The World of Evelyn Waugh

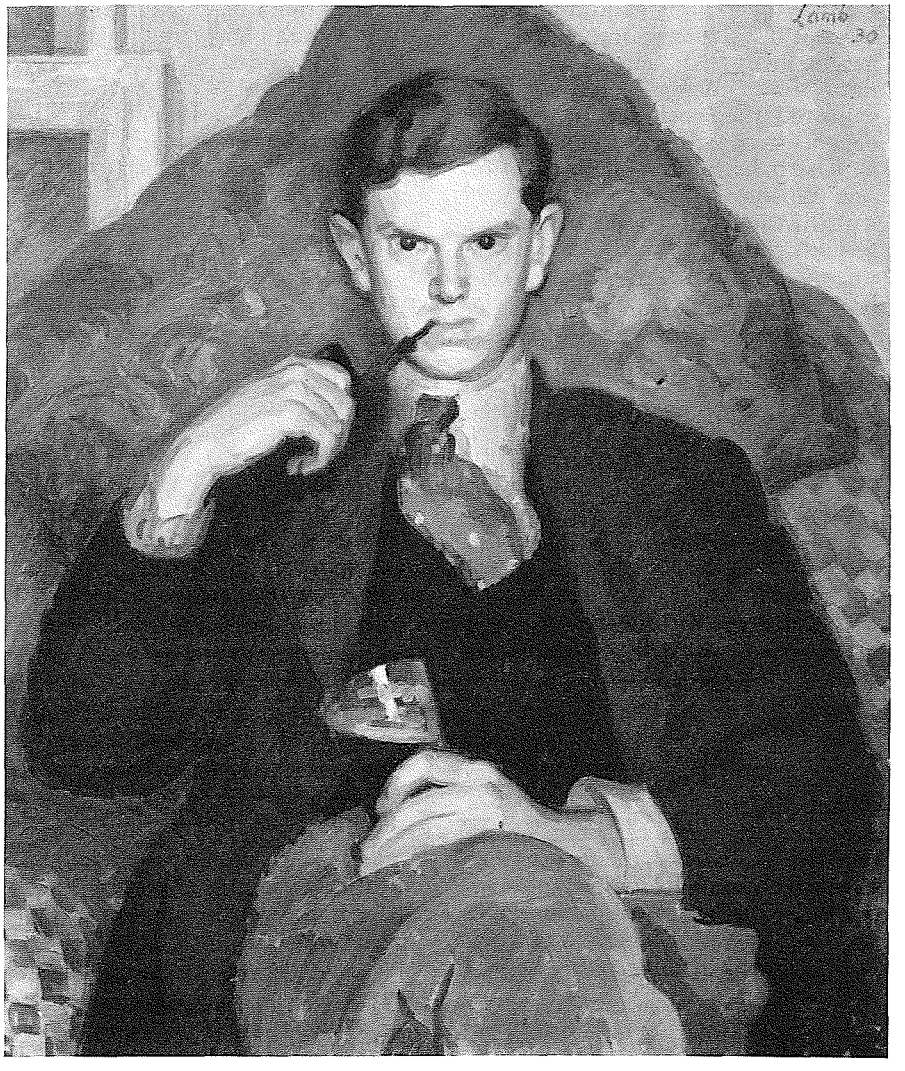
The late Edmund Wilson, America's foremost critic, once hailed Britain's Evelyn Waugh as "the only first rate comic genius in English since George Bernard Shaw." Waugh's more serious work, including *Brideshead Revisited* and his war trilogy *Sword of Honour,* has steadily gained renown in this country. Yet until last fall, when they were re-issued here to coincide with the publication of his diary, Waugh's early comic novels were hard to find in America. Here, we present Kathleen Darman's profile of Waugh, followed by several excerpts from those penetratingly funny early books.

by Kathleen Emmet Darman

A comic, detached ambivalence lies at the heart of Evelyn Waugh's work. He immersed himself in the glittering, sordid swirl of prewar England but at the same time believed it would be "very wicked indeed to do anything to fit a boy for the modern world." He could be generous, charitable, and kind, but in his novels he clearly, if genially, detests Americans, blacks, peers, machines, Englishmen, Jews, everything. He meted out prejudice equitably, outrageously, irresistibly.

He hated Communism, existentialism, Liberalism, and at times, although a devout Catholic, Catholicism. (Still, he found the Church's Index of forbidden books a "convenient excuse for not reading Sartre.") He came out of a Victorian middle-class family but chose the high life among the titled rich, the merely rich, and the leisured indigent—most of whom he both loved and deplored. His first published essay was a defense of Cubism; but in the end, as he conceded in his autobiographical *The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold,* "his strongest tastes were negative. He abhorred plastics, Picasso, sunbathing, and jazz—everything, in fact, that had happened in his lifetime."

This mix of intimacy and detach-



Courtesy of Lord Moyne and Lady Pansy Lamb.

Decline and Fall *was behind him,* Vile Bodies *yet to come, when Evelyn Waugh, aged 26, sat for this portrait by Henry Lamb. He was like a "prancing faun," recalled Oxford friend Harold Acton, "thinly disguised by conventional apparel." But Waugh switched disguises—the reckless dandy, the pious Christian, the crusty Tory—several times before his death in 1966.*

ment made Waugh, as Edmund Wilson put it, "the only first rate comic genius in English since George Bernard Shaw." Waugh could not have captured the world of fashionably decadent, upper-crust England if he had been born into it. He had not. And Wilson ("Is he an American?" sniffed Waugh), one of the first critics to take Waugh seriously, recognized this as an asset rather than a liability. Approaching the London social scene as an outsider, Waugh had to re-create it for himself.

Evelyn Arthur St. John Waugh was born in London in 1903. His father, Arthur Waugh, was a publisher of some note who described himself as "incorrigibly Victorian," though he lived until 1943.

Reacting against what he perceived as his father's emotionalism and "weakness," Evelyn cultivated a different style. Even as a schoolboy, he was ostentatiously aggressive, at times a downright bully.

Despite his parents' rather tepid Anglicanism, Waugh early showed an unusual interest in religion and was sent to Lancing, a public school with pronounced High-Church tendencies. He was a reasonably contented and, his diaries suggest, surprisingly conventional schoolboy, but in his last years at Lancing there was a change. At school he was rebellious; at home, openly hostile toward his father.

The real break came at Oxford. Waugh went up to Hertford College in 1922 and spent his first two terms quietly. But he had formed romantic preconceptions of "a quintessential Oxford which I knew and loved from afar and intended to find." He was not disappointed.

Near the end of his second term, he joined the Hypocrites Club, a center of hard drinking, dandyism, and Oxford high life. Here Waugh found the Oxford he was seeking; the world of the "Bollinger Club" he would re-create in *Decline and Fall;* the "smooth young men of uncertain tastes" whose backgrounds were dramatically, seductively unlike his own; exotics like aesthete Harold Acton; aristocratic dandies like Hugh Lygon, a model for Sebastian Flyte in *Brideshead Revisited.*

Waugh was not a leader in this group; he was too poor, too socially insecure, too ambivalent in his feelings about "modernity." But he was an enthusiastic follower, relishing all that Oxford offered him—from *The Waste Land* to drunkenness and, for a time, homosexuality. Only academic work failed to excite him and he never received a degree. But he did receive access to the "hot springs of anarchy" in his nature, which his upbringing had undervalued and ignored.

As the '20s waned, the dandies' world shifted from Oxford to London, and the circle expanded to include younger, more daring elements—the Bright Young People of *Vile Bodies,* whose parties were theatrical productions, lavishly executed in full costume. Condemned by the newspapers as the epitome of reckless modern youth, the Bright

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Young People obligingly turned London into an immense children's playground. Their parties and hoaxes were duly reported in the gossip columns and consumed with relish and indignation. Such heavy investments in fantasy and frippery were foredoomed; in *Vile Bodies*, Waugh makes the frailty and unreality of his so-called Bright Young Things very clear. Even at Oxford he realized that the aristocracy was more aura than energy and had in fact been largely replaced by a menagerie of arrivistes, Fleet Street barons, and trendy socialites. But Waugh remained enchanted with their antics, and the enchantment lasted all his life.

Waugh came down from Oxford £200 in debt, with no serious ambitions or plans for a career. For a time he attended art school but soon realized he had "not the talent nor the application—I lacked the moral qualities." Nor did steady journalism seem to be his métier. A stint at Lord Beaverbrook's *Daily Express* lasted 16 days.

Worse, he was unhappily in love with Olivia Plunket-Greene, one of the Bright Young People, a moody and difficult girl. Partly through Olivia, Waugh was drawn into the London scene, where he led an increasingly expensive and exhausting social life. He went deeper into debt and was obliged, like Paul Pennyfeather in *Decline and Fall*, to get a job as a schoolmaster, first at a school in Wales, then at a school near Oxford (from which he was fired for drunkenness), finally in London. Although these episodes would later bear comic fruit, Waugh saw them at the time only as dreary additions to "an almost continuous record of failure." At one point, he tried to drown himself, leaving behind a suicide note in the form of some appropriate verses from Euripides. This, too, proved unsuccessful in a wonderfully Waugh-like way; a jellyfish stung him on the leg, and the pain drove him back to shore.

By 1927, however, Waugh had fallen in love with Evelyn Gardner. Her mother, Lady Burclere, was not receptive to the prospect of an impoverished schoolteacher as a son-in-law, so Waugh settled down to writing, although it had never given him as much pleasure as drawing. Nevertheless, he went seriously to work.

In June of 1928, the two Evelyns were secretly married in London. Three months later, *Decline and Fall* was published and well received, and the Waughs, though not well off, seemed happily established. *He-* and *she-*Evelyn, as they were known, were a striking pair—"like two little boys," Nancy Mitford said; at home in their "smart little bandbox of a house," they seemed to combine sophistication with idyllic innocence. Within a year, however, the idyll was over, disastrously.

The 1929 London season had been particularly feverish, and in July Waugh went to the country for some peace to work on *Vile Bodies*. In his absence, *she-*Evelyn fell in love with a mutual friend. She confessed the affair but attempts at a reconciliation failed. In September, Waugh sued for a divorce, and it was granted. A year later, he entered the Catholic Church. The wound of *she-*Evelyn's betrayal was deep, yet neither divorce nor conversion produced a dramatic change in Waugh's writing or his way of life.

With the publication of *Vile Bodies* in 1930, Waugh achieved a certain celebrity. Access to the glittering inner circles was far more easy than

it had been in the '20s, and in his London diary for these years, he sounds tough, self-assured, very much the dandy about town, conspicuously enjoying his success.

But Waugh, like others of his generation, found England in the '30s a less congenial place. He spent much of his time roaming, usually to remote and primitive places. He went to Ethiopia for Haile Selassie's coronation and, later, to cover the Italian invasion. He traveled in Africa, in South America, and to the Spitzbergen Islands in the Arctic. Out of these voyages came material for newspaper stories that he ultimately turned into the comic novels *Black Mischief* (1932), *A Handful of Dust* (1934), and *Scoop* (1938).

In 1937, when the Catholic Church finally annulled his first marriage, Waugh married Laura Herbert, a cousin of his first wife. ("I thought we'd heard the last of that young man," one aunt said.) For the first time Waugh had a permanent home of his own—Piers Court in Gloucestershire. The decision to leave London and establish himself as a country squire was an indication that he was forsaking dandyism for a more traditional way of life. *Scoop* was his first novel from Piers Court, and the brief portrait of the preposterously feudal Boot family, for all its ostensible irony, reveals Waugh's romantic attraction to rural, eccentric "Englishness."

With the same traditional enthusiasm, Waugh welcomed World War II as a heroic renaissance for himself and for England. *Put Out More Flags* (1942), perhaps his finest novel, conveys the optimism of his early wartime years. The central group of the novel are the rogues and dandies of earlier books who now, in wartime, have put aside the feckless habits of peace.

Still, it is characteristic of Waugh's divided nature that the heroes of the novel, the characters who engage Waugh's deepest imaginative attention, are two brilliant misfits, Ambrose Silk and Basil Seal. They will have nothing to do with the war and continue the solitary, anarchic ways they followed in peacetime.

Ultimately, the war disappointed Waugh. Because of his age, he had trouble getting a commission. Eventually he was accepted into the Royal Marines and later transferred to a commando unit under Colonel Robert Laycock, whom he liked and respected. Waugh served bravely in combat at Dakar and on Crete but, on the whole, he was impossible: rude to his superiors, a bully to his men. When Laycock sailed for Italy, he left Waugh behind, confiding to a friend, "I'm afraid Evelyn will be shot. . . . Oh, I don't mean by the enemy."

The most important event of the war years in terms of Waugh's artistic career was *Brideshead Revisited* (1945), his first serious, fictional attempt to reconcile his religion with his art. The first part of the novel is a wonderfully nostalgic evocation of Oxford and the aristocratic country-house world. The second half, a religious story of redemption and conversion, is less successful. As a whole, the novel is a radical failure, for the new order that Waugh finds in the Catholic Church is never depicted with the conviction he brings to the eccentric, irresponsible age he has renounced.

Modern times pressed hard on Waugh in his last decades. The decline of the aristocracy, the encroachment of American power, and, above all, the ascendence of the liberal movement in the Catholic Church appalled and depressed him.

Waugh, like his father, had a histrionic streak; he promoted his "idiosyncratic Toryism" and played the role of curmudgeonly squire with gusto. He realized that his behavior could be trying and, when told as much, once replied: "Can you imagine how much worse I'd be if I weren't a Catholic?" In his last years, he found his pleasures chiefly in his family and a small circle of friends. He died on Easter Sunday 1966.

Waugh claimed to regard writing not as an investigation of character but as "an exercise in the use of language." Like Gilbert Pinfold, he "regarded his books as objects which he had made, things quite external to himself, to be used and judged by others." But this is only partly true, for Waugh's novels are passionate extensions of himself. Why he chose to project a veneeer of detachment remains a complex question.

In early life, Waugh adopted the arrogant, upper-class pose of "never apologize, never explain." Later, sadly, aloofness came to reflect his distaste for the modern world. But in his best work he creates a tension between the two: between his strong sense of tradition and the pleasure he took in assaulting it. For the man who publicly wished he'd been born in the 13th century always knew that he was peculiarly a child of the 20th.

DECLINE AND FALL

Waugh published Decline and Fall *in 1928, shortly after his first marriage. This comic novel traces the career of Paul Pennyfeather, a young man of piety who is expelled from Oxford for indecent behavior. Pennyfeather's misfortunes begin with the annual dinner of Oxford's exclusive Bollinger Club. As the book opens, Mr. Sniggs, the Junior Dean, and Mr. Postelthwaite, the Domestic Bursar, are in their rooms overlooking the inner court of Scone College, listening to a "confused roaring and breaking of glass."*

There is tradition behind the Bollinger; it numbers reigning kings among its past members. At the last dinner, three years ago, a fox had been brought in in a cage and stoned to death with champagne bottles. What an evening that had been! This was the first meeting since then, and from all over Europe old members had rallied for the occasion. For two days they had been pouring into Oxford: epileptic royalty from their villas of exile; uncouth peers from crumbling country seats; smooth young men of uncertain tastes from embassies and legations; illiterate lairds from wet granite hovels in the Highlands. . . . All that was most sonorous of name and title was there for the beano.

"The fines!" said Mr. Sniggs, gently rubbing his pipe along the side of his nose. "Oh, my! the fines there'll be after this evening!"

There is some highly prized port in the senior common-room cellars that is only brought up when the College fines have reached £50.

"We shall have a week of it at least," said Mr. Postlethwaite, "a week of Founder's port."

A shriller note could now be heard rising from Sir Alastair's rooms; any who have heard that sound will shrink at the recollection of it; it is the sound of the English county families baying for broken glass. . . .

"There must be fifty of them at least," said Mr. Postlethwaite. "If only they were all members of the College! Fifty of them at ten pounds each. Oh, my!"

"It'll be more if they attack the Chapel," said Mr. Sniggs. "Oh, please God, make them attack the Chapel."

"I wonder who the unpopular undergraduates are this term. They always attack their rooms. I hope they have been wise enough to go out for the evening."

"I think Partridge will be one; he possesses a painting by Matisse or some such name."

"And I'm told he has black sheets in his bed."

"And Sanders went to dinner with Ramsay MacDonald once."

"And Rending can afford to hunt, but collects china instead."

"And smokes cigars in the garden after breakfast."

"Austen has a grand piano."

"They'll enjoy smashing that.". . .

It was a lovely evening. They broke up Mr. Austen's grand piano, and stamped Lord Rending's cigars into his carpet, and smashed his china, and tore up Mr. Partridge's sheets, and threw the Matisse into his water jug; Mr. Sanders had nothing to break except his windows, but they found the manuscript at which he had been working for the Newdigate Prize Poem, and had great fun with that. . . . But there was still a treat to come.

Paul Pennyfeather was reading for the Church. It was his third year of uneventful residence at Scone. He had come there after a creditable career at a small public school of ecclesiastical temper on the South Downs, where he had edited the magazine, been President of the Debating Society, and had, as his report said, "exercised a wholesome influence for good" in the House of which he was head boy. . . .

Little suspecting the incalculable consequences that the evening was to have for him, he bicycled happily back from a meeting of the League of Nations Union. There had been a most interesting paper about plebiscites in Poland. He thought of smoking a pipe and reading another chapter of the *Forsyte Saga* before going to bed. He knocked at the gate, was admitted, put away his bicycle, and diffidently, as always, made his way across the quad towards his rooms. What a lot of people there seemed to be about! . . .

Out of the night Lumsden of Strathdrummond swayed across his path like a druidical rocking stone. Paul tried to pass.

Now it so happened that the tie of Paul's old school bore a marked resemblance to the pale blue and white of the Bollinger Club. The difference of a quarter of an inch in the width of the stripes was not one that Lumsden of Strathdrummond was likely to appreciate.

"Here's an awful man wearing the Boller tie," said the Laird. It is not

for nothing that since pre-Christian times his family has exercised chieftainship over uncharted miles of barren moorland.

Mr. Sniggs was looking rather apprehensively at Mr. Postlethwaite.

"They appear to have caught somebody," he said. "I hope they don't do him any serious harm."...

At length the crowd parted, and Mr. Sniggs gave a sigh of relief.

"But it's quite all right. . . . It's Pennyfeather—some one of no importance."

"Well, that saves a great deal of trouble. I am glad, Sniggs; I am, really. What a lot of clothes the young man appears to have lost!"

Next morning there was a lovely College meeting.

"Two hundred and thirty pounds," murmured the Domestic Bursar ecstatically, "not counting the damage! That means five evenings, with what we have already collected. Five evenings of Founder's port!"

"The case of Pennyfeather," the Master was saying, "seems to be quite a different matter altogether. He ran the whole length of the quadrangle, you say, without his trousers. It is unseemly."...

"Perhaps if we fined him really heavily?" suggested the Junior Dean.

"I very much doubt whether he could pay. I understand he is not well off. Without trousers, indeed! And at that time of night! I think we should do far better to get rid of him altogether. That sort of young man does the College no good."...

At the gates Paul tipped the porter.

"Well, good-bye, Blackall," he said. "I don't suppose I shall see you again for some time."

"No, sir, and very sorry I am to hear about it. I expect you'll be becoming a schoolmaster, sir. That's what most of the gentlemen does, sir, that gets sent down for indecent behaviour."

VILE BODIES

Vile Bodies *(1930) is a manic tale of London's 1920s smart set. Through a whirl of parties—"Masked parties, Savage parties, Victorian parties"—runs the on-again, off-again romance between Adam Fenwick-Symes, an impoverished writer, and Nina Blount, daughter of a batty country aristocrat.*

Coming home from France, Adam has had the typescript of his autobiography—his only hope of solvency—impounded by an English customs officer, along with a copy of Dante's Purgatorio. *("French, eh? . . . and pretty dirty, too, I shouldn't wonder.") Desperate, he is hired as Mr. Chatterbox, the gossip*

columnist on London's Daily Excess. *Unfortunately, Lord Monomark, the newspaper's owner, has forbidden further mention of the 62 most prominent Londoners, including the Prime Minister and the Archbishop of Canterbury, all of whom are suing the paper. (Adam's predecessor had deliberately libeled all of them in his last column.)*

Forced to write about "a murky world of nonentities," Adam nevertheless brings a certain ingenuity to the task—culminating in his invention of the remarkable Imogen Quest.

He started a series of "Notable Invalids," which was, from the first, wildly successful. . . . He followed it up with a page about deaf peers and statesmen, then about the one-legged, blind and bald. . . . Finally, he ransacked the lunatic asylums and mental houses of the country, and for nearly a week ran an extremely popular series under the heading of "Titled Eccentrics." . . .

"Lady ——, whose imitations of animal sounds are so life-like that she can seldom be persuaded to converse in any other way . . ."

And so on.

Besides this, arguing that people did not really mind whom they read about provided that a kind of vicarious inquisitiveness into the lives of others was satisfied, Adam began to invent people.

He invented a sculptor called Provna, the son of a Polish nobleman, who lived in a top-floor studio in Grosvenor House. Most of his work (which was all in private hands) was constructed in cork, vulcanite and steel. . . . Such is the power of the Press, that soon after this a steady output of Early Provnas began to travel from Warsaw to Bond Street and from Bond Street to California. . . .

Encouraged by his success, Adam began gradually to introduce to his readers a brilliant and lovely company. He mentioned them casually at first in lists of genuine people. There was a popular young attaché at the Italian Embassy called Count Cincinnati. He was descended from the famous Roman Consul, Cincinnatus, and bore a plough as his crest. Count Cincinnati was held to be the best amateur cellist in London. Adam saw him one evening dancing at the Café de la Paix. A few evenings later Lord Vanburgh [a rival gossip columnist on the *Morning Despatch*] noticed him at Covent Garden, remarking that his collection of the original designs for the Russian ballet was unequalled in Europe. Two days later Adam sent him to Monte Carlo for a few day's rest, and Vanburgh hinted that there was more in this visit than met the eye, and mentioned the daughter of a well-known American hostess who was staying there at her aunt's villa. . . .

But Adam's most important creation was Mrs. Andrew Quest. There was always some difficulty about introducing English people into his column as his readers had a way of verifying his references in Debrett. . . . However, he put Imogen Quest down one day, quietly and decisively, as the most lovely and popular of the younger married set. And from the first she exhibited signs of a marked personality. Adam wisely eschewed any attempts at derivation, but his readers nodded to each other and speedily supplied her with an exalted if irregular origin. Everything else Adam showered upon her. She had slightly more than average

height, and was very dark and slim, with large Laurencin eyes and the negligent grace of the trained athlete (she fenced with the sabre for half an hour every morning before breakfast). Even Provna, who was notoriously indifferent to conventional beauty, described her as "justifying the century."...

Soon Imogen Quest became a byword for social inaccessibility—the final goal for all climbers.

Adam went one day to a shop in Hanover Square to watch Nina buy some hats and was seriously incommoded by the heaps of bandboxes disposed on the chairs and dressing-tables ostentatiously addressed to Mrs. Andrew Quest. He could hear her name spoken reverently in cocktail clubs, and casually let slip in such phrases as "My dear, I never see Peter now. He spends all his time with Imogen Quest," or "As Imogen would say . . ." or "I think the Quests have got one like that. I must ask them where it came from."...

Finally a message came down that Lord Monomark was interested in Mrs. Quest; could Mr. Chatterbox arrange a meeting? That day the Quests sailed for Jamaica.

BLACK MISCHIEF

Black Mischief *(1932) centers on the quixotic fortunes of Seth, Emperor of Azania, Lord of Wanda, and "Bachelor of the Arts of Oxford University." Having imperfectly assimilated the fruits of Western progress, young Seth has embarked on an ambitious One Year Plan to move his backward African homeland into a New Age. To that end he has appointed Basil Seal, a college acquaintance and irrepressible cad-about-London, as Minister of Modernisation. Seal in turn, is assisted by an expatriate Armenian wheeler-dealer, Youkoumian, who serves as Financial Secretary.*

In his relentless quest for modernity, Seth has organized a Pageant of Birth Control to promote infertility among his bewildered people. Although the idea is opposed by the Azanian nobility, the Nestorian Church, and "a few of the decayed Arab intelligentsia," the tribesmen and villagers are surprisingly enthusiastic.

This development was due directly and solely to the power of advertisement. In the dark days when the prejudice of his people compassed him on every side and even Basil spoke unsympathetically of the wisdom of postponing the gala, the Emperor found among the books that were mailed to him monthly from Europe, a collection of highly inspiring Soviet posters....

An artist was next found in the

Armenian colony who, on Mr. Youkoumian's introduction, was willing to elaborate Seth's sketches. Finally there resulted a large, highly colored poster well calculated to convey to the illiterate the benefits of birth control. . . .

It portrayed two contrasted scenes. On one side a native hut of hideous squalor, overrun with children of every age, suffering from every physical incapacity—crippled, deformed, blind, spotted and insane; the father prematurely aged with paternity squatted by an empty cook-pot; through the door could be seen his wife, withered and bowed with child bearing, desperately hoeing at their inadequate crop. On the other side a bright parlour furnished with chairs and table; the mother, young and beautiful, sat at her ease eating a huge slice of raw meat; her husband smoked a long Arab hubble-bubble (still a caste mark of leisure throughout the land), while a single, healthy child sat between them reading a newspaper. Inset between the two pictures was a detailed drawing of some up-to-date contraceptive apparatus and the words in Sakuyu:

WHICH HOME DO YOU CHOOSE?

Interest in the pictures was unbounded; all over the island woolly heads were nodding, black hands pointing, tongues clicking against filed teeth in unsyntactical dialects. Nowhere was there any doubt about the meaning of the beautiful new pictures.

See: on right hand: there is rich man: smoke pipe like big chief: but his wife she no good: sit eating meat: and rich man no good: he only one son.

See: on the left hand: poor man: not much to eat: but his poor wife she very good, work hard in field: man he good too: eleven children: one very mad, very holy. And in the middle: Emperor's juju. Make you like that good man with eleven children.

And as a result, despite admonitions from squire and vicar, the peasantry began pouring into town for the gala, eagerly awaiting initiation to the fine new magic of virility and fecundity. . . .

"If you ask me," said Basil, one morning soon after the distribution of the poster, "loyalty to the throne is one of the hardest parts of our job."

"Oh, gosh, Mr. Seal, don't you ever say a thing like that. I seen gentlemen poisoned dead for less. What's e done now?"

"Only this." He handed Mr. Youkoumian a chit which had just arrived from the Palace:

For your information and necessary action; I have decided to abolish the following:

Death penalty.

Marriage.

The Sakuyu language and all native dialects.

Infant mortality.

Totemism.

Inhumane butchery.

Mortgages.

Emigration.

Please see to this. Also organise system of reservoirs for city's water supply and draft syllabus for competitive examination for public services. Suggest compulsory Esperanto. Seth.

"E's been reading books again, Mr. Seal, that's what it is. You won't get no peace from im, not till you fix im with a woman. Why can't e drink or something?"

Later, two representatives of England's Society for the Prevention of Cruelty of Animals, Dame Mildred Porch and Miss Tin, arrive in Azania on a fact-finding tour. Seth decides to demonstrate Azania's new-found modernity by honoring the visiting ladies with a state dinner. He tells Basil:

"It shall be an entirely Azanian party. I want the English ladies to see how refined we are. I was doubtful about asking Viscount Boaz. What do you think? Will he be sober? . . . and there is the question of food. I have been reading that now it is called Vitamins. I am having the menu printed like this. It is a good, modern, European dinner, eh?"

Basil looked at the card. A month ago he might have suggested emendations. Today he was tired. . . .

So the menu for Seth's first dinner party went to the *Courier* office to be printed and came back a packet of handsome gilt edged cards, laced with silk ribbons in the Azanian colours and embossed with a gold crown.

March 15th.

IMPERIAL BANQUET FOR WELCOMING THE ENGLISH CRUELTY TO ANIMALS

Menu of Foods.

Vitamin A
Tin Sardines
Vitamin B
Roasted Beef
Vitamin C
Small Roasted Suckling Porks
Vitamin D
Hot Sheep and Onions
Vitamin E
Spiced Turkey
Vitamin F
Sweet Puddings
Vitamin G
Coffee
Vitamin H
Jam

"It is so English," explained Seth. "From courtesy to your great Empire." . . .

Presently when the last vitamin had been guzzled, Viscount Boaz rose to propose the health of the guests of honour. His speech was greeted by loud applause and was then done into English by the Court Interpreter:

"Your Majesty, Lords and Ladies. It is my privilege and delight this evening to welcome with open arms of brotherly love to our city Dame Mildred Porch and Miss Tin, two ladies renowned throughout the famous country of Europe for their great cruelty to animals. We Azanians are a proud and ancient nation but we have much to learn from the white people of the West and North. We too, in our small way, are cruel to our animals"—and here the Minister for the Interior digressed at some length to recount with hideous detail what he had himself once done with a woodman's axe to a wild boar—"but it is to the great nations of the West and North, and specially to their worthy representatives that are with us tonight, that we look as our natural leaders on the road of progress. Ladies and gentlemen we must be Modern, we must be refined in our Cruelty to Animals. That is the message of the New Age brought to us by our guests this evening. May I, in conclusion, raise my glass and ask you to join with me in wishing them old age and prolonged fecundity."

SCOOP

Written in 1938, soon after the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, Scoop *remains a classic, a devastating portrait of the world of the foreign correspondent. William Boot, a countryman and live-at-home nature writer ("Feather footed through the plashy fen passes the questing vole . . .") for London's* Daily Beast, *has been mistakenly assigned by Lord Copper, the Fleet Street magnate, to cover an incipient civil war in Ishmaelia, located on the African mainland not far from Azania. Young Boot dutifully sets off to join the scores of foreign journalists misreporting events in Jacksonburg, Ishmaelia's capital. En route, aboard the S.S.* Francmaçon *in the Red Sea, he picks up a few tips from Corker, a veteran reporter for the Universal News Service.*

Corker looked at him sadly. "You know, you've got a lot to learn about journalism. Look at it this way. News is what a chap who doesn't care much about anything wants to read. And it's only news until he's read it. After that it's dead. We're paid to supply news. If someone else has sent a story before us, our story isn't news. Of course there's colour. Colour is just a lot of bulls'-eyes about nothing. It's easy to write and easy to read but it costs too much in cabling so we have to go slow on that. See?"

"I think so."

That afternoon Corker told William a great deal about the craft of journalism. The *Francmaçon* weighed anchor, swung about and steamed into the ochre hills, through the straits and out into the open sea while Corker recounted the heroic legends of Fleet Street; he told of the classic scoops and hoaxes; of the confessions wrung from hysterical suspects; of the innuendo and intricate misrepresentations, the luscious, detailed inventions that composed contemporary history; of the positive, daring lies that got a chap a rise of screw; how Wenlock Jakes, highest paid journalist of the United States, scooped the world with an eyewitness story of the sinking of the *Lusitania* four hours before she was hit; how Hitchcock, the English Jakes, straddling over his desk in London, had chronicled day by day the horrors of the Messina earthquake; how Corker himself, not three months back, had had the rare good fortune to encounter a knight's widow trapped by the foot between lift and landing. . . .

Many of Corker's anecdotes dealt with the fabulous Wenlock Jakes. ". . . syndicated all over America. Gets a thousand dollars a week. When he turns up in a place you can bet your life that as long as he's there it'll be the news centre of the world.

"Why, once Jakes went out to cover a revolution in one of the Balkan capitals. He overslept in his carriage, woke up at the wrong station, didn't know any different, got out, went straight to a hotel, and cabled off a thousand-word story about barricades in the streets, flaming churches, machine guns answering the rattle of

his typewriter as he wrote, a dead child, like a broken doll, spread-eagled in the deserted roadway below his window—you know.

"Well they were pretty surprised at his office, getting a story like that from the wrong country, but they trusted Jakes and splashed it in six national newspapers. That day every special in Europe got orders to rush to the new revolution. They arrived in shoals. Everything seemed quiet enough, but it was as much as their jobs were worth to say so, with Jakes filing a thousand words of blood and thunder a day. So they chimed in too. Government stocks dropped, financial panic, state of emergency declared, army mobilized, famine, mutiny—and in less than a week there was an honest to God revolution under way, just as Jakes had said. There's the power of the press for you.

"They gave Jakes the Nobel Peace Prize for his harrowing descriptions of the carnage—but that was colour stuff."

THE LOVED ONE

The Loved One *(1948) is Waugh's most perverse novel; he recommended that the squeamish "return their copies to the library or the bookstore unread." The setting is Whispering Glades Memorial Park, a lush California necropolis modeled, despite disclaimers, on Hollywood's Forest Lawn Cemetery. The title of the book refers to the cemetery's clients as well as to Miss Aimée Thanatogenos, resident cosmetician and aspiring embalmer. She is being amorously pursued by Mr. Joyboy, dean of American morticians, and by a young Englishman, Dennis Barlow, a sometime screenwriter now employed as an attendant at the Happier Hunting Grounds, a Whispering Glades for pets.*

Sir Francis Hinsley, just fired by Megalopolitan Pictures, has hanged himself with his suspenders. Dennis, his friend and fellow countryman, must make arrangements for the funeral. With recorded strains of the "Hindu Love-song" in the background, he opens preliminary negotiations with a Mortuary Hostess.

"We want my friend buried."

"This is not your first visit to Whispering Glades?"

"Yes."

"Then let me explain the Dream. The Park is zoned. Each zone has its own name and appropriate Work of Art. Zones of course vary in price and within the zones the prices vary according to their proximity to the Work of Art. We have single sites as low as fifty dollars. That is in Pilgrims' Rest, a zone we are just developing behind the Crematory fuel

dump. The most costly are those on Lake Isle. They range about a thousand dollars. Then there is Lovers' Nest, zoned about a very, very beautiful marble replica of Rodin's famous statue, the Kiss. We have double plots there at seven hundred and fifty dollars the pair. Was your Loved One married?"

"No."

"What was his business?"

"He was a writer."

"Ah, then Poets' Corner would be the place for him. We have many of our foremost literary names there, either in person or as Before Need reservations. You are no doubt acquainted with the works of Amelia Bergson?"

"I know of them."

"We sold Miss Bergson a Before Need reservation only yesterday, under the statue of the prominent Greek poet Homer. I could put your friend right next to her. But perhaps you would like to see the zone before deciding?"

"I want to see everything."

"There certainly is plenty to see. I'll have one of our guides take you round just as soon as we have all the Essential Data, Mr. Barlow. Was your Loved One of any special religion?"

"An Agnostic."

"We have two non-sectarian churches in the Park and a number of non-sectarian pastors. Jews and Catholics seem to prefer to make their own arrangements."

"I believe Sir Ambrose Abercrombie is planning a special service."

"Oh, was your Loved One in films, Mr. Barlow? In that case he ought to be in Shadowland."

"I think he would prefer to be with Homer and Miss Bergson."

"Then the University Church would be most convenient. We like to save the Waiting Ones a long procession. I presume the Loved One was Caucasian?"

"No, why did you think that? He was purely English."

"English are purely Caucasian, Mr. Barlow. This is a restricted park. The Dreamer has made that rule for the sake of the Waiting Ones. In their time of trial they prefer to be with their own people."

"I think I understand. Well, let me assure you Sir Francis was quite white."

As he said this there came vividly into Dennis's mind that image which lurked there, seldom out of sight for long; the sack or body suspended and the face above it with eyes red and horribly starting from their sockets, the cheeks mottled in indigo like the marbled end-papers of a ledger and the tongue swollen and protruding like an end of black sausage. . . .

"Your are sure that they will be able to make him presentable?"

"We had a Loved One last month who was found drowned. He had been in the sea a month and they only identified him by his wristwatch. They fixed that stiff," said the hostess, disconcertingly lapsing from the high diction she had hitherto employed, "so he looked like it was his wedding day. The boys up there surely know their job. Why if he'd sat on an atom bomb, they'd make him presentable."

"That's very comforting."

Dennis's next appointment is with the cosmetician of the Orchid Room, Aimée Thanatogenos. Clad in the white livery of her profession, she is, he thinks, the "sole Eve in a bustling, hygienic Eden."

Her full face was oval, her profile pure and classical and light. Her eyes greenish and remote, with a rich glint of lunacy.

Dennis held his breath. When the girl spoke it was briskly and prosaically.

"What did your Loved One pass on from?" she asked.

"He hanged himself."

"Was the face much disfigured?"

"Hideously."

"That is quite usual. Mr. Joyboy will probably take him in hand personally. It is a question of touch, you see, massaging the blood from the congested areas. Mr. Joyboy has very wonderful hands."

"And what do you do?"

"Hair, skin and nails, and I brief the embalmers for expression and pose. Have you brought any photographs of your Loved One? They are the greatest help in recreating personality. Was he a very cheerful old gentleman?"

"No, rather the reverse."

"Shall I put him down as serene and philosophical or judicial and determined?"

"I think the former."

"It is the hardest of all expressions to fix, but Mr. Joyboy makes it his speciality—that and the joyful smile for children. Did the Loved One wear his own hair? And the normal complexion? We usually classify them as rural, athletic and scholarly—that is to say red, brown or white. Scholarly? And spectacles? A monocle. They are always a difficulty because Mr. Joyboy likes to incline the head slightly to give a more natural pose. Pince-nez and monocles are difficult to keep in place once the flesh has firmed. Also of course the monocle looks less natural when the eye is closed. Did you particularly wish to feature it?"

"No, let us eliminate the monocle."

"Just as you wish, Mr. Barlow. Of course, Mr. Joyboy *can* fix it."

"No. I think your point about the eye being closed is decisive."

"Very well. Did the Loved One pass over with a rope?"

"Braces. What you call suspenders."

"That should be quite easy to deal with. Sometimes there is a permanent line left. We had a Loved One last month who passed over with electric cord. Even Mr. Joyboy could do nothing with that. We had to wind a scarf right up to the chin. But suspenders should come out quite satisfactorily."

"You have a great regard for Mr. Joyboy, I notice."

"He is a true artist, Mr. Barlow. I can say no more."