.'" *Labels: A Mediterranean Journal* (London: Duckworth, 1930), p. 22.
- 15 Frederick J. Stopp, *Evelyn Waugh: Portrait of an Artist* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1958), pp. 32-33.
- 16 *Labels* was published in the United States under the title *A Bachelor Abroad*; *Remote People* was entitled *They Were Still Dancing in America*. Waugh wrote two other travel books, but disowned both. His 1939 book on Mexico (*Robbery Under Law* in Great Britain, *Mexico: An Object Lesson* in the U.S.), a violent attack sponsored by British oil interests whose property had been nationalized, was omitted altogether when

Waugh gathered his pre-war travel writing into a one-volume collection, *When the Going Was Good*, in 1946. And *A Tourist in Africa* (1960) was to him, a despicable potboiler (see *Letters*, p. 549).

- ¹⁷ Waugh made this statement in "Fan-Fare" (*Life*, 8 April 1946, pp. 53-60), his collective answer to the fan-mail he received from American readers of *Brideshead Revisited*.
- ¹⁸ Malcolm Bradbury, *Evelyn Waugh*, Writers and Critics Series (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1964).
- ¹⁹ Julian Jebb, "The Art of Fiction XXX: Evelyn Waugh," *Paris Review*, 8 (Summer-Fall, 1963), 73-85; p. 78.
- ²⁰ Davis, "Settling the Estate: Evelyn Waugh's Posthumous and Uncollected Work," *Papers in Language and Literature*, 17 (1981), 204-19; p. 215. This article surveys all the Waugh writing that has become available since 1966 and describes uncollected or unpublished work of which editions are needed.
- ²¹ Davis is the principal authority on Waugh bibliography: see Robert Murray Davis et al., *Evelyn Waugh: A Checklist of Primary and Secondary Material* (Troy, N.Y.: Whitston, 1972), and Robert Murray Davis, *A Catalogue of the Evelyn Waugh Collection at the Humanities Research Centre, The University of Texas at Austin* (Troy, N.Y.: Whitston, 1981).