

**On the Road from Facts to Fiction:
Evelyn Waugh's Travel Books**

UNIVERSITY OF BIALYSTOK, FACULTY OF PHILOLOGY

Grzegorz Moroz

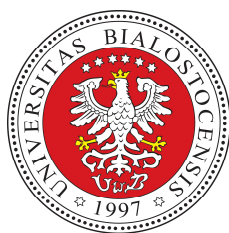
**On the Road from Facts to Fiction:
Evelyn Waugh's Travel Books**

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Reviewed by professor Zbigniew Białas, the University of Silesia

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Wydawnictwo PRYMAT, Mariusz Śliwowski, ul. Kolejowa 19; 15-701 Białystok,
tel. 602 766 304, e-mail: prymat@biasoft.net, www.prymat.biasoft.net

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Introduction

When at the beginning of the nineteen nineties, as an independent scholar, I was researching the travel books of Evelyn Waugh in the Cambridge University Library, I could not conceive the effect this experience would have on me as a person and as, it turned out, an academic *in spe*. In 1993 at Warsaw University I defended my Ph.D. dissertation entitled *When the Going Was Good and the Fees Handsome: Evelyn Waugh's Travel Books*. At the beginning of this millennium I returned to the academic research and started gathering materials for a book on the methodology of teaching English Literature. It was not to be written, because in the autumn of 2004 I came across a copy of the *European English Messenger* which included an article by Tim Youngs entitled "The Importance of Travel Writing". This article opened with this declaration: "[o]ne of the most important but understated developments in English Studies over the past few years has been the increasing amount of attention paid to travel writing". (Youngs, 5) Under the influence of this article, I immediately decided to return to my first academic love: travel writing. It took me almost a decade to write a book which was published in 2013 under the title *Travellers, Novelists and Gentlemen: Constructing Male Narrative Personae in British Travel Books, from the Beginnings to the Second World War*. Over the last three years I have extended the scope of my research to Polish travel writing which resulted in a paper published in *Travel Writing Studies* (edited by Tim Youngs) "Ryszard Kapuściński: Between Polish and Anglophone Travel Writing" and in a book on comparative analysis from the generic perspective of Polish and Anglophone travel writing, which I hope to finish at the beginning of next year.

When the proposal to have my Ph.D. dissertation published arrived, at first I had mixed feelings. I had had considered publishing it myself after my return to travel writing research in 2004, but was too preoccupied with other projects then. Re-reading my dissertation was, obviously, a sentimental journey, but it also made me realize that the path of analysis I adopted in it has not been trodden by travel writing scholars (or by Waugh scholars). In

my dissertation I analysed six travel books by Evelyn Waugh (five of them were written and published in the 1930s; the sixth, *A Tourist in Africa* appeared in 1960) in six consecutive chapters, from the perspective of Waugh's being more and more confident as a travel writer, but also from the perspective of travel books as located somewhere in the middle of 'literary chains' (as I called them); texts of different genres, situated on both sides of the fiction/non-fiction divide, which were the literary outcomes of Waugh's journeys. The trips and journeys which Waugh described in his travel books were usually first textualised in numerous entries in his diaries, letters to friends and publishers, as well as in newspaper articles. Later came travel books, which were in turn, usually followed by works of fiction—short stories, novellas and novels—'re-utilizing' settings and characters encountered 'on the road'. As I found out, the division between non-fiction and fiction in Waugh's writing does not correspond with the generic divisions into fictional and non-fictional (sub)genres, as the 'fictionalisation' of facts could be discerned not only in Waugh's travel books, the genre considered borderline between fiction and non-fiction. Examples of 'fictionalisation' are abundant in the earlier phases of these literary chains; in Waugh's diaries and in his newspaper articles. On my re-reading of this dissertation I found it appropriate to change the original title of *When the Going Was Good and the Fees Handsome: Evelyn Waugh's Travel Books* to *On the Road from Facts to Fiction: Evelyn Waugh's Travel Books*. The first part of the former title was a compound of two intertextual phrases. The first was taken from the title of Waugh's 1946 Penguin edition of fragments of his 1930s travel books entitled *When the Going Was Good*, the second from W.H. Auden's "Letter to Lord Byron" included in his and Louis MacNeice's 1937 travel book *Letters from Iceland*: "I love my publishers and my publishers love me/ at least they paid a very handsome fee/ To send me here". (Auden and MacNeice, 23) Today, this old title looks not only more than a tiny bit pretentious to me, but it is also not precise at all. I believe that the new title may not necessarily be less pretentious, but at least it is more indicative of the content of the book.

Evelyn Waugh's travel books received the status of 'canonicity' in travel writing studies in the very early days of the discipline in 1980 thanks to Paul Fussell's seminal *Abroad: British Literary Traveling Between the Wars* and the

chapter entitled “Evelyn Waugh’s Moral Entertainments”. But later, with the feminist and postcolonial turn in travel writing studies, Waugh’s travel books have been focused upon relatively rarely. In 2001 Bernard Schweizer’s *Radicals on the Road: The Politics of English Travel Writing* contained a chapter on Evelyn Waugh. The other three ‘radicals’ Schweizer concentrated upon were George Orwell, Graham Greene and Rebecca West. In 2003 an anthology of Waugh’s travel books was published by Alfred A. Knopf under the title: *Waugh Abroad: Collected Travel Writing*. Waugh’s travel texts were preceded by an introduction written by Nicholas Shakespeare.

While writing a chapter on the ways in which Evelyn Waugh constructed his narrative personae in my *Travellers, Novelists and Gentlemen* I followed an interesting clue provided by Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan in *Tourists with Typewriters: Critical Reflections on Contemporary Travel Writing* (1998), who treated Evelyn Waugh and Robert Byron as direct precursors of contemporary travel writing of the type followed by Bruce Chatwin and Raymond O’Hanlon and who declared the narrative personae of all these four travel writers “camp”. (Holland and Huggan, 35)

In 2013 at the Aldous Huxley conference held at Balliol College, entitled “The Condemned Playground: Aldous Huxley and His Contemporaries” I gave a presentation entitled “Oxford Travel Book Writers and Gentlemen-Scholars: Constructing Narrative Personae in Aldous Huxley’s *The Jestling Pilate*, Robert Byron’s *The Station* and Evelyn Waugh’s *Remote People*” which later appeared—in *Crossroads*.

As far as this book is concerned, I have decided to omit the Introduction and the first chapter of my original dissertation entitled “A Short Survey of British 1930s Travel Book” as they appear dated from my vantage point at the end of 2016. The main body of the text, that is six chapters dealing with six of Evelyn Waugh’s travel books, is published with only small stylistic alterations. The first chapter deals with Waugh’s first travel book: *Labels* (1930). It reported Waugh’s 1929 luxury cruise in the Mediterranean aboard the “Stella Polaris”. The second chapter approaches *Remote People* (1932), which was the result of Waugh’s long journey to Ethiopia and Eastern Africa, in the context of Waugh’s diary entries and newspapers arti-

cles on the one hand and the novel *Black Mischief* on the other. In the third chapter the texts which form the literary chain around *Ninety-Two Days* (1934) are analysed. This travel book was a result of an arduous trek in Central America, which lasted from January till May of 1933. The fourth chapter approaches the literary chain that was the result of Waugh's two trips to Abyssinia undertaken in 1935 and 1936, and it focuses on the travel book *Waugh in Abyssinia* (1936) and *Scoop*, the novel set in Abyssinia. Chapter Five deals mostly with Waugh's travel book *Robbery Under Law* (1937) and Chapter Six with his last travel book *A Tourist in Africa* (1960).

Białystok, November 2016

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CHAPTER I

Labels

Labels: A Mediterranean Journal, Waugh's first travel book, was published in Britain in 1930 (in America the book appeared in the same year with a different title, *A Bachelor Abroad*, a fact that will be commented upon further on in this chapter). The book describes a cruise around the Mediterranean that Waugh undertook in the winter and spring of 1929; a Norwegian shipping company gave him and his wife free tickets on the understanding that Waugh would advertise its services in his writings. The Waughs travelled to Paris by plane and then by train to Monte Carlo, where they boarded a luxury cruiser the "Stella Polaris".

It was quite common for writers in the 1930s to travel for money offered by various sponsors. Usually the writers were paid partly in advance by publishers, and sometimes they would be commissioned as newspaper correspondents. Later in his life Waugh himself travelled twice to Ethiopia for the *Times* and the *Daily Mail*, whereas *Robbery Under Law*, a book about Mexico in the late 1930s was sponsored by a British oil millionaire, eager to have Waugh speak and write in favour of British interests there. Of course, such commitments must to a certain extent have influenced the authors' impartiality and unbiased outlook on things as diverse as the quality of bed sheets and the role of big transnational corporations in Third World countries.

Waugh's narrator in *Labels* is a young, cynical dandy and man of the world, whom almost nobody or nothing can shock or even mildly surprise; few things can muster his acceptance and he is in general very critical of most aspects of contemporary life; from luxury hotels to local architecture. His only enthusiastic comments in the book are reserved solely for the "Stella Polaris" and her crew. He would not admit

to his readers that he had received free tickets for the cruise but clung to the story, that he had intended to go to Russia via Turkey, probably just as an excuse and/or to impress his readers with his ambitious travelling plans. He paid tribute to the “Stella Polaris” from his first glance at her; as she was entering the Monte Carlo harbour.

She was certainly a very pretty ship, standing rather high in the water, with the tall, pointing prow of a sailing yacht, white all over except for her single yellow funnel, and almost ostentatiously clean; a magnificent Scandinavian seaman stood at the foot of the gangway. So far I was agreeably impressed, but I reserved judgment, for she has the reputation of being what is called “the last word” in luxury design, and I am constitutionally sceptical of this kind of reputation.¹

Waugh might have been constitutionally sceptical but he also had commitments to fulfil and he continued to praise the “Stella Polaris”: “by any standards the comfort of the “Stella” was quite remarkable, I have never seen anything outside a hospital so much scrubbed and polished”². And pleasure cruising in general: “[...] the qualities which struck me most about this system of travel were its outstanding comfort and leisure”³.

Yet in *Labels* Waugh also showed a slightly different attitude while writing about services provided by other sponsors, an attitude not so straightforward and enthusiastic as in the case of the “Stella Polaris”. He describes how just before reaching Malta he had sent two telegrams to two different hotels asking for free accommodation during his stay on the island in return for his publicity in articles and books. When, to his surprise, the representatives of both hotels turned up at the quay, he dismissed one of them saying: “I am afraid that you have been deluded by a palpable forgery”⁴. The description of the other hotel in *Labels* is carried out in his typical, critical manner, but only up to a certain

¹ Evelyn Waugh, *Labels* (London, 1930), p. 39.

² *Ibid.*, p. 43.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

point, when he suddenly changes his mood: “the worst of it, however, was in the first impression, and I am really doing my duty honourably to the proprietor in warning people of it and exhorting them not to be deterred”⁵. It is altogether a different matter as to what extent he was sincere in these remarks.

Labels was Waugh's first travel book, but he had already written *Rossetti* (1928) and a fairly successful satirical novel *Decline and Fall* (1928) and considered himself, at the age of twenty six and after half-hearted attempts to become a teacher and journalist, a full time writer. Thus he treated *Labels* as what is these days known as a pot-boiler; a book of no extraordinary merits that would, however, prevent the author from being totally forgotten by his readers. He explained this in the following way:

[...] Now, even if you are very industrious, you cannot rely on writing more than two books a year, which will employ your public, as it is called, for about six hours each. That is to say, that for every hour in which you employ your readers' attention, you are giving her a month to forget you. It would be very difficult to organise even a marriage on that basis, still more one's financial career. So you have to spend half your leisure in writing articles for the papers, the editors buy these because people read your books because they see your articles in the papers. This is called a vicious circle by those who have not got into the running.⁶

Throughout the book Waugh remains very conscious of this autotopical mode as well as of the pot-boiling qualities of his travel writing; preferring to stick to his witticisms and satirical bias rather than to venture into guide-book elaborations; concentrating on people, rather than places. He laments on the difficulty of finding “any aspect of social organization about which one can get down one's seventy thousand words without obvious plagiarism”⁷.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

In many aspects *Labels* remains a travel book untypical for Waugh, which is only to a limited extent due to the fact that it was his first one. Most important of all is the fact that *Labels* does not form a link in the literary chain that most of Waugh's travel books are parts of: a diary entry – an article in a newspaper – a travel book – a short story – a novel. In fact it stands almost on its own with no diary at one end or a novel at the other to compare it with. There is just one very short story entitled “Cruise”, which was based on *Labels*, or rather, to be more exact, based on the cruise itself.

There are various reasons and clues that might explain this. Waugh, at most times an ardent and regular diary-writer, left no entries between 23 November 1928 and 19 May 1930. His brother Alec suspected that it was because he was unwilling to write about his first, unsuccessful marriage to Evelyn Gardner, whom Evelyn Waugh had married in June 1928. The wife left him in July of the next year, only a few weeks after their return from the Mediterranean trip; at a time when Waugh was busy writing his next novel. It is not clear if Waugh destroyed the existing diary or if he had not kept one at all at that time. When he resumed his diary, *Labels* had already been finished and, it seems, almost forgotten, for when he received its copy for proof reading on 29 May 1930 he just mentioned the fact on this day with no comments whatsoever.

The absence of the article on the “Stella Polaris” cruise can be explained by the fact that, at the time, Waugh was not a press correspondent and the places he visited were “fully labelled”, in other words not exotic enough and there was no war in the region to write about. The cruise was not an experience that was strong, traumatic or extraordinary enough to inspire Waugh to write a novel based on it, as he did after his subsequent travels which resulted in *Black Mischief*, *Handful of Dust* or *Scoop*. Having finished *Labels* in a very short time (six weeks) Waugh began work on *Vile Bodies*, a novel about Bright Young Things, a group of upper class party loving British contemporaries of the American Lost Generation. The novel was set in London and there is no trace there of a cruise round the Med. It is a bit strange for Waugh to “waste” such an abundance of comical material which a ship cruise must have provided.

While describing Paris, Waugh explained his reasons for the title of his book: "I have called this book *Labels* for the reason that all places I visited are fully labelled. I was no adventurer of the sort who can write books with such names as *Off the Beaten Track in Surrey* or *Plunges into Unknown Herts*. I suppose there is no track quite as soundly beaten as the Mediterranean seaboard, no towns so constantly and completely overrun with tourists on those I intend to describe"⁸. Which gives him a chance to define his goal: "but the interest I have found in preparing this book, which I hope may be shared by some of its readers, was that of investigating with a mind as open as the English system of pseudo-education allows, the basis for this reputation those famous places have acquired"⁹. But in fact Waugh concentrated mostly on the reputation of red light districts, avoiding any other, more obvious, sights.

Thus it seems obvious that from the very beginning of his travel book writing Waugh puts himself in a position when it is a witty comment or an apparently unorthodox, often flippant and light hearted attitude rather than the comprehensive erudite descriptions that would accompany descriptions of these trips. He would eagerly admit that he was not an expert on architecture or history and opted for "local colour" and the ironic observations of his fellow passengers, other tourists and natives. *Labels* is not a book of many digressions, and those he decided to insert are mostly about the nature and form of travel books; but on the whole what is striking in comparison with other travel books of this period is the almost complete lack of literary remarks, essays or digressions.

Labels is unique among Waugh's travel books in one more way. Although he employs a first person narration, which seems indispensable in travel writing, the person of the narrator is far more "fictitious" than usual. Of course, the relation of the world presented in travel books to the real world is not always very straightforward and plain, yet generally it is possible to differentiate the "real" *Brazilian Adventure* by Peter Fleming from the "fictitious" *On the Road* by Jack Kerouac. Waugh's

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁹ *Ibidem*.

Labels should be placed somewhere in between the two. It describes a “real” cruise in a very “realistic” way, but its narrator is a “fictitious” one because, “a bachelor abroad” from the American edition resembles the “real” Waugh only to a limited extent. He splits his own personality into the narrator of *Labels* and one of the characters in this travel book who he chooses to name “Geoffrey”. It was not the only instance in his writings when Waugh split himself into two personae. He did it in *Scoop* and in the short stories “The Balance” and “The Tutor’s Tale” but he did not introduce this device into any of his subsequent travel books.

It is the narrator who is granted Waugh's wit, his attitudes and his cynical stance, but it is Geoffrey, a fellow traveller who is furnished with Waugh's external features. The American title of the book – “A Bachelor Abroad” – is ironic in a twofold manner: Waugh was not a bachelor abroad while cruising in the Med, yet his wife was to leave him shortly afterwards. The narrator meets Geoffrey and Juliet on a train to Monte Carlo, while the “bachelor” has been left on his own to admire the night life in Paris. Geoffrey resembles a young Waugh: “The young man was small and pleasantly dressed and wore a slight, curly moustache; he was reading a particularly good detective story with apparent intelligence”¹⁰. Whereas Juliet (in reality the she-Evelyn) is described “as huddled in a fur coat in the corner, clearly far from well”¹¹ and the narrator intelligently deduces that “from the endearments of their conversation and marked solicitude for each other's comfort, on their honeymoon, or at any rate recently married”¹². Waugh had married Evelyn Gardner a few months before the cruise had started. He took her with him, and she was indeed seriously ill at that time. The narrator of *Labels* befriends Geoffrey and they spend quite a lot of time together. Juliet's serious illness and her long stay in hospital correspond to she-Evelyn's ordeal on the cruise. The narrator leaves Geoffrey and Juliet in Port Said as they embark on a boat leaving for Cyprus while he is about to sail to Malta on his own, a fact which also had its direct

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 29.

parallels in Waugh's own life. It seems that the underlying reasons for this split into two characters were personal as well as literary. At the time Waugh was writing *Labels*, his own marriage to Evelyn Gardner was about to end, she had had an affair with John Heygate, a news editor at the BBC. It must have been much more convenient and perhaps less painful to present oneself and one's unfaithful wife from the relatively objective standpoint of a fictitious bachelor-narrator. It seems that once Waugh decided to split himself into two characters he must have perceived the literary as well as the ironic advantages of it. Geoffrey is depicted in a far more favourable light than ailing Juliet, he has his funny peculiarities, but on the whole he is a young man of integrity and a very pleasant, worldly companion.

Waugh wrote *Labels* at a time which in many respects was a watershed in his life. Apart from the failure of his marriage and his subsequent lack of a fixed abode that lasted till 1937, it was his conversion to Roman Catholicism that changed him and his attitude more than anything else. Waugh took religious instructions to become a Roman Catholic in the summer of 1930. On 29 September 1930 he was received by Father Martin D'Arcy SJ into the Roman Catholic Church. *Labels* got published roughly around this time, but the book had been written a few months earlier. It was too late to change the text, or even those fragments that dealt more or less directly with religion. All that Waugh could do was to insert an author's note at the beginning: "so far as this book contains any serious opinions, they are these of the dates with which it deals, eighteen months ago. Since then my views on several subjects, and particularly on Roman Catholicism have developed and changed in many ways. E.W."¹³ The note could not alter the fact that *Labels* was Waugh's only pre-Catholic, "pagan" travel book. But on the other hand he did not elaborate in *Labels* on the "serious opinions" he seemed to be so much afraid of in his note. He carefully eschews any forays in the direction of an erudite or intellectual travel book and clearly prefers his book to remain satirical in tone throughout and his attitude to Christianity or Roman Catholicism was that of cynical flip-

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

pancy rather than serious or fundamental criticism. The subject crops up from time to time but it is presented merely as one among many strange fads and numerous superstitions the narrator encounters and his narrator is too much of a dandy to explain or describe them in a more regular fashion. Yet, organized religion is a source of many funny episodes and anecdotes. His flight to Paris, for instance, gives him a chance to recount a story of an Oxford president of the Union who was so conservative that he did not believe that anything heavier than air could fly. Apparently, he was converted to Catholicism two days later. Other “air-plane conversions” followed suit, and “when a little later he (the pilot) came down in flames, the Jesuits lost a good ally, and to some people it seemed as if the Protestant God had asserted supremacy in a fine Old Testament manner.”¹⁴ When the “Stella Polaris” anchored in Haifa, the narrator took a trip to the Holy Land, to Cana of Galilee “where a little girl was offering wine jars for sale. They were the authentic ones used in the miracle. If they were too big she had a smaller size indoors, yes, the small ones were authentic, too”¹⁵. The stay on Malta results in a short essay on the history of the Order of St. John. It makes the narrator wonder what strange rites of initiation the knights must have praised, what friendships and jealousies sprang up among these celibate warriors.

Later, in the late 1930s Waugh had some problems with orthodox Catholic critics, but because of *A Handful of Dust* (1934), not *Labels*. Even after his conversion Waugh occasionally wrote about Catholicism in a lighter vein but the fact remains that he omitted all religious fragments and anecdotes from *Labels* in his *When the Going Was Good* (1946), where he compiled excerpts from his pre-war travel books.

Labels shares many features with the majority of 1930s travel books. It begins, typically enough, in February in cold, numb and boring London. “There was not even a good murder case.”¹⁶ Then the narrator decides to go south to warmer climates; he chooses to go for a

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

luxury cruise; he sets off with little luggage but with some “serious books”, such as Spengler's *Decline of the West*, and with a sketchbook and flies to Paris where he spends a few days exploring the night clubs and cabarets. He toys with the idea of going to Russia but frankly admits that it is a ploy mostly for the sake of his readers. He takes a train to Monte Carlo where he joins the cruise. Most “Bright Young Baedekers” of this period have similar beginnings. Then we have an equally obligatory bit about the writing of travel books and an interesting essay on tourists and travellers. Waugh distinguishes between “Grand Tour” aristocratic travellers of days gone by, Thomas Cook three week middle-class, second-class tourists and Mr. Belloc-type wanderers [as described in his famous *Path to Rome* (1902)]. It is the last group that Waugh, despite his ritzy tastes, devotes most attention to, perhaps because the other two had been studiously described and ridiculed by many of his predecessors. According to Waugh's narrator, Mr. Belloc's pilgrim on his way to Rome:

[...]wears very shabby clothes, and he carries a very big walking stick. In the haversack on his back he carries a map and a garlic sausage, a piece of bread, a sketch book and a litre of wine. As he goes he sings songs in dog Latin; he knows the exaltation of rising before day-break and being overtaken by dawn many miles from where he slept; he talks with poor people in wayside inns and sees in their diverse types the structure and the unity of the Roman Empire.¹⁷

When Waugh wrote this colourful description he could not have heard of Patrick Leigh Fermor, then a sixteen year old schoolboy who was about to run away from home and school and wander through Europe in the manner presented by Waugh and write about his travels many years later in undoubtedly the most charming and artistically mature travel books about travelling in the 1930s – *A Time of Gifts* (1979) and *Between the Woods and Water* (1986).

There follows an essay about the advantages of pleasure cruising over other forms of tourism. It is difficult to estimate to what extent

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

Waugh's eulogy of ships is due to his free cruise ticket for the cruise or to his love of comfort and luxury or to his snobbery. There are certain passages in his book that read like a folder taken from a ship's agent. He is very critical of trains and cars as means of travel not only because they are not as comfortable as ships:

For the real travel snob, recurrent clashes with authority at custom houses and police stations are half the fun of the travelling. To stand for hours in a draughty shed while a Balkan peasant dressed as a German staff officer, holds one's passport upside down and catechises one in intolerable French about the Christian names of one's grandparents, to be blackmailed by adolescent fascists and pummelled under the arms by plague inspectors.¹⁸

This passage reads like a parody of many a "continental" travel book, in which border crossings are described as key ordeals; as some kind of rites. It is the growing international tension in the 1930s, the end of the age of travellers and terror at the borders that Waugh foresaw and described in *Labels*; just as he was the first writer to foresee the new Armageddon as early as in 1930; in the final scene of *Vile Bodies*.

Valentine Cunningham in his book on British writers of the thirties underlined how various and diversified British travel books in the 1930s were and described borders and border crossings as being the most characteristic features of the period's travel books. Waugh travelled very extensively during the whole decade but he carefully avoided continental Europe, with its intricate systems of heavily guarded borders and meticulous border checks. That was certainly one of the major reasons he preferred luxury cruisers to orient expresses.

Labels is full of descriptions of hotels, aesthetic and worldly pleasures of "Stella's" ports of call, of local characters and fellow passengers, but its value as a straightforward guide-book is very limited. Having described his itinerary as "labelled" and on the "beaten track", Waugh feels excused not to indulge in long, descriptive passages on art, history or architecture; passages so typical of the genre. He frankly ad-

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

mits that “I would memorise a lot of dynasties and dates in the morning and forget them before luncheon, I confused the features of one building with another [...] so in the end I was content to give up the attempt, treating the places we visited as so many spots of natural beauty”¹⁹.

He begins his trip in the most labelled of places – in Paris. He calls it “bogus” and is very critical of it. He concentrates on fashion, the visual arts; and on the whole he approves of its night life, criticises cheap and expensive hotels, Americans and the custom of “La champagne obligatoire”. His tastes are ritzy and extravagant and as a reviewer of *Labels* observed in the *New Statesman* the reader should not study Waugh's list of hotels, restaurants and night clubs too closely – “until he draws a number in the Calcutta Sweep”²⁰. The next stopping place, Monte Carlo, strikes the narrator as being very gaudy, rich and artificial, and he compares it with a pavilion at an international Exhibition and claims that its wealth derives solely from man's refusal to accept the conclusion of mathematical proof.

The “Stella Polaris” called at Messina, Haifa, Port Said, Malta, Constantinople, Corfu, Venice, Catargo, Naples, Barcelona, Mallorca, Algiers, Gibraltar, and Seville. The ship did not remain in one port longer than two, sometimes three days. Waugh realizes and admits that this is not an ideal situation for a “serious traveller”. This may be convenient for a reconnaissance tour when one learns where to stay for longer. Such a system also does not allow for any research or any detailed sight-seeing. The narrator and his fictitious companions leave the ship in Port Said to go and see Egypt. Port Said is the only place Waugh describes in a traditional, guide-book like manner and he admits that he has worked hard researching to be able to do so. The narrator generally seems to be interested in brothels and night clubs rather than in museums or architecture. The pyramids are compared to the Prince of Wales whose presence at the next table one pretends not to notice, but still cannot help glancing at furtively. Corfu is described as a para-

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

²⁰ *New Statesman*, 18 October 1930, p. 58.

dise on earth, a place where Waugh would like to live and he urges his readers to buy two copies of *Labels* to enable him to fulfil his dream.

The only other place that draws the narrator's closer attention is Barcelona, owing to a few buildings designed by the fin de siècle architect Gaudi. Waugh devotes a ten page essay (his longest by far) on it and presents some photographs of Catalan art nouveau, concentrating mostly on the work of Gaudi. He was impressed and moved but mildly critical of "what an art for an art's sake can become when it is untempered by considerations of traditions or good taste"²¹. He openly toys with the idea of writing a whole book on Gaudi; yet admits that he was unwilling to buy a monograph on him in Spanish because apparently he could not afford it. He hates Gibraltar and adores Seville, but in the end is very happy to be back in England and writes a full paragraph on the decline of patriotism there. On the whole Waugh is a very impatient, irregular and moody traveller and his anti-intellectual bias and satirical predilections result in descriptions of people or, better still, groups of people rather than places or ideas.

Some critics point out that Waugh was unable to create "real", "rounded" characters and that this can be particularly clearly seen in his travel books where it is more difficult to avoid presenting people as people and not as allegories; as personifications of vices, stereotyped "flat" characters. This seems to be true but Waugh's forte is something else; he was a keen observer of people, their addictions, peculiarities, weaknesses. The people he meets on the cruise can be roughly divided into two groups: fellow-travellers and locals. Waugh described both groups as an equally malicious detachment of the man of the world. He points out that he is aware of the deficiencies and limitations of an Oxbridge education, but finds all the alternatives to be far worse.

In a novel that he wrote not more than two years later, *Black Mischief*, he tried to prove this point even more clearly. There he attacked not only modern European civilization with its cult of mechanical gadgets, but also "the savages and barbarians". On his trip round the Mediterranean he eagerly revokes stereotypes about various nations and

²¹ Waugh, *Labels*, p. 181.

cultures, comparing them on aesthetic grounds, and looks for their superiority or inferiority. For example, the stay in Constantinople resulted in this remark: "Living as we are under the collective inferiority complex of the whole West, and humbled as we are by many excellencies of Chinese, Indians and even savages we can still hold our heads in the Muslim world with the certainty of superiority. It seems to me that there is no aspect of Mahomedan art, history, scholarship or social, religious or political organization, to which we, as Christians, cannot look with unshaken pride of race."²²

This cultural bias influences the way in which he perceives and describes both Englishmen abroad and foreigners. Taxi-drivers, stewards, porters, pimps, salesmen, shoe shine boys, waiters and other "natives" are usually depicted as greedy, incompetent, cunning, deceptive, and sometimes as merely funny. They can be quite ingenious in cheating gullible tourists out of their money but the experienced travellers (the narrator is in the process of becoming one) know all their tricks and how to handle them efficiently. The narrator has no illusions about Egyptian porters:

These throw themselves upon one's baggage like Westminster schoolboys on their Shrove Tuesday pancake, with the difference that their aim is to carry away as small a piece as possible, the best fighter struggles out happily with a bundle of newspapers, a rug, an air cushion, or a small attaché case, the less fortunate share the trunks and suitcases. In this way one's luggage is shared between six or seven men, all of whom clamorously demand tips when they have finally got it into the train or a taxi.²³

Yet, the locals remain in the background as "types", and it is only in the case of one taxi-driver that the narrator treats him as a person and thus he becomes a character. On the other hand, the fellow travellers fare not much better, with the only exception of Geoffrey (the second half of Waugh's personality). Strangely enough *Labels* lacks the

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 110-11.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

satirical presentation of the British middle-class, whose representatives constituted the majority of the “Stella's” passengers and who seem to be an obvious target for the satirical writer of Evelyn Waugh's predilections. It was much later, in a short story based on the Med cruise entitled “Cruise” that Waugh ridiculed some of the middle class attitudes and habits. In *Labels*, however, it is the Americans that he mocks for their naive materialism and thus, for example, when sightseeing in Memphis his narrator overhears a conversation of a group of American tourists who wonder how much it must have cost to build a pyramid.

It seems that abroad Waugh considered himself and felt in a much more patriotic and nationalistic way. Both *Decline and Fall* and *Vile Bodies*, novels written immediately before and after *Labels*, contain very ironic, even malicious pictures of British society or rather its middle and upper middle classes in the late 1920s. Waugh is far more generous and magnanimous towards them in *Labels*. This can be particularly well seen in his description of the British community in Port Said. These people are depicted as highly cultured and educated individuals leading quiet lives, believing in traditional, conservative values, perusing little innocent pleasures and being far more British (which is meant as a compliment) than people in Britain. They do not read year-old newspapers or crave for Piccadilly, which according to Waugh was supposed to be what a stereotyped Briton living and working abroad did in his spare time. There is “no nonsense of tropical romance”, no inclination to “go native”, but there are rehearsals for amateur theatricals, pleasant dinner parties, gambling for drinks. They are unaware of the anxieties that beset most people in Britain. Waugh was only once more so uncritical and enthusiastic about Britons, in *Remote People* when he described British settlers in Kenya. The Port Said British community is presented as a group: happy, carefree, humane, and the narrator stops short of presenting any particular, individual people, perhaps in order to strengthen the slightly idyllic, nostalgic mood. The other group that Waugh describes are middle class widows of comfortable means. They induce him to comment on the beneficial effects of celibacy; on most people's behaviour and attitudes and on Freudian sublimated sex mo-

tives in the very idea of the pleasure cruise to the Orient, sheiks, camels, romantic love, rape.

Thus the only character in *Labels*, apart from the narrator, described in any detail, is Waugh's other *porte-parole* – Geoffrey. This is a situation not untypical of many travel books, where the motif of travel itself forces fast shifts of places and people, hence the usual camera eye perspective and self-centred perception of the world of the narrator, and also often the journey into one's own personality.

The digressions, which in the case of some travel books exceed the descriptions of the scenery and people are not very numerous or substantial, which may be partly due to the limited research that Waugh undertook on this book prior to or after the trip, but also to his generally anti-intellectual disposition. So, although the reader of *Labels* can find a very detailed, potent recipe for a hangover drink or the story of Waugh being confused with his then more famous brother Alec, on the whole Waugh clings to the plot, which is the trip itself.

As I have mentioned earlier *Labels* is not a part in the literary chain that later on was to become typical for Waugh: “from a diary entry to a novel”. The only other literary project connected with the Mediterranean cruise is a short story entitled “Cruise”. It is written in the form of letters and postcards from a young lady of leisure to a non-specified friend, probably a girl, judging by the nature of the confessions. Although the ship is differently named, the “Glory of Greece”, it follows the “Stella's” route: Monte Carlo, Naples, Port Said and so on. The young lady is accompanied by her parents and Bertie, her older brother, a constantly “plastered” student from Oxford. The young lady narrator is a gullible satirical epitome of a middle class British debutante on her maiden voyage. She sees the trip as a means of meeting candidates to become her fiancés. Every new laconic postcard brings a *démenti* of a former one. “Only the cynical purser wasn't a bit surprised on account he said people always got engaged and have quarrelled on the Egyptian trip every cruise so I said I wasn't in a habit of getting engaged lightly thank you and he said I wasn't apparently in the habit of going to

Egypt so I won't speak to him again nor will Arthur [her fiancé at the time].”²⁴

Waugh's literary gifts seem to be particularly well suited to such a crisp, sparkling pastiche. His predilection for perceiving people in terms of stereotypes becomes an asset rather than a drawback. The external details of the cruise are the same as in *Labels*; moreover, in the background of the story there appears “a honeymoon couple very embarrassing” and a “pansy writer” with a pen with green ink. The difference lies not so much in the length as in the mode of presentation, which is mostly due to the personality of the narrator in *Labels*. It is really a pity that Waugh did not write a mock travel book with one of his characters from his later novels as the narrator of it. Although he was to utilize the form of a travel book in his fiction, namely in *The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold*, the narrator of this novel was too much of Waugh himself to create any kind of ironic distance or detachment.

From the whole text of *Labels* Waugh chose to retrieve just more than half of it in his paperback selection of the pre-war travel books entitled *When the Going Was Good*. “A Pleasure Cruise in 1929” contains most of the funny episodes, all the descriptions of red light district excursions and some anecdotes. Waugh completely left out two longer essays: on Gaudi and on Port Said, as well as all the remarks or anecdotes connected with Christianity and his remarks about the nature and types of travelling. This leaves the excerpts in a state where they are centred almost entirely around the plot, that is the colourful and often witty descriptions of the cruise itself, with places remaining even more in the background than in the unabridged version. Waugh must have considered this type of creative writing his forte, especially after his own intensive editing of it. In the preface to *When the Going Was Good* he stresses the easy going, dandy-like mood of his early books mostly in order to show its transformation into a more “serious” attitude in the fragments cut from his later travel books: “each book, I found on re-reading, had a distinct and slightly grimmer air, as, year by year, the

²⁴ Evelyn Waugh, *Work Suspended* (Harmondsworth, 1967), p. 21.

shades of the prison-house closed”²⁵. Waugh must have spent quite a while shortening *Labels* to “A Pleasure Cruise in 1929”; apart from omissions of paragraphs or even whole chapters, there are also numerous stylistic improvements, subtle cuts of some shorter fragments or even single sentences; some sentences are re-written to connect various paragraphs and maintain the smooth reading of the text.

Labels is different from all of Waugh's other travel books not only because of its narrative method but also because of the lack of a novel based, however loosely, on it. But on the other hand it displays many features that reappeared in all of his later travel books. Flippant and light hearted narration, numerous stories and anecdotes often verging on absurd or black humour will become characteristic features of his subsequent travel books, even though all of these would have gloomier and gloomier settings and general moods than the sunny Med tour on board a luxury cruiser.

²⁵ Evelyn Waugh, *When the Going Was Good* (Harmondsworth, 1946), p. 8.

CHAPTER II

Remote People

In October 1930 Evelyn Waugh went to Abyssinia as a special correspondent for the *Times* to cover the coronation of the Emperor Ras Tafari – Haile Selassie I. From Addis Ababa he did not go back home but travelled through East Africa: Aden, Zanzibar, Kenya, Uganda, Congo, before finally returning home via Cape Town in February 1931. *Remote People*, a travel book, in which he described his journey, was published in the same year by Duckworth, and, a year later, it was followed by *Black Mischief*, a novel drawing strongly on Waugh's African travels. This was to become a formula for him later on in the 1930s: a journey, a travel book and a novel, with diary entries and newspapers articles immediately following the journey. A formula and a routine; tedious at times. What were the reasons that forced this dandy and sybarite to embark on, what was to become; a long streak of expeditions during which he often lacked what he considered to be the rudimentary comforts of civilized life?

In 1946 Waugh, looking back on his travels back in the 1930s wrote that he never aspired to being a great traveller and stated that: “I was simply a young man, typical of my age; we travelled as a matter of course”¹. But surely there must have been some other reasons beyond that “matter of course”.

P.A. Doyle observed: “and when he was most alone, most lonely, most homeless, he fled to the dark and musty jungles of Africa and South America”². This may be one of the reasons for his sudden departure for Africa in October 1930, but Waugh himself never admitted it.

¹ Evelyn Waugh, *When the Going Was Good* (Harmondsworth, 1946), p. 10.

² D. Paul Farr, “Evelyn Waugh. Tradition and the Modern Talent”, in *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, (Autumn 1969), p. 509.

Jacqueline McDonnell in her book *Waugh on Women* while discussing the influence women had on Waugh's life and work remarked: “[i]f Waugh hadn't divorced Evelyn he might have become a family man and would not have travelled extensively”³. This is, of course, merely a hypothesis, yet the fact remains that the divorce earlier in 1930 left Waugh without a settled base, which must have had a considerable effect on the way in which he spent the seven following years, that is till the time that he got married for the second time in 1937. During these years he travelled extensively, both in Britain and abroad and wrote four of his six travel books and also three novels, for which his travels provided, more or less directly, both settings and characters. It is worth recalling that just few years earlier, while still at Oxford, Waugh had spoken with contempt of what he used to call “bloody abroad”, and even the holiday trips to France or Greece seemed to him to be boring, tedious and superfluous; moreover, he claimed that people who spoke more than one language must have lost the mastery of their native tongue. His early novels, *Decline and Fall* and *Vile Bodies* dealt with Bright Young Things and were entirely set in England. The Mediterranean trip in 1929 resulted in *Labels*, Waugh's first travel book, but as its title suggested it hardly ever got off the beaten track, and Waugh remained there a “tourist”, rather than a “traveller”, a distinction which is almost meaningless in the age of jumbo jets, but it was not so in the 1930s.

By calling Waugh “a traveller on the rebound”⁴ Paul Fussell indirectly supported the hypothetical reasons for Waugh's extensive travels described by P.A. Doyle. Waugh himself was silent about any motives different and deeper than curiosity, yet the most distinguished of Waugh scholars, R.M. Davis, suspected that he had undertaken his first African journey because perhaps: “he consciously planned what in retrospect is the clear shift from the position of leading specialist on the

³ Jacqueline McDonnell, *Waugh on Women* (London, 1986), p.18.

⁴ Paul Fussell, *Abroad; British Literary Traveling Between the Wars* (New York, 1980), p. 171.

younger generation to that of a critic in far broader and deeper terms who was developing attitudes towards political and religious issues”⁵.

On 29 September 1930 Waugh was received by Father Martin D'Arcy into the Roman Catholic Church. On 10 October 1930 he embarked on a ship sailing to Djibouti. There is a hiatus in Waugh's diary between 23 August 1930 and 10 October 1930. The first entry afterwards is entitled: London – Addis Ababa, Friday 10 October – Sunday 26 October 1930 and describes the passage to Djibouti, the train journey to Addis Ababa and the events that took place there, but gives no clues as to Waugh's reasons for undertaking the journey. Waugh begins *Remote People* with the following sentence: “[t]hey were still dancing, just before dawn on October 19th, 1930, the 'Azay le Rideau' came into harbour at Djibouti”⁶; there follows a description of a pair of tired dancers, stewards pulling the festoons after a grand fete, and of some of Waugh's fellow passengers. Later on Waugh gives his only explanation for his trip; an explanation that is quite witty but does not disclose too much:

My own presence there [on the ship] requires some explanation. Six weeks before, I had barely heard Ras Tafari's name. I was in Ireland staying in a house where chinoiserie and Victorian Gothic contend for mastery over Georgian structure. We were in the library, discussing over the atlas a journey I proposed to make to China and Japan. We began to talking of other journeys and so of Abyssinia. One of the party was on leave from Cairo, he knew something of Abyssinian politics and the coming coronation. Further information was provided from less reliable sources, that the Abyssinian Church had canonized Pontius Pilate, and consecrated their bishops by spitting on their heads; that the real heir to the throne was hidden in the mountains, fettered with chain of solid gold; that the people lived on raw meat and mead. We looked the Royal family in the *Almanac de Gotha* and traced their descent from Salomon and the Queen of Sheba, we found the history which began: The first cer-

⁵ R.M. Davis, “Towards a Mature Style; The Manuscript of Waugh's *Remote People*” in *Analytical and Enumerative Bibliography*, number 1 and 2 (1983), p. 3.

⁶ Evelyn Waugh, *Remote People* (Harmondsworth, 1986), p. 9.

tain knowledge which we have of Ethiopian history is when Cush, the son of – ascended the throne immediately after the Deluge; the obsolete encyclopedia informed us that, “though nominally Christian, the Abyssinians are deplorably lax in morals, polygamy and drunkenness being common even among the highest classes and in the monasteries.” Everything I heard added to the glamour of the astonishing country. A fortnight later I was back in London and had booked my passage to Djibouti.⁷

No records remain of how seriously Waugh thought of going to China and Japan; the fact is that he never went there, as he never went to Russia, a trip that he boasted of to his readers in *Labels*. If R.M. Davis's assumption is right, then he may have sensed at that time that the trip to Abyssinia would be more rewarding to him in literary terms.

In *Remote People* Waugh claimed that he booked his passage to Djibouti first and that only then went to see the foreign editor of a London daily newspaper (in fact it was the *Times*. For some reason Waugh modestly refrains from mentioning the paper's title, although it must have been a “claim to fame”; for a young writer to work as a special correspondent for this particular newspaper), and after an interview “emerged [...] for the first time in my life a fully accredited journalist, with a miniature passport authorizing me to act as special correspondent during the ten days' coronation celebrations at Addis Ababa”⁸. Waugh had been freelancing for various papers since he left Oxford and till 1930 this proved to be at least as important a source of income as the royalties for his books. It was a normal procedure at the time, a procedure Waugh usually studiously adhered to, to solicit publishing houses and editors to cover the travelling expenses of a writer or a journalist. Did Abyssinia fascinate Waugh so much that he was prepared to pay for his journey out of his own pocket and got his accreditation in an off-hand way, because he wanted to be able to see things, which an ordinary tourist or “tripper” would not be allowed to see?

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁸ *Ibidem*.

Or, which is more likely, was it partly an attempt to create an image of his narrator as a worldly gentleman of independent means?

It is unclear when Waugh started to ponder the idea of writing a travel book. As mentioned before, the first entry in the diary after a long break covers the whole outward journey and the first week in Addis Ababa. The main event, the coronation of Haile Selassie, is summarized there in two short sentences: “Coronation Sunday interminable service, 6.30-12.30. Ritual made ludicrous by cinema operators”⁹. The next entry was written in Addis Ababa on 3 November 1930, that is a whole week later, and it is from this particular day that the diary suddenly became very regular; the entries were inserted daily, most of them were written in a crisp, telegraphic style, clearly different from the previous ones. This regular spell ended abruptly on 19 February, the day on which he arrived back in England and he did not write a single entry in a diary for the next twenty months. He resumed it only when he was preparing for the next long journey, this time to South America. It seems quite feasible that Waugh had decided to write a travel book not earlier than the beginning of November, and resumed a diary in order to use it as notes for *Remote People*. He started to write a travel book that he was later to entitle *Remote People* (its American title was, just like in case of *Labels*, different: *They Were Still Dancing*; that is the beginning of the opening sentence of the book) well before he finished his journey, when he was still in Congo, on board a Belgian ship the “Prince Leopold”. In a chapter entitled “Second Nightmare” he confessed: “I fought boredom, and to some extent overcame it, by desperate expedient of writing – it was there, in fact, that I ground out the first chapter of this book”¹⁰.

In 1946, while writing a preface to *When the Going Was Good*, Waugh explained that at the time of writing *Remote People* and *Ninety-Two Days* the journeys seemed to him an ordeal; “an initiation to manhood”¹¹. This was quite a typical motif of the writers of the generation born too late to

⁹ Evelyn Waugh, *Diaries of Evelyn Waugh*, ed. Michael Davie, (Harmondsworth, 1976), p. 332.

¹⁰ Waugh, *Remote People*, p. 174.

¹¹ Waugh, *When the Going Was Good*, p. 9.

fight in the Great War to try in vain to emulate Rupert Brooke who, with his death and his talent, embodied everything that they had missed.

And there remains a religious motif. Vernon Young stated that: “there is no evidence to suggest that he [Waugh] was looking for agony to convince himself in the Graham Greene manner, that the ways of God are variously strange”¹². This statement is certainly true of *Remote People*, although it is not exactly so of *Ninety-Two Days*, Waugh's subsequent travel book. *Remote People* is devoid of elements of a journey undertaken as a pilgrimage or a penance. His religion and his travelling seemed to be two totally separate things. He did not even admit to his readers that just before he had sailed for Africa he had been received into the Catholic Church. There are long religious digressions inserted in *Remote People* but the book's narrator always tries to give them a broader perspective, carefully abstaining from any more personal digressions or from showing a discernible bias towards his religion.

The *Times* published three articles written by their “special correspondent to Ethiopia” – Evelyn Waugh: “Dusky Emperor Greets the Duke of Gloucester”, “Emperor of Ethiopia, The Coronation Ceremony”, “Ethiopia Today – Romance and Reality”. The first describes the greeting the British delegation for the coronation received in Addis Ababa. The second is a detailed description of the coronation itself on 2 November 1930. The third is Waugh's analysis of the political situation in Ethiopia preceded by an outline of Ethiopian history. Waugh also wrote a long article entitled “Champagne for Breakfast. A Journey to Abyssinia”, which was published in the *Graphic* on 20 December 1930. The *Times* articles were written in a formal, detached tone and particularly in the first two, Waugh merely reported the events and it is only in the third one that he ventured to state his own opinions. The *Graphic* article resembles to a much larger extent, the tone prevalent throughout *Remote People*, as its style is more relaxed and the first person narrator is on the lookout for some freakish incident and apart from providing information about Ethiopia, Waugh concentrated on what is known in journalism as a “human interest angle”. Thus, for

¹² Vernon Young, “End of Voyage”, *The American Scholar*, (vol. 51, 1982), p. 87.

example, he described the luncheon at the palace with the Emperor in which he participated, and an incident with a Syrian lady who “strode up to the Emperor and recited at great length and with lavish gesture a long complimentary ode composed by herself in Arabic, a language unintelligible to His Majesty”¹³. This incident was described in a similar vein, but with more details in *Remote People*.

Even though the facts and events described in the articles and in *Remote People* are definitely the same, there is no question of incorporating the extracts from the former in any direct way into the latter. Of course, Waugh must have used the research he had undertaken to write the articles also when he wrote some of the discursive passages in *Remote People*, but there is a distinct difference between the two; the difference between Waugh the journalist and Waugh the writer.

Waugh remarked in *Remote People* that while reading the accounts of various journalists of the coronation of Haile Selassie he had the impression that he himself had participated in a totally different ceremony. This induced him to write a longer digression about journalists, “Yellow Press”, and the irreconcilability of the two main principles of journalism: “getting in first with the news” and “giving the public what it wants”. He wrote: “Almost any London newspaper today, would prefer an incomplete, inaccurate and insignificant report of an event provided it came in time for an earlier edition than its rivals”¹⁴. In his diary he noted having received the following telegram: “Coronation cable hopelessly late beaten every paper London”¹⁵. Waugh, as if to explain this, described in *Remote People* journalists who wrote detailed accounts of the coronation well before it actually took place. In one of his later novels, namely in *Scoop*, he made this discrepancy between facts and the ways in which journalists describe them one of its dominant themes. As a journalist he felt that he was bound by a different, more stringent and rigid code of professionalism than when he thought of himself as a

¹³ *The Essays, Articles and Reviews of Evelyn Waugh*, ed. Donat Gallagher, (London, 1988) p. 118.

¹⁴ Waugh, *Remote People*, p. 40.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 333.

writer. And it is the latter standard that he adopted while writing *Remote People*. He also felt that his work as a journalist restricted his freedom as a traveller. Thus he depicted with relief the day in Abyssinia on which his official duties as a special correspondent ended: "I could now come and go as I liked. I could meet people without seeing in their eye the embarrassed consciousness that they were talking to the Press"¹⁶. During the second part of his African journey he turned from a travelling journalist into a traveller proper.

The relation between Waugh's diary and *Remote People* is of a different kind than that between his press articles and this travel book. The articles exist independently, whereas the entries in Waugh's diary that referred to his first African trip, were treated by him as notes for the travel book that he intended to write. Their telegraphic style and the fact that they were written in this form and with this regularity only while the journey still lasted supports this claim. These entries were later used not only to describe events that constituted the "framework" of the travel book, but some of them were notes which Waugh elaborated into shorter and longer digressions. Observations, remarks, ideas that are often expressed in the diary in one short sentence are later developed in the travel book either into discursive passages or anecdotal scenes. For example the entry "one couple still dancing, grey faces"¹⁷ becomes the key image of the opening scene of *Remote People* and "grey faces" are crucial to the mood of it. The sentence: "Father J. told me with relish of the excommunicating of CMS (Church Missionary Society) priests for fucking"¹⁸ was not incorporated into the travel book, but instead Waugh wrote a paragraph about the rivalries between the missionaries of different denominations.

There are some longer observations in the diary which Waugh wrote clearly with the future travel book in mind. For example, he wrote in the diary:

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

¹⁷ Waugh, *Diaries of Evelyn Waugh*, p. 330.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 348.

How often in London, when satiety breeds scepticism, one has begun to wonder whether luxury is not a put-up job, whether one does not vulgarly confuse expense with excellence. Then with one's palate refined by weeks of (comparative) privation, of nameless and dateless wines, cigars from Borneo or the Philippines, one meets again the good things of life and knows certainly that the taste, at least in these physical matters, is a genuine and integral thing.¹⁹

This seems to be a paragraph ready to be put into an intended travel book, but Waugh still must have worked hard on editing it. In *Remote People* it looks like this:

How often in Europe, after too much good living I have begun to doubt whether the whole business of civilized taste is not a fraud put upon us by shops and restaurants. Then, after a few weeks of gross, colonial wines, hard beds, gritty bath water, awkward and surly subordinates, cigars from savage Borneo or the pious Philippines, cramped and unclear quarters and tinned food-stuffs, one realizes that the soft things of Europe are not merely rarities which one has been taught to prefer because they are expensive, but thoroughly satisfactory compensations for the rough and tumble of earning one's living - and a far from negligible consolation for some of the assaults and deceptions by which civilization seeks to rectify the balance of good fortune.²⁰

The comparison of the diary with *Remote People* shows the ways in which Waugh adopted and transformed his experience and created a narrator who became yet another character of the book; the ways in which: "he develops a wondering image of himself as a comic character, a pretend little Englander, and a pretend snob. His capacity to be both inside himself and outside is remarkable. He is both actor and critic"²¹. The creation of his narrator as an independent traveller and man-of-the-world leads to certain discrepancies between the diary and the travel book. For example, according to the diary, he booked a ticket

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 352-3.

²⁰ Waugh, *Remote People*, p. 178-9.

²¹ Fussell, *Abroad*, p. 19.

for a ship from Cape Town to England while still in Elizabethville, Congo more than a week before he reached Cape Town. In *Remote People* he reported that when he arrived in Cape Town: "I had about forty pounds left in my pocket. A boat was sailing that afternoon. I could either wire to London for more money and await its arrival or I could take a third-class ticket home. I left that day"²². The description of the voyage that follows is written in the manner of a worldly gentleman looking down with a kind of amusement at the plebeian games of his fellow passengers.

Sometimes he distorts the facts slightly to stress the hardships he had to go through in order to "grind out" the travel book. For example in *Remote People* he stated that during a night on an overcrowded boat he laid his overcoat on the deck and used a canvas grip as a pillow. However, if the diary is to be believed, he found a deckchair and "by three in the morning was just beginning to doze"²³.

Waugh played down, which is of course quite natural, those unpleasant traits of his character that were mentioned in his biography written by Christopher Sykes and also by his other friends and acquaintances. He admitted, though, that he found the activities of most other people abhorrent, and confessed in the diary: "I think I must be a prig, people do shock me so"²⁴. He elaborated on this theme in *Remote People*: "I shall always find something startling and rather abhorrent in the things other people think worth doing and something puzzling in their standards of importance [...] I shall probably be increasingly, rather than decreasingly vulnerable to the inevitable minor injustices of life"²⁵. Yet, if the narrator of *Remote People* was to resemble a man-of-the-world, and it seems that Waugh wanted him to do so, he had to be detached, and not easily vexed by his fellow human beings. "Odious" and "stupid" were the standard adjectives that Waugh used in his diary to describe people; in the travel book he was often at pains to present

²² Waugh, *Remote People*, p. 176.

²³ Waugh, *Diaries of Evelyn Waugh*, p. 346.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 334.

²⁵ Waugh, *Remote People*, p. 85.

them as such without using direct expressions. *Remote People* is also devoid of the frequent and abrupt dismissals of his servants he wrote about in the diary and Waugh was also careful to “censor” little incidents in his diary, like this one: “My taxi-driver laughed when I asked for the *carte de tarife* so I paid him nothing at all”²⁶.

Remote People was thus one of the steps in the process of Waugh's transformation of his experiences of his first African journey. The book was in many respects different from *Labels*. Seen from a certain perspective it belongs much more to the mainstream of 1930s British travel books. “Duckworth and Co” published it in 1931, just a few months after Waugh's return from his trip. Waugh divided it into five parts: two longer ones: “Ethiopian Empire” and “British Empire”, and three shorter ones which he called first, second and third “Nightmares”. The longer parts refer to two main stages of Waugh's trip: Abyssinia and British East Africa, respectively. The “Nightmares” present the frustrations and boredom of travel and the disillusionment of homecoming.

There is a stark contrast between the two main parts of *Remote People* and they constitute the same book only because Waugh visited the places they describe on the same journey. Robert Byron's *First Russia, Then Tibet* has the same kind of construction. The difference lies mostly in Waugh's attitudes towards Abyssinia on the one hand and Kenya and Aden on the other. The moment he entered the British Empire the satirical detachment that characterized “Ethiopian Empire” disappeared. From the very start he perceived Ethiopia as a place not quite real, as a country out of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* in which “one finds the peculiar flavour of galvanized and translated reality, where animals carry watches in their waistcoat pockets, royalty paces the croquet lawn beside the chief executioner, and litigation ends in the flutter of playing cards”²⁷. The British Empire turned out to be a much more serious affair to him, an affair requiring a different tone. An American scholar, James F. Carens saw it this way:

²⁶ Waugh, *Diaries of Evelyn Waugh*, p. 334.

²⁷ Waugh, *Remote People*, p. 23.

Scratch an Englishman and if the scratch goes deep enough, you find an Englishman. Take the brightest, hardest, most cosmopolitan of England's Bright Young People, ship him out to English colony, expose him to any hardship, fleas, garlic, custom officers - and suddenly he goes native, goes Trollope-and-Kipling, talks of Anglo-Saxon heritage, looks down his nose at Hindus, Somalis, French and other niggers. That is what, briefly, happened to Evelyn Waugh.²⁸

Critics agreed that Abyssinia was a gift to Waugh in a literary sense, that it gave him a whole range of material ideal for his particular brand of satirical talent, whereas the second half, the one in which he related his East African journey, has some very sentimental moments, and generally lacks the vigour and zest of the earlier episodes. Waugh found himself too much overcome by the heat and various political issues to retain his Ethiopian mode. There are some good scenes, but not as many as in the first part.

Waugh called his stay in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa, “a preposterous *Alice in Wonderland* fortnight” and tried to present it in this way. His mood turned into a serious one only in two longer digressive passages. One is an outline of recent Ethiopian history; it is written in an informative style, similar to the one he used in his articles for the *Observer*. The second one is perhaps more interesting as it discloses Waugh's personal attitude to the civilizational role of Western Christianity in the history of mankind. It is often the case with travel book writers that their encounters with the unfamiliar bring out the re-evaluations of the familiar, and it is true also in the case of Evelyn Waugh. It was the Coptic ritual that allowed him to notice and praise the openness of the Western church. It was in Ethiopia that he for the first time envisaged civilization “as a city under constant threat which can be preserved from the eruption of barbarism only by uncompromising vigilance”²⁹. The Coptic Mass in Debra Dowa monastery, the ritual and liturgy of which were unintelligible to Waugh, induced him to write some comparisons with Western Christianity:

²⁸ James F. Carens, *Critical Essays on Evelyn Waugh* (Boston, 1987), pp. 31-2.

²⁹ Ian Littlewood, *The Writings of Evelyn Waugh* (Oxford, 1983), p. 163.

At Debra Lebanos I suddenly saw the classic basilica and open altar as a great positive achievement, a triumph of light over darkness consciously accomplished, and I saw theology as the science of simplification by which nebulous and elusive ideas are formalized and made intelligible and exact [...] And I began to see how these obscure sanctuaries [of the Church in the first century] had grown, with the clarity of the Western reason, into the great open altars of Catholic Europe, where Mass is said in a flood of light, high in the sight of all, while tourists can clatter round with their Baedekers, incurious of the mystery.³⁰

But the process worked both ways: he also started to evaluate other cultures very ethnocentrically comparing them with the traditional Catholic culture which he thought of as distinguished by its ideal of aesthetic fineness, its order and craftsmanship.

Waugh achieved some of his satirical effects by the skilful use of a disparity that existed between the coronation and its accompanying events and the way in which the European journalists reported it. The unconscious parody of Western civilization by Ethiopians was another source of Waugh's inspiration. Waugh himself perceived the coronation as a publicity stunt organized by Ras Tafari – Haile Selassie I – in order to achieve a twofold goal: to impress his own countrymen and convince them that he was not a chief of just a few tribes, but a monarch recognized on equal terms by the governments of the world, and moreover to show the European delegations that Ethiopia was a civilized country. He might have succeeded in the former, but Waugh thought that he had failed in the latter.

The narrator of *Remote People*, just like the narrator from *Labels*, was shaped as a man-of-the-world (but this time not a dandy), someone trying to remain detached, cool and slightly aloof, slightly snobbish. His presentation of the first part of the book was summed up in this way: “[i]n Addis Ababa everything was haphazard and incongruous; one learned always to expect the unusual and yet one was always sur-

³⁰ Waugh, *Remote People*, p. 68.

prised”³¹. He described a whirlwind of receptions, parades, official ceremonies and observed with hidden relish that Abyssinia was, after one removed a thin guise prepared specially for the occasion, a very primitive, backward country. He played upon the contrasts between savage natives and the artificiality of the European delegation (including himself) wearing tall hats, evening clothes and white gloves watching a ritual that for them was totally incomprehensible.

Waugh's treatment of Ethiopia seemed to many European liberals of the time to be imperialist at best; and at worst racist. Sixty years later, in the light of the subsequent career of Selassie and the decades of political terror and widespread starvation, his satirical angle takes on a different meaning. It was this kind of what may be called a prophetic cultural imperialism; that he was to elaborate upon in his next novel, *Black Mischief*. James Carens saw it this way: “Waugh's account of arbitrary power, irrational belief, cruelty and misery seems no overstatement of the deathly consequence of civilization and barbarism”³².

The title *Remote People* has been used by critics as a pun underlining Waugh's inability to create rounded characters, but these people really remain remote also because the narrator made very few attempts to know them better. He concentrated on “civilized” people. Waugh's selection of individuals to be transformed into characters of his travel book was based among other things on their suitability for him as satirical figures that would enliven the narration. The prime example in *Remote People* was, of course, Professor W., but it is also true of two feminists campaigning for the abolition of prostitution and drug trafficking and to a certain extent also of Irene, Waugh's aristocratic friend.

Professor Thomas Whittemore was a celebrated American ecclesiologist, a specialist on Byzantine art. In *Remote People* he is referred to as “Professor W.” or simply “the professor”. He is introduced during the description of the coronation ceremony, perhaps to break its monotony and formal character:

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

³² Littlewood, *The Writings of Evelyn Waugh.*, p. 5.

Professor W., who was an expert of high transatlantic reputation on Coptic ritual, occasionally remarked: "They are beginning the Mass now. "That was the offertory". "No, I was wrong, it was the consecration." "No, I was wrong, I think it is the secret Gospel." "No, I think it must be the Epistle." "How very curious"; I don't believe it was a Mass at all". "Now they are beginning the Mass [...] and so on."³³

The professor enters into the limelight again when he proposes that he and Waugh should together make an expedition to the monastery of Debra Lebanos. The expedition begins with the professor putting into the car empty Vichy-bottles he intends to fill with holy water. The narrator's suggestion to throw them away and to bring the holy water in his empty beer bottles, once he has drunk his beer, is rejected by the professor as blasphemous. The professor's eccentricity, behaviour and incompetence remain a constant source of comic scenes and situations; and these are often strengthened by the narrator's studied stance of detachment; for example:

Professor W. and I set out with a guide up the hillside. It was a stiff climb; the sun was still strong and the stones all radiated a fierce heat. "I think perhaps, we ought to take off our hats" said the professor, "we are on very holy ground."

I removed my topi and exposed myself to sunstroke, trusting in divine protection but, just as he spoke, it so happened that our guide stopped on the path and accommodated himself on a way which made me think his reverence for the spot was far from fanatical.³⁴

Stereotyped American tourists were a constant and reliable source for the satirical fragments in 1930s British travel books. Materialistic yet gullible, innocent yet zealous, energetic and curious when confronted with unfamiliar people and countries, they simply could not have been left out as objects of ridicule and satire. Waugh had already depicted them in *Labels* when they were sightseeing in Memphis. The

³³ Waugh, *Remote People*, p. 44.

³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 61.

incompetence of an American scholar in Abyssinia – might have been the epitome of Waugh's satirical attitude, knowing his reluctant attitude to American culture on the one hand and intellectuals and scholars on the other. Professor W. is presented not as a three dimensional character, but as a fantastic figure in an *Alice in Wonderland* world that Waugh so diligently created in his book.

“British Empire” is, on the whole, far more serious in tone, which was mostly due to Waugh's personal attitude to the places and people that he saw, and this resulted in many more discursive digressions of a political and cultural nature. R.M. Davis, who meticulously studied Waugh's manuscripts, remarked of *Remote People*:

Evidence from the manuscript demonstrates not only that, as in all of his manuscripts, he took second and third thought to achieve effective rhythms and add telling details, and that he continued and extended his deadpan interest in bizarre personalities but that he laboured constantly and effectively to strengthen the serious discursive passages which are major evidence in *Remote People* of his growth as a writer and thinker.³⁵

And Waugh himself felt obliged to explain to his readers after a particularly long political digression:

It is very surprising to discover the importance which politics assume the moment one begins to travel. In England they have become a hobby for specialists - at best a technical question in economics, at worst a mere accumulation of gossip about thoroughly boring individuals [...] Outside Europe one cannot help being a politician if one is at all interested in what one sees; political issues are implicit in everything.³⁶

He admitted that he went abroad with no particular views about the British Empire, but the insistence of problems made it impossible for him not be concerned with them and not to take sides. At the be-

³⁵ Davis, “Towards a Mature Style”, p. 3.

³⁶ Waugh, *Remote People*, p. 120.

ginning of the second part of the book he remarks that the places that he had previously considered as “romantic” – Zanzibar and Congo – turned out to be boring, whereas those that he had expected to detest – Kenya and Aden – he found very interesting. It seems that he perceived them as such not because of their attractiveness for tourists or travellers but because there he found people cultivating the style of life that he considered the highest achievement in the history of civilization: that of the eighteenth century English squirearchy. Cultured and refined sheiks in the Aden protectorate and British settlers in Kenya invoked in him feelings of admiration mixed with envy, and he was prepared to defend their rights and arguments both against the British government with its official policy and against various “liberals”. Waugh confessed that he had fallen in love with Kenya because of its “warmth, loveliness and breadth and generosity”³⁷. Kenyan gentlemen farmers are the only people in the book that are not “remote” to the narrator. He described the visits to their farms, parties, how he listened to their political opinions and shared them. In *Remote People* he fervently attacked those books written on Kenya that presented settlers as easy-going dandies or rapacious adventurers. He argued that: “[t]he Kenya settlers are not cranks of the kind who colonized New England, nor criminals and never-do-wells of the kind who went to Australia but perfectly normal, respectable Englishmen [...] One may regard them as Quixotic [...] but one cannot represent them as pirates and land grabbers”³⁸. There follows an attack on the liberals, who according to Waugh knew nothing of the racial conflicts because in England the only coloured people they met were Indian students on buses. He also tried to belittle the cases of brutality and violence of whites toward blacks and claimed that they had nothing to do with racial hatred. Masai, an East African tribe of hunters received the brunt of his attack; he portrayed them as a race of bullies who would not obey any other law except the law of force. On what he considers to be a crucial point of the “right” to the land, he had this to say: “It is unprofitable to discuss

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

the question of abstract 'rights' to the land, if one does, one is led into all kinds of ethnological byways – have the Nilotic immigrant tribes any more 'right' in East Africa than the British? One must confine oneself to recent history and rough justice”³⁹. The question of rough justice was raised once more when Waugh compared the effectiveness of British and German penal codes in the colonies. He claimed that the German one was superior as it lacked the right of appeal and thus was simpler and more comprehensible to the natives. He was also very critical of official British policy towards Kenya in particular and the whole of East Africa in general: “We came to establish a Christian civilization and we have come very near to establishing a Hindu one. We found an existing culture which, in spite of its narrowness and inflexibility was essentially decent and vulnerable. We have destroyed that [...] or at least, attended at its destruction [...] and in its place festered the growth of a mean and dimly culture”⁴⁰.

His highly ethnocentric theories of what is “civilized” and what is not led him to treat the presence of Indians in Africa with unchecked contempt and derision, while Arabs got off comparatively lightly. Waugh restrained his narrator from expressing overtly racist statements; instead he quoted and paraphrased other authors specializing in them but he left no doubt as to where his sympathies lay. For him Kenyan settlers played an important civilizational role; the role which he compared with Spanish settlements in America and the Norman baronies of the Levant.

His travels in Uganda inspired him to write some digressions on the role of Christian missionaries in Africa. He dutifully presented the critical opinions of “anti-imperialists”, “romantics” and “serious sociologists” on the role the missions had had in the colonization of Africa and then defended, what he called “these heroic outpost”, claiming that “Europe has only one positive thing that it can offer to anyone, and that is what the missionaries brought”⁴¹.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

Although there are many more discursive passages in “British Empire” than in “Ethiopian Empire”, they still do not dominate, at least in quantity, the whole. Waugh's love of the country brought numerous descriptions of its landscape, lakes, plantations, hills and comparisons with rural England. He must have enjoyed a race week in Nairobi, filled with parties, but then was in pains to explain that it wasn't by any means the typical way in which hard working Kenyan settlers spent their free time. The descriptions of some of the settlers' houses foreshadow his later attitudes; his nostalgia and admiration of country houses that pervade *Brideshead Revisited* and some of his short stories.

“Three Nightmares” differ in character and tone from both major parts of *Remote People*. The first one begins with an essay on boredom and changes into a description of four days Waugh spent trying to get to Aden. Waugh claimed that the boredom of civilized life, various aspects of which he enumerated with a personal and satirical bias, was a “puny and trivial” thing in comparison with the boredom one could be faced with in the tropics. His narrator was trying hard to convince his readers how bored he was, but as he himself admitted this is a very elusive feeling to present: “This suffering was genuine enough, but like a mother emerging from twilight sleep, I am left with only the vague impression that nothing much happened”⁴². Then he contemplated a compilation of an “anthology of bored verse” and it was one of few literary digressions in this book (the other being a report of a conversation with the bishop of Harare who had known Rimbaud); a phenomenon very different from the travel books of Huxley or Greene where literary digressions played a much more important role. “First Nightmare” served as an interlude between Ethiopia and the British colonies; it is a travelogue – that is a report of horrors and frustrations of travel rather than a description of places visited.

“Second Nightmare” was written in the same vein. It is inserted just after “British Empire” and contains a report on Waugh's travels on trains and river ships in the Belgian Congo. Earlier in the book Waugh had mentioned having read Gide's *Voyage de Congo* but it seems that it

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 91.

had no effect on his presentation of his material; Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness*, which also might have been an obvious source of parallels is not even mentioned or referred to. By the time he reached Congo, Waugh's narrator remarked that he was deadly tired with travelling and he could concentrate on nothing more but search for the quickest way back home, which proved to be quite difficult due to the erratic air-services on which he had previously counted. Thus, instead of returning via the west coast of Africa, he returned via the Republic of South Africa and depicted mostly Congo's trains, railway stations and ships; once again making boredom his main theme.

“Third Nightmare” ends the book, and it is the shortest of the three. It describes the visit of Waugh's narrator to a new, then fashionable, restaurant in London on the day of his return from Africa. The dinner turned out to be a disaster “cigarette smoke stung the eyes [...] the wine frothed up and spilt on the tablecloth [...] it tasted like salt and soda water [...] mercifully a waiter clustered it away before we had time to drink it⁴³. But why did he go there in the first place and then dutifully describe it in the second? Perhaps to create a contrast with Nairobi, or to provide a sort of anti-climax; or break with the tradition of a happy homecoming dominant in this kind of literature. Home turns out to be at least as uncivilized as the musty jungle.

Waugh, unlike many other literary travellers of the decade, was not much interested in ethnography, geography, geology or any other field handy for a travel book writer. Instead he was constantly on the lookout for queer details, atrocious incidents, funny encounters to be conveniently turned into witty anecdotes. Hence the zest with which he describes an Arab boy reciting Scouts' Law in English with total, comic incomprehensibility, a village where people wore no clothes except discarded Homburg hats, a golf course visited from time to time by a hippopotamus, which results in a slight change of rules – those were the things that he intermingled with serious discursive passages.

An incident with the Kenyan immigration clerks and two episodes with two different Belgian captains of ships in the Congo may be put in

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 183-4.

a different category of events. They were presented in a way that from a certain perspective seems to be quite typical of British 1930s travel books: an independent traveller tries to remain cool when confronted by petty officials and their preposterous demands which add up to the hardships of the trip. Immigration clerks take an instant dislike to Waugh, question his explanations and insist that he has to pay fifty pounds sterling as a deposit for entering Kenya. One of the Belgian captains wants Waugh's narrator to show him a medical certificate, another a motor-bicycle; neither of which he had. Waugh presents these episodes in a comic, light mood; they play a similar role to that of Professor W. from the first part of the book.

The reviewers of *Remote People* were quick to notice the book's weak points, although all of them agreed that it had some remarkable, gorgeous passages. Rebecca West, writing for the *Daily Telegraph* remarked: "Mr. Waugh has failed to observe that it is an iron law of literature that the minute one begins to describe how one has been bored one becomes a bore oneself"⁴⁴. A reviewer for the *New York Times Book Review* observed an ironic treatment of all non-Englishmen. Only his friend and a fellow travel book writer Peter Fleming praised the whole book indiscriminately in the *Spectator*. He underlined the technical difficulties facing any travel book writer and presented *Remote People* as a masterpiece of its kind: "Mr. Evelyn Waugh [...] has written the very best possible sort of book about his journey. He is extremely witty. He observes with insight and, where his curiosity is touched, enquiries with discrimination"⁴⁵. The conservative press warmly greeted Waugh's discursive passages and his political judgments. On the whole *Remote People* was evaluated with his earlier satirical novels in mind. It was just one more "pot boiler", which would have received fewer reviews had not the author been a promising novelist of some repute.

Waugh admitted himself that the book was "ground out" but he realized that he was a professional writer and could make it marketable. In a letter to his parents from Addis Ababa he remarked that he had a

⁴⁴ *Daily Telegraph*, (14 December 1931), p. 18.

⁴⁵ *Spectator*, (23 January 1932), p. 118.

plot for a first rate novel and did not mention that he was going to write a travel book. Yet he started his next novel, *Black Mischief*, only when he had dutifully completed *Remote People*. It seems that its Abyssinian part still makes interesting reading, whereas the deficiencies of Waugh as a serious thinker and critic in the second turn out to be even more apparent than they were to the reviewers in the early 1930s. In *Labels* Waugh created a dandy narrator; in *Remote People*, especially in the second part, the narrator expresses much more received, conservative ideas. *Labels* was in more than one sense a "Juvenilium". *Remote People* began a series of travel books written by a writer of consolidated political, cultural and literary views, who wrote them quickly, professionally with money as his main objective. To a certain extent the travel books that followed repeated the pattern devised and worked out in 1931 when he wrote *Remote People*.

In *When the Going Was Good* long excerpts from *Remote People* were inserted into two chapters: "A Coronation in 1930" and "Globe-Trotting", which is the division parallel to the one that exists in *Remote People*, whereas the second and third of the "nightmares" were inserted into the latter chapter and "First Nightmare" was omitted altogether. Apart from many stylistic retouches he carefully crossed out all the discursive passages from *Remote People*, which of course meant many more cuts in "British Empire" than in the first part. What remains is a quite impartial but not very lively account of Waugh's trips plus some funny episodes. Even if one disagrees with most of Waugh's opinions expressed in *Remote People*, one should admit that they provide a certain balance of tone, whereas the dissected chapters of *When the Going Was Good*, devoid of most of the social and cultural background, lack the atmosphere of a 1930s travel book with its interplay between the discursive and the descriptive.

The final link in the literary chain of Waugh's writing inspired by the 1930-31 trip to Africa was the novel entitled *Black Mischief*. It would be a gross exaggeration to treat *Remote People* only as a major source for this novel. Of course there is no doubt that many parallels can be drawn between the two despite Waugh's denials in the preface in one of the later editions of *Black Mischief* that Azania from the novel was

not Ethiopia. Fictitious characters from *Black Mischief* have their obvious counterparts in descriptive passages of "Ethiopian Empire": Amureth is Menelik, Seth is Ras Tafari, Achon is Lej i Vasu. The cannibal Wanda tribe with teeth filed into sharp points and mud-caked pig tails resemble Masai warriors. Mr. Youkomian, an Indian trader is meant to represent everything despicable and contemptible which Waugh described in his travel book. It may be said that in the novel Waugh tried to justify the misanthropy pervading the travel book. But the sharpest edge of his satire in the novel was directed at a notion that he merely touched upon in the travel book: the notion of progress. *Black Mischief* is only to a limited extent caricature of Abyssinia, of savages aspiring to be "civilized and progressive". It is first of all a grotesque vision of Western civilization disrupted by the nineteenth-century idea of progress, which Waugh considered destructive for its traditional values. Constitutional monarchy, a bi-cameral legislature, proportional representation, women's suffrage, independent jurisdiction, freedom of the press, referendums, and birth control are made grotesque by putting them against the background of fictitious, savage Azania. The intensity of the clash between the unfamiliar with the familiar reaches a much higher level than in the travel book but the mechanism is similar. The unfamiliar, the strange, the savage bring out the comparisons and praise or critique of the familiar. Somehow Waugh must have felt that these problems should be described in a novelistic manner rather than in an essay to be inserted into a travel book.

Another aspect that was left out in *Remote People* and ridiculed at length in *Black Mischief* was that connected with diplomacy; with ministers, legations, and receptions. In the travel book diplomats are hardly mentioned whereas in *Black Mischief* they provide the main plot and a source of bitter satire. In the novel they are a bunch of comic figures presented similarly to the way in which Waugh presented Professor W. in his travel book. Was it because he had planned to "use" them in his novels that he didn't "grind" them into his travel book? Or perhaps they were characters on a different level of artistic creation.

The literary output of Waugh's journey to see the coronation in Abyssinia and his subsequent travels in East Africa was thus of a varied

nature: press articles, entries in the diary, the travel book, two chapters in the literary travelogue and the novel. Obviously because of its nature, *Remote People* gives the fullest account of these travels, but it presents just one of many methods of transformation of the actual experience into creative writing. The analysis of the chain shows that the distinction between “fiction” and “non-fiction” is a very fluid one and runs neither to the left nor to the right of *Remote People* but right through it, due to descriptive and discursive passages on the one hand and on the other to Waugh's treatment of the narrator, and his creation of some of the characters, which closely resemble his approach used while writing novels or short stories.

CHAPTER III

Ninety-two Days

Waugh returned from his African journey in February 1931 and was to remain in England for the next eighteen months. During this period he stayed mostly at his friends' houses and it was there that both *Remote People* and *Black Mischief* were written. His new friends (the old friendships had crumbled after his divorce) came from "socially grander circles". At that time, Waugh frequently visited country houses with Lady Diana Cooper, but his most impassioned attachment was with Teresa (Baby) Jungman, whom he wanted to marry, but he thought that it was impossible because he had become a Catholic after divorcing his wife. Teresa Jungman was a Catholic, too. Was his South American trip an escape from the emotional tangle that such a situation must have caused? There is little evidence to support such a claim, but this hypothesis is worth considering in view of the fact that the reasons he himself gave for going there sound not very convincing.

In December 1932 he embarked on a ship bound for Georgetown in British Guiana; the literary output resulting from this trip comprised a travel book *Ninety-Two Days* (1934), a short story "The Man Who Liked Dickens" (1933) and a novel *A Handful of Dust* (1934). He had ceased writing a diary the day he returned from Africa; he resumed it on the third day of his voyage; most probably treating it as a notebook for a travel book. The diary provides no real clues as to his motives for going there, but in the travel book he felt obliged to mention some.

His expedition to the jungle of British Guiana and Brazil stands clearly apart from all the rest of his longer, "more serious" travels, as it was the only case when Waugh travelled not as a journalist or was not commissioned to write a book. To put it differently, it was the only case when he paid his expenses out of his own pocket. There is no evi-

dence to suggest that he tried to find any sponsors. And this ninety-two day long trip was not a leisure cruise, but a hard, difficult trek through the jungle in very primitive conditions; it must have cost a lot of money (the explorer's equipment, wages of carriers, tickets and many other items) yet somehow Waugh, who in his other travel books gave a lot of information about his expenses, never mentions the subject in *Ninety-Two Days*.

In *Ninety-Two Days* he listed some of the alternative ways in which he considered spending the winter of 1932/33: trips to the Solomon Islands, Iraq, Mexico, but also fox hunting and carpentry classes. Did he go to British Guiana just to write one more travel book and look for the material for his next novel?

His own explanations (provided mostly in the first chapter of *Ninety-Two Days*), are not always convincing; in fact, some of them are contradictory. He writes "I was at difficulties to find an answer, except that I was going because I knew so little; and also because it has always attracted me on the map"¹ and goes on with a story of how he had listened to astonishing tales he had heard from a seaman about Guinea, how he confused it with Guiana, and that it had been too late to go back when he discovered his mistake. It is worth recollecting here that he used a similar "romantically ignorant" explanation in *Remote People*. In *Ninety-Two Days* he also presented more general, more "ideological"; reasons for going to remote places like British Guiana: "[...] for myself and for better than me, there is a fascination in distant and barbarous places, and particularly in the borderlands of conflicting cultures and states of development, where ideas, uprooted from their traditions, become oddly changed in transformation. It is there that I find the experiences vivid enough to demand translation into literary form"².

At the time Waugh was in Guiana the *Daily Mail* (16 January 1993) published his article entitled "Travel and Escape from Your Friend". There he called himself a travel maniac and gave four reasons for travelling. One: it is essential for people who practise no regular profession

¹ Evelyn Waugh, *Ninety-Two Days* (Harmondsworth, 1984), p. 12.

² *Ibid.*, p. 11.

to take long holidays from their lives. Two: some element of risk is necessary for human well being. Three: if one is interested in one's fellow beings, one cannot ignore the study of human nature in unfamiliar surroundings. Four: inquisitiveness about the places themselves.

Yet he was unwilling to admit that he travelled in order to write a travel book or a novel: "the truth is that self-respecting writers do not "collect materials" for their books, or rather that they do it all the time in living their lives. One does not travel, any more than one falls in love, to collect material. It is simply part of one's life".³ So at times he wanted his reader to believe that he travelled in order to write travel books and at times he did not. This may be because he could not decide if the image of the narrator that he created was to be of an old-fashioned explorer of independent means or a professional writer and amateur traveller who is writing first and foremost for money. It was the latter type that he defended against the accusations some readers were bound to raise, and therefore he was quick to formulate them himself, as if to blunt the edge of the attack. "You go off for six months on a lunatic expedition among cannibals and mosquitoes and then expect us to buy your travel books to pay your expenses". And his answer to it was this: "Of course all an author's readers are engaged indirectly in supporting him, and why they should resent providing him with a canoe when they do not mind standing him supper at an expensive restaurant I cannot imagine"⁴.

Harry Carpenter in *Brideshead Generation* quotes the following conversation with Waugh in 1932: "When asked why he was going, he answered that he was looking for material for another book but admitted: "That is an explanation which holds very little water [...] People would sooner read about Mayfair than the jungle"⁵. Richard Johnstone wrote that Waugh presented his urge to travel "as on one hand a search for intellectual stimulus, a journey through the realm of ideas. On the

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

⁴ Evelyn Waugh, *The Essays, Articles and Reviews of Evelyn Waugh*, ed. Donat Gallagher, (London, 1988), p. 134.

⁵ Henry Carpenter, *The Brideshead Generation. Evelyn Waugh and His Friends*, (London, 1989), p. 248.

other, it is seen as providing something more basic, something more akin to old-fashioned inspiration”⁶.

Waugh left Britain in December 1932 and returned there in May 1933. On 12 October 1933 he commenced *Ninety-Two Days*, and foresaw that this task would take him “a month or two”. It was his third travel book, by which time he must have felt pretty confident, and slightly bored, in that genre.

Like most of the travel books of the 1930s and similarly to all of Waugh's own travel books, *Ninety-Two Days* incorporates numerous self-centred fragments. The book begins with a short essay on the nature of the writer's work in general. Waugh explains his selection of material and anticipates the reader's reaction to it. For example, he explains his restraint in overt descriptions of boredom, despite his willingness to do so, claiming that this was the result of the critique of his essay on boredom in *Remote People*. He does not try to pretend that writing a travel book is anything but painful toil. He begins *Ninety-Two Days* in the following manner: “At last, relentlessly, inevitably, the lugubrious morning has dawned; day of wrath which I have been postponing week by week for five months [...] It was the end of the tether. There was nothing for it but to start writing this book”⁷. Then he goes on to debunk the myth of a writer as an inspired genius and presents his concept of writing as hard, regular work not very much different from office routine. He argues that even Trollope “did his work by the clock [...] stopping in the middle of a sentence when the time was up”⁸. Once again he wants to be perceived as a highly qualified professional, a craftsman, rather than an inspired artist. Yet, having admitted that he writes for money, he wants to avoid the label of “mercenary drudge”: “The truth I think is this – that though most of us could not write except for money, we would not write any differently for money”⁹. This

⁶ Richard Johnstone, *The Will to Believe. The Novelists of the Nineteen Thirties* (Oxford, 1982), p. 130.

⁷ Waugh, *Ninety-Two Days*, p. 7.

⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

statement could be treated as a kind of motto not only for this particular travel book, but for all of them.

Waugh's self-consciousness in *Ninety-Two Days* is also evident in the way he treats the hardships of travel. He knows that they are ineluctably connected with travelling over difficult terrain and his attitude is to debunk them consistently, but on the other hand to create an image of his narrator as an experienced traveller. Yet, it is descriptions of these hardships that constitute the framework of this book and Waugh is aware of this. On the one hand he avoids Rider Haggard's and Peter Fleming's "action packed" narration, but on the other he realizes that the debunking of travel and the jungle cannot go too far as it would verge on a pastiche, an effect he does not intend to achieve. So he ironically describes those explorers who, when "normal people" talk about their favourite food say something like: "I never enjoy anything as much as sitting down after a twenty-mile trek to a billycan full of cacao and a freshly killed piece of hart breast cooked in an old tin"¹⁰. Waugh's own strategy is to present such treks as arduous and such food as barely edible, but he knows that he cannot allow himself to write an overt "martyrdom of travel", that it would be a bit too much for his readers. One of his main concerns seems to be to refute any possible accusations of an implied reader that he is merely an ordinary tourist suffering from inconveniences he is not accustomed to. He mocks the ways of explorers both in the travel books and in his fiction (Dr. Messenger in *A Handful of Dust*), mixing irony with eulogy. For example, he inserted this dialogue between a local and himself in the final chapter of the book:

- Have you been up to Kaieteur?

(Waugh) - Not exactly, but I passed it on coming down, on my way back.¹¹

Kaieteur is the name of a waterfall, which is virtually the only tourist attraction in British Guiana. Waugh's main concern at the beginning of the

¹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 114.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

expedition was not to see the falls, apparently because it was too obvious and too common a destination. In the end he delicately underlines the distinction, crucial for him, between a traveller and a tourist. He states explicitly that he endures the hardships not for their own sake, but because they are indispensable if one is to get to know the country and people well. Airplanes and trains, according to him, are too efficient, too quick, too comfortable to achieve this goal. It is only when every change is achieved by physical effort that one can really learn something about the country. And he was prepared to undertake such a task. He also made it clear that he regarded as fallacies such widely held notions that travel makes one free, that travellers are untrammelled by convention, that during expeditions one eats with a good appetite and sleeps with the imperturbable ease of infancy. He presented his personal experiences to prove that this was not so. He summed up *Ninety-Two Days* in this way: "Much of this chronicle – perhaps, it may seem – too much has dealt with the difficulties of getting from place to place. But that seems to be unavoidable. For it is the preoccupation of two thirds of the traveller's waking hours and the matter of all his nightmares. It is by crawling on the face of it that one learns a country, by the problems of transport that it's geography becomes a reality and its inhabitants real people"¹².

He debunks the conventional pleasures of explorers, demystifies the legend of "good living" as a reason for rough travelling and at one time becomes aware that the picture of the narrator he creates becomes really one sided. It is there that he inserts a paragraph on the pleasures that he derived from travelling rough. There were not too many of them; just two: reading and washing: "I took away a copy of *Nicholas Nickleby* and read it with avid relish during the ensuing journey, bit by bit while the light lasted, grudging the night every hour of her splendour and the day its tail, which kept me from this new and exciting hobby"¹³. And on washing: "it was as keen a physical sensation as I have ever known, excluding nothing, to sit on a tacuba across a fast

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 151.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

flowing mountain creek, dabble one's legs knee deep and pour calabash after calabash of cellar cool water over one's head and shoulders, to lie full length on the polished rocks and let the stream flow over one, eddying and cascading"¹⁴.

By 1933 Waugh was an experienced reviewer of numerous travel books of the period, too experienced in fact not to notice the inherent weaknesses of the plot of *Ninety-Two Days*, and to a certain extent his reluctance to write this book may be partly explained by this. First and foremost, on his South American expedition he did not have any clear goal or objective that could become a leitmotif and he was not prepared to say that this lack of a goal became a goal in itself, or write a straightforward pastiche. Waugh's original purpose was to go down Rio the Branco to Manaos in the heart of the Amazon jungle. But he had to abandon this project in Boa Vista (which is also in Brazil) because he was refused accommodation on a boat and did not want to risk malaria. But, as Peter Fleming pointed out: "His purpose was in itself too arbitrary and aimless [...] to supply the reader with the continuity of interest"¹⁵.

His trek lasted, as the title of the book suggests, ninety-two days. It started in Georgetown, the capital of British Guiana. From there he travelled by rail to New Amsterdam, where his expedition really began. For the following three months he travelled on foot, on horseback and by water through jungle and savannah. The farthest point he reached was Boa Vista in Brazil. In the first part of his journey he was accompanied by Mr. Bain (in his diary this character is referred to as Mr. Haynes), a government official who was returning to his outpost deep in the jungle. After receiving his supplies by water, Waugh travelled with some droghers (carriers) to St Ignatius Mission, where he befriended Father Mather, a Jesuit, and rested there for a few days. After crossing the Brazilian border and reaching Boa Vista he expected to get to Manaos. When this proved impossible, he returned by a more westerly route to Georgetown visiting Mr. Winter (a prospector for gold

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵ Stannard ed., *Evelyn Waugh*, p. 135.

and diamonds), Father Mather (for the second time), and saw the famous Kaieteur falls. All in all, not much to write home about; not much to write a traditional travel book about.

The bulk of the book comprises descriptions of the slow, awfully painful progress through jungle and savannah. Waugh divided his book into nine chapters; each of them covers one particular stage of the expedition and is treated as a unit, thus although the book is generally faithful to the diary (some critics think that it follows the diary too slavishly), the day by day pattern of the diary is disturbed and the chronology is more akin to that of a novel than of a travelogue. Waugh did not divide it into ninety-two small units, although this would be compatible with the title. Perhaps he felt that it would have slowed down the rhythm of the book even more. Yet, he did not try to hide his ennui, lack of enthusiasm and tiredness. The descriptions abound in phrases and expressions like: "The mist of frustration still hangs about us", "Depression deepened", "It would be tedious to record", "Monotonous vegetable walls on either bank", "As depressing a time as I have known in adult life", "I was to grow to hate it", "At last that day, like all others, came to an end".

Waugh slept in pitched camps, Indian villages, at ranches, rest-houses, missions; sometimes in beds, but mostly in hammocks, which he praised for their practicality in tropical conditions. He covered up to twenty miles a day, on mounts that were often not good at all, and difficult to hire or buy. Walking resulted in painful blisters, canoeing was boring and paddling too arduous for him. He was glad to be back. This debunking and playing down the explorer's adventures verges on what may be called "iterological martyrdom".

Food is yet another instance of this attitude. Waugh, a devout amateur of exquisite cuisine, convincingly depicts his abhorrence of farine and tasso, the staple diet of the region. He pronounces them only technically edible; that is, not poisonous. Farine is "a vegetable product made of cassava root. It is like coarse sawdust in appearance, granulated, tapioca coloured substance of intense hardness and a faint taste of brown paper [...] tasso is the dry beef, the incarnation of every joke ever made about meat

at schools or messes or charitable institutions”¹⁶. Both farine and tasso, however, provided handy subjects for mini-essays of a cultural, social and nutritional nature. The European type of food was a little better, but only in relative terms. Waugh, whose diaries are full of details about lunches at the “Ritz” showed that he was prepared to endure a lot for the sake of his travels and his readers.

A certain ambivalence in Waugh's treatment of travel and travel book writing is seen in his choice of the title of the book and the photograph for its cover. It seems that both are supposed to draw the attention of the prospective reader; to stir his curiosity. The title, *Ninety-Two Days*, becomes meaningful only when seen together with the photograph, but then its meaning acquires a self-ironical edge. The photograph of Waugh's own choice presents himself in a full explorer's outfit, with tropical forest as a background. It is, of course, black and white, or to be more exact brown and white; it presents Evelyn Waugh as the epigone of explorers for the sake of exploring. Richard Johnstone described this photograph in the following way:

For me, one of the most moving emblems of the thirties is a photograph of himself which Waugh bravely included on the frontispiece to his travel book, *Ninety-Two Days*. He is dressed as though for a costume party in genuine nineteenth century explorer's rig. In his drill shirts, leggings and bush hat, his right arm weighed down by an over-size heavy-duty watch, he stares at the point behind the range of a camera, a resigned and bewildered look on his face. He is an Imperialist without an Empire, an explorer who is not sure which direction he is heading, or indeed why he began the journey in first.¹⁷

At “face value” the title indicates the actual duration of the expedition. But it also has a second, “deeper” meaning: that of a penal sentence of three months which, of course, corresponds to Waugh's general attitude to this journey as expressed in the book. But this interplay of the title with the frontispiece photograph is supposed to attract a reader to buy a book,

¹⁶ Waugh, *Ninety-Two Days*, p. 67.

¹⁷ Johnstone, *The Will to Believe*, p. 133.

rather than as a final comment on it. The penance, that the title suggests is of an ambiguous nature; Waugh did not explain it in the text, and never mentioned any religious motives for his trip. His attitude to his travels is a curious mixture of elegy and irony, which exists in the text itself and which is also seen in the very title. Moreover, Waugh must have been very much aware of the conventional and somewhat boring nature of his travel books; after all he was an experienced travel-book reviewer. His parody of *Ninety-Two Days* in *Scoop* leaves no doubt about it; there the title of the book gets changed into *Waste of Time*.

In the large body of British 1930s travel books there are not many which describe journeys to remote regions of the globe undertaken for goals similarly amorphous as Waugh's *Ninety-Two Days*. The obvious parallels can be drawn only with books by Graham and Barbara Greene, in which they relate their journey through Liberia. In 1933 Graham wrote *Journey Without Maps*, his cousin Barbara, *Land Benighted*. The other pair of Graham Greene's and Evelyn Waugh's travel books written as a result of similar journeys were their "Mexican" travel books: *The Lawless Roads* and *Robbery Under Law*. Greene's journey was similar in the sense that it was undertaken roughly at the same time, and its overt motives had nothing to do with scientific exploration or leisurely tourism. Graham and Barbara Greene trekked the Liberian jungle in the same fashion as Waugh did in Guiana. Yet their books differ considerably, especially Graham's one, not only because of the plethora of literary connotations, which are practically non-existent in Waugh's prose. Greene felt strongly that he had to identify his experiences of the journey with a confrontation of the Freudian subconscious of his own childhood. Waugh's mental constitution was of a different nature; he kept his readers at a distance by not allowing any glimpses into his private life or into his personality. That may be one of the reasons for the apparent lack of goals for his journey. While summing up his journey at the end of his book Waugh wrote: "It [the book] makes no claim to being a spiritual odyssey, whatever interior changes there were – and all experience makes some changes – are the writer's

own property and not the marketable commodity”¹⁸. Whereas Greene's expedition was first and foremost a “spiritual odyssey” and Greene wove his plot around this notion. Waugh's overt admission of the “writer's own property” is a direct indication of a disparity between Evelyn Waugh, the writer and the “real” person Evelyn Waugh, the implied narrator of travel books, a disparity which, of course, would have existed even if he did not mention it, but by expressing it he is again very self-conscious of the rules that apply in this specific literary genre.

In comparison with *Labels* and *Remote People* there is a shift in the way Waugh wants his narrator to be perceived by readers, a shift in accents, rather than in general strategy. In Waugh's first two travel-books it was a worldly, aloof gentleman and a travelling dandy; in *Ninety-Two Days* he is a more serious writer-explorer. The narrator remains aloof. Nothing can really surprise him as Waugh made it clear that he was first of all an experienced traveller. Thus, the world as he encounters it in south America is not only judged against the standards and values of European civilization, but also compared with Waugh's knowledge of Africa, its customs, culture and people. The narrator-traveller has already learnt the tricks he was in the process of learning in *Labels*. For example, he describes how he changed hotels in Georgetown, not because he did not like the first one, but because the second had a good bar frequented by the locals, and this according to him is the best place to acquire valuable information about such places; then he wonders how teetotaler-travellers manage in such circumstances. All the little, unimportant incidents of the sea passage are often presented in a similar vein; so as to stress his experience as a traveller. Christmas in the tropics is one more subject described with relish, but also with an air of someone who hardly ever spends winters in Britain.

The narrator of *Ninety-Two Days* does not flaunt his ignorance of history or science as is the case in *Labels*, but he feels thoroughly competent only in the fields of writing and travelling. He seems to be as uninterested in the jungle, its fauna and flora, as he generally was in

¹⁸ Waugh *Ninety-Two Days*, p. 168.

architecture or history on his Mediterranean trip, nor does he pretend that he is interested in anything like this. His attention is drawn only by insects, and these for very practical reasons: because they bite. So we have detailed descriptions of nuisances caused by mosquitoes, ticks, dabauri flies, and diggas,

The only subject typical of travel books that stirs his attention and makes him insert some of his remarks and beliefs is anthropology. Professor Malinowski's *The Sexual Life of the Savages* is the only book that is discussed in *Ninety-Two Days* at any length. On the whole, he praises it, but is critical of its more general and final conclusions claiming that the material collected by Malinowski in Trobriand islands did not allow him to formulate them in such a way and then contrasts these conclusions with some of his "field observations" in British Guiana (the problem of parenthood and ritual concerning childbirth) which stand in contradiction to Malinowski's conclusions. Waugh divides anthropologists into two wide categories, those who "are flashed with agnosticism of provincial universities" and those "fresh from their seminaries"; and both groups are treated very sceptically.

The reasons why savages wear clothes and produce (and drink) alcohol are two topics on which Waugh felt competent enough to venture his own theories. He claims that those who think that missionaries and traders made "primitive" people aware of their nakedness are wrong. According to him these people started wearing clothes because of their ornamental value, not because they wanted to hide anything. He also refutes the notion that Europeans taught many tribes and races to drink strong alcoholic beverages. His theory is that the knowledge of how to produce alcohol had been known long before European conquests, and the orgies of Amazon Indians serve him to prove it. In both cases he disclaims popular opinions rather than serious anthropological theories. Nevertheless it should be noted that Waugh's interest in these matters seems to go beyond the fascination with things odd and bizarre that prevailed in his earlier travel books. He was simply older and more mature; and he must have perceived what he wrote on anthropology in its popular version as both more attractive and less personal than his Catholicism which is hardly mentioned in the text.

Waugh also used a formal device to make *Ninety-Two Days* appear a more “serious” travel book; that is footnotes. They are not too numerous and could well have been incorporated into the text, or sometimes omitted; they are mostly encyclopaedic; and they are not different in any way from numerous descriptions and explanations in the text itself. Their choice is very arbitrary, ranging from casual remarks to informative passages, such as the one below:

Boviandar is the name given to the people of unpredictable descent – mostly Dutch, Indian and Negro mixtures – who live in isolated huts along the lower waters of the big rivers; they generally have a minute clearing where they grow manioc and maize; they fish and spend most of their time, like the water rat in *Wind in the Willows*, messing around in boats.¹⁹

Waugh, an experienced traveller and a veteran of many arduous border crossings, could not refrain from expressing his big surprise at the ease with which he moved from British Guiana to Brazil. There were no immigration officers there to ask stupid questions, no forms to fill, no luggage search, no deposits to pay. Waugh put the difficulties of border crossings to literary use; particularly in *Remote People*, here the fact that the border did not practically exist resulted in a drastically different approach. Valentine Cunningham wrote that while describing his crossing of the border with Brazil in *Ninety-Two Days* Waugh “was consciously tongue-in cheek, trying to demystify the period's frontier obsessions, to prick a lot of literary persons' bubbles”²⁰.

In comparison with his earlier travel books a certain difference can also be observed in Waugh's treatment of people – that is characters. They remain in many senses “remote”, and there are no attempts to make them “rounded” characters in E.M. Forster's sense of the word, but Waugh is here clearly more understanding and less bitter in the treatment of his fellow human beings. There is a distinct albeit not always successful attempt to be more “Christian” towards them. Even those people who in the diary had

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

²⁰ Valentine Cunningham, *British Writers of the Thirties* (Oxford, 1987), p. 368.

received little or no sympathy were presented in a far more favourable light as characters of this travel book (Mr. Bain, Father Keary). Of course this is an alteration, rather than a crucial change, and can be seen only in juxtaposition to his earlier, unsympathetic and unfriendly treatment of fellow human beings.

It is Father Mather, a Jesuit in charge of the St. Ignatius Mission, "the kindest and most generous of all the hosts of this colony",²¹ who gets the narrator's highest admiration. He is praised for his intellectual integrity, his superb craftsmanship in leather, iron and wood; for his patience, medical skills and generally for his services to the Indian community. Thanks to him, the mission acquires the status of the ideal community, like the long lost medieval societies yearned for by T.S. Eliot and Evelyn Waugh himself. It is a bit strange that the character of Father Mather was not literally transformed in *A Handful of Dust*, but his mission certainly has many aspects of "the City of God" that Tony Last, the protagonist of this novel searches for.

All the other hosts are also portrayed congenially, and Waugh only occasionally uses irony. Mr. Bain is presented as a chatterbox of funny, harmless nonsense: "[...] then there was Napoleon. He was only a little corporal but he divorced his wife and married the daughter of an Emperor. Mark my words, Mr. Yarwood, all those Bolshevists will be doing that soon"²². But on the other hand he is perceived as a reliable public servant and a decent, friendly host. Mr. Winter, a diamond prospector and Mr. Hart, a rancher, received similarly warm treatment from the narrator.

However, the Indians, Negroes and local people of European descent remain just as "remote" as the Africans from his earlier book. For most of the time they are described merely as a part of the background of the explorer's trek. The narrator's attention is drawn by some of his personal servants and carriers, Yotto, Price, Eusebio, only when they fail to fulfil their duties or say something bizarre. The negroes stink, the white people do not – that is the narrator's observation after travel-

²¹ Waugh, *Ninety-Two Days*, p. 74.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 38-39.

ling with them on a lorry. Indians are so lazy that they do not want to paddle, and use the walls of the rest-houses as firewood and so on. It must be noted, however, that when Waugh's narrator realizes that some of these callous opinions are prejudiced and unfair he can look at himself with self-irony: "[a] week before I had been bitterly commenting on the Indians who had done the same, pointing out that it showed a peculiar trait in their character – a listlessness, improvidence, a wantonness, irresponsible egotism, arrested development – I had found numerous epithets to describe my contempt for their destructive habits"²³.

A character who stands clearly apart from all the others in *Ninety-Two Days* is Mr. Christie. Waugh inserts him into his "collection of eccentrics". And it is Mr. Christie transformed as Mr. Todd, who later reappeared in the short story "The Man Who Liked Dickens" and in the novel *A Handful of Dust*. Mr. Christie is presented as a mystic, religious visionary, who had constant contact with God. The narrator's own story is "verified" by an article written by a missionary who had visited Mr. Christie many years earlier and tried to give him a medal of Our Lady but it was not accepted as Mr. Christie was supposed to have said; "[w]hy should I require an image of someone I see so frequently. Besides it is an exceedingly poor likeness."²⁴. The narrator's own encounter with Mr. Christie is presented in a style characteristic of Waugh's satirical novels. He refrains from comments and merely asks inquisitive questions that help Mr. Christie to speak for himself and reveal his visions; no overt attempts to ridicule or poke fun are made. For example, when the narrator is told that Mr. Christie has been lately privileged to see the total assembly of the elect in heaven, he merely asks: "Were there many of them?" to which he receives the answer: "It was hard to count because you see they have no bodies but my impression is that there were very few"²⁵.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

The satirist's fascination with things bizarre, odd and strange which was so vital in *Labels* and *Remote People* is not so dominant in *Ninety-Two Days*, but as the example with Mr. Christie has shown, it still surfaces from time to time. So there is a description of a toad eating burning cigarette ends, Mr. Bain's story of how he saw ape-like creatures – the Missing Link; the story about a preacher of a black Jordanite sect and some others. It is in such moments that Waugh's style, characteristic of his early novels, seems to sparkle again. It becomes crisp, compact and detached. It is in such moments that his ear for dialogue helps him to incorporate pidgin English, with its phonetics and syntax, into his text in order to achieve comic effects. For example we have a scene where Yetto, his servant, is recollecting a short spell of the grand life he led after a lucky strike as a gold prospector: "Dey was fine girls but you could get dem for a dollar a night. But me give dem gold bangles and gin and whisky and a drive round and round in an automobile. All de girls plenty fond of Yetto when he had de money [...] But me was young den. Now me learned wisdom".²⁶ When asked by the narrator what kind of wisdom it was, he answered: "Well, chief me tell you dis. Me would spend all de money on myself. Me would buy fine clothes and rings. Den de girls would go wid me for the hope of what me was going to give them. And in the end me would give them nothing".²⁷

Politics, a subject of particular importance in *Remote People*, is hardly mentioned here. There is just one informative paragraph about the achievements of the Boundary Commission; as if British Empire no longer existed, as if British Guiana was not part of it, as if the narrator's attention was turned elsewhere. Religion is yet another subject only reluctantly and perfunctorily discussed. The narrator admits that he is a Catholic, but only when Mr. Christie has inquired about it. His Roman Catholicism is of no consequence to the text as such and the only time the supernatural comes into the limelight is when the narrator is lost in the savannah and then suddenly and "miraculously" comes across a hut where he is given food by an English speaking Indian. Then, by using a complicated

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

²⁷ *Ibidem.*

and not quite scientific method, he calculates the mathematical improbability of the whole situation, arrives at a 1:54 750 000 chance, and therefore prefers to regard it as a benevolent intervention of St. Christopher. Waugh must have felt that religion was not an attractive topic for a typical reader of his travel books and kept himself in check so as not to deal with it at length as this quote shows: "I feel that this book has too much ecclesiastical flavour already; otherwise I could well devote a chapter to the Easter festivals at Mount St. Benedict."²⁸

Ninety-Two Days is, in the manner similar to most of Waugh's travel books, an element of the full literary chain: diary – press article – travel book – short story – novel, a chain that by 1933 had become a routine for him. The diary which he terminated the moment he arrived in England from Africa in February 1932 was resumed once he boarded the ship bound for Georgetown in December 1933. On the whole the entries were a bit more detailed than those from his previous trips. They were clearly intended as notes for a travel book, which by then must have been a pretty obvious result of each expedition, but they were not a shorter version of *Ninety-Two Days*. They were written in a telegraphic style and not in order to be published. It was during the process of writing a travel book that he utilized all his literary gifts and abilities. The diary was treated just as one of the references. His division of the book into nine chapters, describing the stages of his expedition as independent units, supports this view. Some entries in the diary are compact notes which Waugh expands in his travel book, but sometimes the diary can be very accurate, and this accuracy is then often abandoned in *Ninety-Two Days*. For example the entry for Friday 10 March 1933 reads: "Left 8.52. Tipura 9. Into bush 10.16. Steep descent to Dwarabura. Up creek on left of trail. bore right into open 10.30. Followed small creek crossing twice. 10.57 village of five houses named Shimai"²⁹. Waugh carefully avoided such details, as well as exact dates and yet was accused in one of the reviews of "slavishly following the diary"³⁰. It is true that there are few

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

²⁹ Waugh, *The Diaries of Evelyn Waugh*, p. 378.

³⁰ Martin Stannard, *Evelyn Waugh, The Early Years 1903-39* (London, 1986), p. 355.

alterations between the diary and the travel book, and those that exist are not of crucial importance. For example, the Mr. Haynes of the diary becomes Mr. Bain in the travel book, and Mr. Bain is treated in a much more favourable way; some of his most ridiculous opinions that were put down in the diary are not used in the travel book. Then there is a slight shift of accents in the story of a gift he receives from Father Mather – a leather, “custom made” case for his camera. In *Ninety-Two Days* the narrator is joyously surprised when it is handed to him, whereas it is obvious from the diary that he had known about it long before. But these are on the whole minor, tactical changes; most of the facts and data from the diary were only stylistically transformed and incorporated into the travel book.

Waugh suspended the writing of his diary once again; upon his arrival in England. He resumed it in July 1934 to keep notes on an expedition to Spitsbergen. This expedition was intended by its leader, Sandy Giles, to be a reconnaissance for the Oxford University Arctic Expedition of 1935-6, but it was cut short by an unexpected thaw. It was Waugh's only major travelling venture which did not result in a travel book, and also none of his novels bears its traces. He published only one press article on it. Yet the fact that he resumed the diary, as he had done during his African and South American trips, suggests that he probably had some literary plans about Spitsbergen as well.

In the diary entry from Boa Vista, Sunday 12 February 1933 Waugh observed: “Wrote bad article yesterday but thought of a plot for short story”.³¹ And two days later he reported that he had finished this short story. There is little doubt that he must have been referring to the short story that was published in 1933 – “The Man Who Liked Dickens”. Later on this story was to become a chapter in *A Handful of Dust*, where it had the title “Du Cote de Chez Todd”. At the time he was writing this short story he had his encounter with Mr. Christie freshly in mind, as he had visited the mystic's ranch just two weeks prior to his arrival in Boa Vista. It is there that the transformation of Mr. Christi, a religious maniac, into Mr. Todd, a literary maniac had taken place. An Il-

³¹ Waugh, *The Diaries of Evelyn Waugh*, p. 371.

literate Mr. Todd holds Tony Last, the protagonist of the short story and the novel a prisoner and makes him read Dickens' novels aloud to him over and over again.

Two questions should be asked here. Why did Waugh change religious mania into literary mania, and why Dickens of all writers? As to the first question, he may have been unwilling to treat a religious subject in a satirical form in his fiction, as this was bound to cause a critical reaction from a part of the Catholic press. (Paradoxically, even despite this *A Handful of Dust* was strongly attacked by some Catholic as a work a Catholic should not have written). As for Dickens, Waugh noted in his diary and in *Ninety-Two Days* that he read (with relish) *Martin Chuzzlewit* and *Bleak House* on this expedition. Jeremy Meckier and Malcolm Bradbury discussed Waugh's choice of Dickens as part of his critique of the Victorian era and secularized religion, and tried to establish Dickensian or anti-Dickensian motives in both the short story and the novel. It is also worth noting that whereas the short story was completed while Waugh was still in Brazil, the novel was written almost a year later in England and that Waugh incorporated the short story into the second part of it, but then in an American edition changed the whole ending and deleted the whole South American episode from it, so what at first seemed to be the key episode of the whole novel was later totally omitted in its American version.

A Handful of Dust is composed of two distinct parts, and the seam between the two is clearly seen. The first part takes place in England and is a shrewd and witty comedy of the British upper class, a topical and stylistic extension of his early, Bright Young People Novels. It is the second part that corresponds with Waugh's own experiences in British Guiana and Brazil. The two parts are put together by the main protagonist, Tony Last, who after his son had been killed in an accident and his wife has left him, decides to go on an South American expedition in search of the legendary City in the Amazon jungle.

Waugh himself did not travel to South America in search of a City; it is not even mentioned in *Ninety-Two Days*, but he might have got the idea of "the City" from a conversation with Peter Fleming that he had just

few days before leaving for Georgetown. Fleming had just returned from an expedition in search of Colonel Fawcett, who disappeared on his expedition to Matto Grosso in 1925, and Fawcett's main objective was to find El Dorado. Fawcett never returned and there were rumours that he was living among the Indians. In his diary Waugh admitted that he had talked with Fleming about the equipment for his trip, but there and then he might just as well have got ideas for his short story and for the novel. Mr. Todd from the novel owes many of his characteristics to Mr. Christie, but in some aspects he resembles Colonel Fawcett as well. Critics called Tony's City, a spiritual City, a City of God; the only parallel to it that appears in *Ninety-Two Days*, is Father Mather's mission, but it must be stated that the similarity is slightly far-fetched.

The second, South American, part of the novel was deeply rooted in Waugh's personal experiences. Peter Green perceived it as the novel's weakness: "The background material can all be found in the travel book, *Ninety-Two Days*; which came out in the same year as *A Handful of Dust*, and the truth is both more fantastic and more impressive than the fiction"³². Terry Eagleton thought that "the wanderings in Pie-wie country are too realistically detailed, in the close physical description of landscape and event to be of really 'symbolic' importance"³³. Both these opinions are on the whole true, but it seems worth noting that all these small elements taken from the travel book (e.g. fifteen-mile daily treks, cobs of maize overrun with wild growth, that once was a farm, the reek of sugar, buzzing bees and much topographical information) merely provide a background for the second part of the novel which is written in a very different literary convention from the one applied in *Ninety-Two Days*. Some of the closing parts of *A Handful of Dust* read like a grotesque fantasy, a delirious vision with a mish-mash of ideas, places and people. And this grotesque vision is made even sharper by some of those striking details which start functioning on more than one level.

³² Peter Green. "Du Cote de Chez Waugh", *A Review of English Literature*, vol. II number 2, April 1961, pp. 99-100.

³³ Terry Eagleton, *Exiles and Emigres* (London, 1970), p. 55.

There are some apparently trivial elements in the travel book which are given new significance, a new range of meanings in *A Handful of Dust*. For example, in *Ninety-Two Days* Waugh described the process which Indians use to produce an alcoholic drink called cassava. Women chew specific roots, then spit into bowls, and the saliva triggers fermentation. This “ritual” is also described in the novel, but there it acquires a different perspective. In the first part of *A Handful of Dust* Waugh describes Lady Brenda (Tony's wife) spitting into her mascara in the presence of her maid. Thus when, a hundred pages later, he describes Indian women spitting into bowls, the result is remarkably different than in *Ninety-Two Days*. This appears to be a good example of a useful way of transforming common, everyday experiences into powerful metaphors.

The first American edition of *A Handful of Dust* had an alternative ending, or to be more exact an alternative whole second part. In it, Tony does not go on an expedition in search of a City and therefore is not made a prisoner of Mr. Todd. Instead he goes on a leisurely Caribbean tour from which he returns to England to re-unite with his wife and his beloved country house, Hetton. This version with the happy ending was perceived by critics as inferior and it was never re-printed. It is mentioned here because it was in a sense an alternative version not only of Waugh's novel but it seems that Waugh himself considered doing what Tony did in this almost forgotten version. In *Ninety-Two Days*, while writing about his trips round harbours in Antigua, Barbados and Trinidad on the way to Georgetown, he recollects that some passengers asked him why he had decided to go to an obscure jungle in British Guiana rather than simply cruise the Caribbean? Why, indeed? Waugh's only answer to it, which should not be taken too seriously, was that he and his brother Alec, who was also a travelling writer, divided the world between themselves into two and the Caribbean happened to be Alec's territory.

Thus Colonel Fawcett's goal was El Dorado, Peter Fleming's goal was Colonel Fawcett; Tony Last's goal was the City, Graham Greene's goal was a journey to the centre of himself. Waugh's goal, according to his confessions, was travelling itself, travelling for the sake of travelling and little more.

In *Ninety-Two Days* Waugh was so preoccupied with his own travelling, with actual details of moving from place to place, that all the other, "traditional" aspects of travel books seem to be of secondary importance. European civilization in its British version was no longer to him a reason for constant evaluations and judgement; in fact it is the least imperialistic of all of his travel books. But it is also typical of his writings in its lack of literary illusions. He refrains from any comparisons or parallels with such obvious literary predecessors as André Gide or Joseph Conrad.

The first reviews of *Ninety-Two Days* were generally favourable, and it was praised for its style. But the book, when perceived from a longer perspective, got far lower ratings and is now quite commonly dubbed as uninspired and routine. But on the other hand, it shows Waugh as a more mature writer than in *Remote People*. It ends with his homecoming and the mood becomes once more typical of Waugh's travel books:

After a change of luggage in London I went straight to Bath and spent a week there alone in an hotel. Spring was breaking in the gardens, tender and pure and very different from the gross vegetation of the tropics. I had seen no building that was stable or ancient for nearly six months. Bath, with its propriety and uncompromised grandeur, seemed to offer everything that was most valuable in English life, and there, pottering composedly among the squares and crescents, I came finally to an end of my journey.³⁴

Ninety-two days of self imposed hard living resulted in Waugh's travel book which is perhaps his most "travel oriented" one, where all other elements such as culture, politics, architecture or literature play lesser roles.

³⁴ Waugh, *Ninety-Two Days*, p. 170.

CHAPTER IV

Waugh in Abyssinia

Waugh returned from his expedition to British Guiana in May of 1933. In 1934 he published *Ninety-Two Days*, a travel book depicting this trip, as well as a novel, *A Handful of Dust*, the second part of which was also inspired by his South American experiences. In July 1934 he went on an expedition to Spitsbergen, which was intended to be a reconnaissance for the Oxford University Arctic Expedition 1935-6. The unexpected thaw cut this trip short and Waugh returned to England in August 1934. During the first stages of this expedition he kept a detailed diary (there had been a long hiatus in his diary; the preceding entry was dated Wed, 5 Apr 1933, Georgetown, Guiana) as if he had intended to write some longer piece about it. However, whether it was because the shortness of the trip or because he was afraid to bore his readers with one more travel book from an arduous trek to god-forsaken parts of the world, the only literary output of the Spitsbergen adventure is one travel essay: "The First Time I Went North" published in Theodore Beason's book *The First Time I...* (1935).

In August 1935, when the conflict in Abyssinia seemed about to explode, he got a job as a special correspondent for the *Daily Mail* (one of the very few British newspapers of the period that supported the Italians in this conflict) and sailed for Djibouti from where he took a train to Addis Ababa. He did not keep his diary at the time, nor did he disclose his motives for applying for this post elsewhere. A reader of *Waugh in Abyssinia*, a book that was written after this trip, may get the impression that it was the most obvious and natural thing for him to do at the time. However, there are some indications (especially in his letters to his friends) that he did not treat the job too seriously and appeared not to be worried when he was fired. He came back to England via the Holy Land and Italy in January 1936. A few months later, in August, he returned to Abyssinia; this time his overt

reason was to gather more material for a book that he began writing in March 1936 and finished in October 1936, that is a month after his second return from Abyssinia. The book was finally entitled *Waugh in Abyssinia*; although Waugh himself did not like the pun in the title (Waugh – war), and on several occasions stressed that it had been forced on him by his American publisher.

Waugh in Abyssinia is the last of Waugh's travel books that formed a part of the long literary chain of diary entry – press article – travel book – short story – novel. He wrote two more travel books: *Robbery Under Law* (1939) and *A Tourist in Africa* (1960), but neither of them was an element of such a chain; these books were not followed by any short stories or novels and hardly any articles preceded them.

Thus *Waugh in Abyssinia* marks the end of an era in Waugh's literary career. An era during which the going was good (characteristically enough in 1946 while compiling the book *When the Going Was Good*, he inserted excerpts from his pre-war travel books except *Robbery Under Law*, stating that it stood apart from the rest because his reasons for writing it were political, which, I think, is also true of the first and third parts of *Waugh in Abyssinia*) and during which he travelled to distant and exotic places and fully exploited these trips and expeditions in a literary way.

Waugh in Abyssinia marks the end of an era in one more sense. The thirties were a turbulent decade, a decade during which the writers “took sides” politically, and during which they travelled extensively, for a variety of reasons and by different means. The deterioration of the political situation since 1933 (Hitler's coming to power in Germany, and the beginning of the Sino-Japanese war) resulted in a very quick change in the mood, atmosphere and character of travel books. Some of them ceased to be travel books *sensu stricto*, and became variations of the genre – that is “war travel books”. Travellers of the early 1930s who, much later, in the 1950s were to become tourists, for the time being became war correspondents. The Sino-Japanese war provided the first crop of such travel books; the best known of them were W.H. Auden's and Christopher Isherwood's *Journey to a War* (1934) and Peter Fleming's *One's Company. A Journey to China*

(1933). *Waugh in Abyssinia*, as its title unequivocally suggests, is also an example of this sub-species, which was forced into being by armed conflicts in the 1930s; the other book reporting the events of Italian aggression in Abyssinia was G.L. Steer's *Caesar in Abyssinia* (Waugh reviewed it very critically for the *Tablet*). The third major military conflict of the 1930s that spurred literary war books was the Spanish Civil War.

By studying *Waugh in Abyssinia*, and comparing it with his earlier travel books, we can observe the differences in methods and techniques, as well as in the mood and atmosphere, but there are also long fragments (in the second, middle part) in this book that might just as well belong to *Remote People* or *Ninety-Two Days*. Waugh was usually very discreet about his motives for going abroad, and the 1935 trip to Abyssinia was no exception in that respect. In *Waugh in Abyssinia* he simply stated that he decided to go there as a war correspondent for the *Daily Mail*, as it was one of the few British newspapers taking a "sensible" line on the crisis; which for him meant a pro-Italian stance. It is only in a letter to his fiancé (who later became his wife) Laura Herbert, written from Addis Ababa in October 1935, that he admits his intention of writing "a serious war book". But it turned out that the war, from the point of view of a journalist and writer was not as spectacular and eventful as he had anticipated. In the same letter he betrayed for the first time his intention to write "a novel about journalists" (such a book was published two years later as *Scoop*). It seems that he went to Abyssinia with clear literary goals and that his job with the *Daily Mail* was simply a way to cover his expenses.

Waugh in Abyssinia is obviously not "the serious war book" Waugh had intended to write. This seems to result from fact that the war when it actually started took place in remote regions of Abyssinia to which journalists were not allowed to travel. All "travel books" are, by their nature, hybrids comprising elements of various registers, genres and styles of everything from journalism to poetry. But *Waugh in Abyssinia* is also a hybrid in one more sense. Superficially, it is divided into seven chapters, but the book really consists of three parts; clearly distinguishable from one another. The first part covers the first chapter entitled, in a Shavian fashion, "The Intelligent Woman's Guide to the Ethiopian Question". It is along es-

say on the history, politics and to a certain extent the culture of Ethiopia. It also provides an outline of the history of the European conquest and colonization of Africa. It is written in a scholarly, impersonal style. Waugh uses a third person narrative and the whole reads like a textbook or a travel book by some “erudite” writer; like Aldous Huxley (what I have in mind is the style and subject, not the political views). It is worth mentioning here that in *When the Going Was Good* Waugh totally omitted this chapter, as well as the last part of the book. The second part consists of four chapters and may be called a travel book or rather a war travel book proper. The first person narration and the general mood of flippancy takes over and the rhythm resembles Waugh's earlier travel books. The third part comprises two final chapters. It retains the first person narrative and describes Waugh's second (third if we take into account his trip in 1930) journey to Abyssinia in the summer of 1936, the overt motif of which was to “round off” the book. It is unmistakably different from the second part as it is clearly propagandist in nature, eventually becoming a great eulogy of the Italian Empire.

It is the first of Waugh's travel books that shows this three-fold nature and it seems that it is the book's weakness, not its strength. It is its incoherence rather than diversity that strikes the reader. In each of his earlier travel books Waugh consistently used a first person narrative, and all the essays and longer remarks were incorporated into the main bulk of the text. Later on in the chapter I will analyze the reasons for this change.

The chapter “The Intelligent Woman's Guide to the Ethiopian Question” looks scholarly and descriptive; Waugh clearly “had done his homework” and is eager to show it, but by no means did he want to make it appear objective. He takes sides and is wholeheartedly anti-Abyssinian and pro-Italian. Only when it comes to the history of the European colonization of Africa are his views more complex and less one-sided. In his earlier travel books Waugh eschewed long, informative essays, claiming consistently that he did not want to bore a general reader. Here we have a long, erudite essay, with numerous foot-

notes and references to various books, mostly on the history of East Africa.

By beginning the whole book with such a scholarly essay Waugh puts his narrator in the second part (the first chapter was written in third person narration, so the narrator appears only in the second part) of *Waugh in Abyssinia* in a position where there is little left for him to explain. The informative work has been completed in the first chapter, so now the narrator can concentrate on things bizarre, strange, funny and boring. The first chapter may well have been written by someone else; the second concentrates on totally different aspects of the looming war. Although "The Intelligent Woman's Guide to the Ethiopian Question" lacks the propagandist fervour of the third part of the book, it is distinctly biased in favour of Mussolini's Italy; biased not in an emotional way, but through the use of "impersonal", "factual" arguments strengthened by descriptions of numerous events and examples quoted to support Waugh's stance.

The chapter begins with an outline of the history of the European colonization of Africa. Waugh points out the speed with which it was accomplished (merely a decade) and comments on the haphazard nature of African borders drawn in the Chanceries and of treaties signed with illiterate native chiefs. In his opinion all the ills committed by the ruthless explorers (in the Stanley fashion) were more than redeemed by the missionaries and doctors (in the Livingstone fashion). It turns out that since the early 1930s, that is from the time when he expressed his opinions on the European colonization of Africa in *Remote People*, he changed his views about the superiority of British imperialism over its French and German counterparts:

It is worth remembering indeed, in the present circumstances the particular nature of the reproach which attaches to England. France, Germany and Belgium were the more ruthless, We the more treacherous. We went into the shady business with pious expressions of principle, we betrayed the Portuguese and the Sultan of Zanzibar, renouncing explicit and freshly made guarantees of their territory; we betrayed Lobenquola and other native rulers on precisely the same method but with louder protestations of be-

nevolent intention than our competitors; no matter in what caprice of policy our electorate chose to lead us, we preached on blandly and continuously. It was the trait which the world found difficult to tolerate; but we are still preaching.¹

Considering what follows in this chapter, it is clear that Waugh is carefully preparing the ground for the presentation of the Italian case to an implied British reader, whose sympathies he perceives as being on the Abyssinian side. By denouncing the methods of British imperialism (the “we” he uses several times takes on a slightly ironic connotation) he is creating the atmosphere for an argument that Britain and the British press have no moral or any other right to attack Italian intervention in Abyssinia. The last sentence “but we are still preaching” joins the past with the present and also the European conquest of Africa with the Italian conquest of Abyssinia.

Then Waugh begins the presentation of the history of Abyssinia, but he does it in a non-chronological fashion; he begins with the coronation of Ras Tafari in 1930 (which he also described in *Remote People*). First he describes the presents of “biblical diversity” that the Emperor received from the European delegations and then the ceremony itself. These descriptions are kept in the mode similar to that which he created in *Remote People*; they are described by a flippant and ironically detached narrator. But then a paragraph of a different nature appears beginning with the sentence: “That crowded week was the consummation of months of feverish activity, years of quiet plotting”². There was nothing of such gravity in *Remote People*, where Waugh concentrated on the lighter side of things. Now he becomes serious and presents a lengthy analysis of Tafari’s cunning, his clever policy of intricate games between Britain, France, Italy and his own people. Waugh reveals Tafari’s deceptive but effective method of presenting his country to the Europeans as a medieval state, “a cohesive whole held together by the intricate bonds of feudalism, its occasional disorders as those which had beset the country seven centuries ago”, whereas at

¹ Evelyn Waugh, *Waugh in Abyssinia* (London, 1984), pp. 6-7.

² *Ibid.*, p. 9.

home Tafari, according to Waugh, presented himself as the man who understood foreigners. In Waugh's opinion, the Emperor, by carefully playing the Europeans against one another, managed to strengthen his own position. Again, having in mind what comes next in the chapter, the whole argumentation seems to foreshadow the presentation and justifications of Italian claims to Abyssinia.

And then comes the first of Waugh's numerous attacks on the policy of the League of Nations. He points out that it was the League's hypocrisy which made Germany, because of its defeat in battle, unworthy of having its own colonies in Africa, while at the same time it admitted Abyssinians (whom he refers to as "the most notoriously oppressive administrators of subjected people in Africa") on equal terms to the councils of the world. This paragraph is soaked with moral indignation and contempt, as in this fragment:

That vast and obscure agglomeration of feudal fiefs, occupied military provinces, tributary sultanates, trackless no-man's-lands roamed by homicidal nomads, undefined in extent, unmapped, unexplored, in part left without law, in part grossly subjugated; the brightly coloured path in the schoolroom atlas marked, for want of a more exact system of terminology, "Ethiopian Empire", had been recognized as a single state whose integrity was the concern of the world. Tafari's own new dynasty had been accepted by the busy democracies as the government of this area.³

Only after these two introductory paragraphs does Waugh present the history of Abyssinia in a regular, chronological order. He describes in detail the reign of the Emperor Theodore, which was terminated by the Emperor's suicide at the moment of defeat by a punitive British expedition, which led the country to another period of chaos. Then Waugh writes about the first Italian trading companies in the region and the fact that the British policy since that time (that is for fifty years) had been to encourage Italian penetration of Abyssinia, as Britain itself was not particularly interested in the region but did not want it to fall under French supervision. This policy of encouragement will once again be contrasted with the British attitude towards Italian claims

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.

to Abyssinia in 1935, but this will take place later on in the chapter. Here the point is presented as if it had been of a purely historical relevance.

The next event in the Abyssinian history which Waugh concentrates upon is the Italian defeat in the battle of Adowa. Waugh blames this defeat on numerous factors, perhaps the most prominent of which was Emperor Menelik's devious way of handling negotiations using the method of "the prevarications and evasions, the diplomatic illnesses, the endless exchanges for irrelevant compliments, the lethargy and cunning"⁴. The just, but naive Italians, in an ill considered attempt at conciliation, made Menelik a present of a huge consignment of cartridges, and so the Abyssinians could start the war. Waugh is very meticulous in creating an image of Menelik as a cute villain:

Nothing can be further from historical fact than to picture Menelik as a black Bruce, recklessly defying powerful invaders, he had calculated the chances and opportunities astutely. He was well informed about the relative strength of the European Powers. He was no savage chief to whom any white face was a divine or diabolic portent. He knew that the Italians were a poor people, with no recent military tradition; their government was hampered by the ineptitude in handling parliamentary forms consistently shown by the Mediterranean peoples. The British had spent £ 9 000 000 on their expedition against Theodore, Rome now reluctantly voted £750 000 [...]⁵

The defeat of the Italians is explained and justified, Waugh admits that it was "decisive", but quickly states that it was far from ignominious, as the Italian "army was annihilated by a well equipped force outnumbering it by eight to one. During the preceding retreat and in the hopeless engagement, acts of courage on the part of the Italian officers and of fidelity on the part of the native troops were performed which would have lent glory to any army"⁶.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

It is in this paragraph that Waugh for the first time clearly takes sides; that is he writes very skilfully as a propagandist of the Italian case. The task he sets himself is difficult: to show the victors (Abyssinians) as cowardly, treacherous and also savage and unable to form any social organization and, at the same time, to show in a favourable light and justify the losers (Italians), who are supposed to be brave, competent and culturally superior. Their only drawback seems to be that they are innocently naive. The next few pages are devoted to the history of the Ethiopian Empire created by Menelik. He presents the numerous conquests Abyssinians made as ones that were closely derived from the European model: "Sometimes the invaded areas were overawed by the show of superior force and accepted treaties of protection; sometimes they resisted and were slaughtered with the use of the modern weapons which were being imported both openly and illicitly in enormous numbers: sometimes they were simply recorded as Ethiopian without their knowledge"⁷. There follows a long list of Abyssinian conquests of the neighbouring tribes and the atrocities committed during these conquests. The Abyssinian policy of repression and oppression is described as far worse than anything else that happened in the history of Africa. Waugh depicts it as a system evil to the core, intolerable from its very foundations. His culturally biased vision of world history perceived entirely from the European perspective is particularly well demonstrated in the following fragment:

Here was imperialism devoid of a single redeeming element. However sordid the motives and however gross the means by which the white races established – and are still establishing – themselves in Africa, the result has been, in the main, beneficial, for there are more good men than bad in Europe and there is a predisposition towards justice and charity in European culture; a bias, so that it cannot for long run without inclining to good; things that began wickedly turned out well.⁸

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

The Abyssinian colonialism is shown as something so hideous that even the atrocities committed in the Belgian Congo become in comparison minor, mild and excusable. Waugh blames the Abyssinians for not having done anything to teach, feed or help their subject people; and for imposing a “deadly and hopeless system”. And over and over again he compares it with European colonialism and finds it inferior.

He presents the efforts of “Jeapanese d’Ethiopia”, the society of so called “progressive Abyssinians”, which propagated the ideas of European civilization as something superficial, ineffective, and organized mostly for show; its actions restricted to the small model province conveniently near the railway station in order to present it to the foreigners; and aping of Western “cultivated” manners of drinking and eating. This part of the chapter ends with a powerful presentation of the stereotyped character of the whole nation: “Tricking the Europeans was a national craft; evading issues, promising without the intention of fulfilment, tricking the paid foreign advisers, tricking the legations. tricking the visiting international committees – these were the ways by which Abyssinia had survived and prospered”⁹. In contrast with the first part of the chapter, there are no references or quotes from any books on history or politics; Waugh retains the third person narration, but he gets more and more agitated and biased. He presents differences between various versions of European colonialism as trite and unimportant in comparison with the unbridgeable gap between them and the Abyssinian atrocities. The arguments of the other, pro-Abyssinian, liberal side, the side supported by the majority of British press of the period are not even mentioned, let alone argued with.

The history of the Ethiopian Empire after Menelik's death is presented alongside the history of Italian attempts to colonize it by various means. Waugh points out that after the Great War. Britain and France gave Italy only a fraction of the colonial advantages which had been promised her as the price of entering the war on the side of the Allies. Italy, undeterred, helped Abyssinia to become a full member of the League of Nations. Waugh considers this a very gullible decision and

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

compares it to giving Menelik a load of cartridges in 1893 in order to appease him. The Italian policy towards Abyssinia in the 1920s is seen by Waugh as very similar to an economic and cultural imperialism of the kind the United States imposed upon their unprogressive neighbours. But knowing the national character of Abyssinians (presented only a few pages earlier) he announces that this policy was bound to fail. He reports with a sense of indignation that Italians "earned no recompense or gratitude"¹⁰ for the introduction of Abyssinians into the League. Instead they encountered hostility and unfavourable terms for their trade and charitable enterprises. Waugh gives a long list of discrimination against Italian firms and states with indignation that the Abyssinians "neither wanted Italy's friendship nor feared her enmity"¹¹. He complains that Abyssinians and their government treated Italians in the same manner as the tribes that they had defeated.

The more general point that Waugh seems to be trying to make is that all the cultural standards set by the League of Nations are totally incongruous in Africa. The treatment that other Europeans received in Abyssinia is only slightly better than that provided for Italians. According to Waugh, the only people who hold good opinions about Abyssinians are missionaries; but they are, anyway, universally positively disposed to everybody. The other group sympathizing with Abyssinians are (to use his own words): "extreme lovers of the picturesque who fostered lepers and eunuchs and brigand chiefs, as their milder brothers encamped sulky yokels in England to perform folk dances on the village green"¹². Whereas the anti-Abyssinian party is described as consisting of those who attempted to do the useful jobs in the country. He accuses Abyssinians of xenophobia and sees it as the insurmountable barrier to all free co-operation. Not more than half a page later accusations of xenophobia are levied against the English – he states that their sympathies are most easily aroused on behalf of nations with whom they have no acquaintance. The argument that follows may be summa-

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

¹¹ *Ibidem.*

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 33.

rized in this way: English people prefer Abyssinians to Italians because they most certainly have never met the former while there is a fair chance that they had been overcharged for their lunch in Rome by the latter.

The next paragraph, in my opinion, should be called racist; it is supposed to justify Mussolini's action in Abyssinia in 1935. Here is a fragment of it:

The essence of the offence was that the Abyssinians, in spite of being by any possible standard an inferior race, persisted in behaving as superiors; it was not that they were hostile, but contemptuous. The white man accustomed to other parts of Africa was disgusted to find the first class carriages on the railway usurped by the local dignitaries; he found himself subject to officials and villainous-looking men at arms whose language he did not know, who showed him no preference on account of his colour, and had not the smallest reluctance to using force on him if he became truculent.¹³

And so on in the same tone there follows a number of examples of Abyssinian inhospitality towards foreigners and their reluctance to let them do business in their country.

But, according to Waugh, Britain and France received relatively better treatment than Italy, which expected tangible commercial advantages and got nothing. Waugh argues that Italy's ambitions were clear and legitimate; if one were to judge them by the international morality of America, Japan and the League's Powers. He states that "Abyssinia could not claim recognition on equal terms by the civilized nations and at the same time maintain her barbarous isolation, she must put her natural resources at the disposal of the world"¹⁴. Never before, not even when writing in a patriotic mood has Waugh reached such a level of a one-sided, biased view of political events. His tone becomes so pompously grave that some of the sentences, if read in isolation, might easily be taken as parodies of the imperial parlance of a jingoistic official

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

in Congo or Uganda at the turn of the century. Waugh, apparently unconsciously, reaches a level of self-parody when he describes eager Italian veterinarians who were kept away from cattle ravaged by the plague. With every page he gets more and more agitated, more and more anti-Abyssinian. And finally he announces that in December 1934 Italy had finally despaired of achieving her goal by peaceful means and that (conveniently enough) it was at that time that “the Abyssinians chose to attack the military post at Walwal”¹⁵, and then points out that it is uncertain how far this “piece of folly” was directed from Addis Ababa, and how far it was the spontaneous act of the troops on the spot. After this incident, Abyssinia decided to resort to arbitration, while Italy decided to resort to war.

The Italians could not have hoped for a more arduous supporter of their case than Evelyn Waugh. In Waugh's view: “both sides began to prepare for war on a larger scale; but while the Abyssinians enlisted Europeans' sympathy by a scrupulous regard for the formalities of peaceful negotiation, the Italians boasted from the first that they proposed to fight – in their own time and in the manner which suited them best”¹⁶. Waugh presents the Italian stance as more honest and just, even if politically somewhat naive; whereas the Abyssinian position is described unequivocally as “a scrupulous regard for the formalities of peaceful negotiation”. It is slightly ironic that only two pages earlier Waugh attacked Abyssinians for their total disregard of the Treaty of Friendship signed in 1928. It looks as though he chooses to support in turn the policy of force or the policy based on negotiations and/or moral standards in the manner that Italians are always right, no matter what they decide to do: penetrate the country peacefully or militarily.

The next paragraph begins with the sentence: “No one except Signor Mussolini knows exactly what form he intended the war to take. There are indications that it was originally planned as a punitive demonstration”¹⁷. It describes the vision of what might have happened if

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

¹⁷ *Ibidem.*

the British had not intervened and spoilt everything. The whole first chapter of *Waugh in Abyssinia* was written in March and April 1936, after Waugh had already returned to England via Palestine and Rome in January of that year. While in Rome he interviewed Mussolini and was deeply impressed by him. Nowhere in the text does Waugh mention this interview. He admits only that his knowledge of Mussolini's motives is conjectural but states that as late as the beginning of summer 1935 Mussolini had no intention of making war on a national scale. He creates a blissful vision of how idyllic things could have looked, had Mussolini been given his chance. Some tribes would have been bribed, some scared by a few sharp encounters "with the new methods of war", and an Italian protectorate could have been established; internal order could have been put under a national gendarmerie officered by Italians, a new great dam would have been built, the neighbouring territories would have been saved much expense and anxiety, the masters would have been more humane, and so on. But this plan failed, according to Waugh, because of two factors. First, the Italians underestimated the duplicity of the Abyssinian rulers. But the main reason for the failure of the peaceful solution was due to the policy pursued by the British government. Waugh's argument runs as follows: the policy of Britain and France made the Emperor believe, and the Emperor transmitted this faith to his subjects, that England and France were coming to fight against Italy, and this resulted in a situation where some local chiefs feared to declare themselves against what seemed to be the stronger side. And then comes a fervent defence of Italian actions: "The Italians, in the face of sanctions and a campaign of peevish and impotent remonstrance in England, felt their national honour challenged and their entire national resources committed to what, in its inception, was a minor colonial operation of the kind constantly performed in the recent past by every great Power in the world"¹⁸.

The final paragraph of the chapter is a spiteful attack on the British handling of the affair and on the British press. At the time Waugh was writing this chapter (April 1935), the Italians were conducting a full

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

scale attack on Abyssinia. Waugh's reaction was this: "[...] the papers are filled with reports of the death agonies of the Abyssinian people and scholars are demonstrating in the correspondence column their ingenuity in composing Greek epitaphs for them. No one can doubt that an immense amount of avoidable suffering has been caused, and that the ultimate consequences may be of worldwide effect"¹⁹.

The last prophecy of Waugh turned out to be true: the Abyssinian conflict, as well as the Spanish Civil War, may be seen from the longer time perspective as testing grounds for the armies preparing for the Second World War. However, it seems debatable whether it could have been avoided, had Britain supported Mussolini in 1935, as Waugh implies. Thus, a chapter which began with an outline of the history of the European colonization of Africa has been gradually transformed into a platform for arguments supporting the Italian military occupation of Abyssinia, and a fierce, even if not always direct, attack on the British government and the British press.

The middle part of *Waugh in Abyssinia* consisting of four chapters ("Addis Ababa Under the Last Days of the Ethiopian Empire"; "Harar and Jijiga"; "Waiting for the War" and "Anticlimax") stands clearly apart from the opening and final sections. It is written in a first person narrative and in this respect as well as in the mood, which is flippant and ironic, it resembles Waugh's earlier travel books. Waugh explains that the whole journey and the whole book materialized mostly thanks to the fact that at that time "Abyssinia was News"; that everybody even with the slightest knowledge of the country was in high demand, so that even "the journal of a woman traveller in Upper Egypt was advertised as giving information on Abyssinian problems"²⁰. This is an ironic reference to the book by Marcelle Prat *White Brown and Black*; in the review of which he wrote: "[...] it is not until page 228 that the authoress crosses the frontier into Abyssinian territory; on page 240 she is certainly back in the Sudan, and of the intervening pages five deal with the events which may have taken place in either Sudan or Abyssinia,

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

but with a strong probability from internal evidence in favour of the former”²¹. Waugh himself modestly does not mention his claims for expertise on Abyssinia: more than 100 pages on Abyssinia in *Remote People* and about fifty in “The Intelligent Woman's Guide [...]”. He lets the facts speak for themselves and also is not afraid to declare frankly that he did not know the first thing about being a war correspondent.

In the middle section of the book Waugh concentrates on the description of Addis Ababa preparing for the war, and on his fellow journalists. Both subjects seem to suit perfectly well his light, ironic style, and the mood becomes similar to that of his earlier novels rather than his earlier travel books, as in the latter he did not have so many opportunities to focus on people, particularly on Europeans. The journalists of *Waugh in Abyssinia* are by no means “remote people”. They are more like “unrounded” characters of *Vile Bodies* or *Decline and Fall*. Waugh's presentations of his colleagues' ways of professional conduct usually have a satirical edge, but the main problem they often foster is the relationship between fact and fiction. Ian Littlewood pointed out of *Waugh in Abyssinia*: “When reality fails to meet the journalists' requirements, it is simply nudged into a more amenable condition; between a friendly cup of tea and a military consultation there is a modest gap for the imagination to bridge. Waugh points satirically to the moment at which truth expands into fiction”²². Littlewood's statement appears to be true not only in the case of the correspondents, but also of travel book writers, whose dependence on fact is similarly crucial. Waugh had been a press correspondent before, during the coronation of Ras Tafari in 1930. Later on, he reported in *Remote People* cases of journalists editing the facts in strikingly biased ways or even inventing them. But this seems minor and unimportant in comparison with a situation where over a hundred journalists wait anxiously for the war to begin, the authorities do not allow them to leave the capital, and their editors pester them with cables demanding scoops. In *Waugh in Abyssinia* journalists

²¹ Evelyn Waugh, *The Essays, Articles and Reviews of Evelyn Waugh*, ed., Donat Gallagher (London, 1988) p. 174.

²² Littlewood, *The Writings of Evelyn Waugh*, p. 202.

(mostly Americans) revert to personal stories and the invention of news out of thin air. The Europeans are on the whole less courageous or more timid and employ local spies to provide them with gossip. Such spies (Waugh's was named Wazir Ali Bey) worked at the same time for several competing journalists, as well as for Abyssinians and Italians. Their impudence is described meticulously in *Waugh in Abyssinia* and later utilized in *Scoop*.

The flat, boring, frustrating reality of journalists' lives is sometimes contrasted by Waugh with their heroic dreams of themselves. "But meanwhile there still lingered in our minds the picture we had presented of ourselves to our womenfolk at home, of stricken fields and ourselves crouching in shell holes, typing gallantly amid bursting shrapnel and runners charging through clouds of gas; bearing our dispatches on cleft sticks".²³ This vision should be treated quite seriously, even though it is presented in a mock-heroic fashion. It corresponds quite well with Waugh's desire, expressed in his letter to Laura Herbert, to write "a serious war book", which proved impossible because of the way in which the war was fought and the policy of the Abyssinian authorities. Thus, instead he wrote two chapters aptly entitled: "Waiting for the War" and "Anticlimax", dominated by such events as the meeting of Addis Ababa's prostitutes dubbed by journalists: "Abyssinian Amazons. Famous Legion of Fighting Women Leave For the Front", or the Emperor's visit to a newly opened hospital where he is shown a model amputation of a hand of a "war-hero", who turns out to be a penalized thief. The journalists and their editors create an atmosphere in which "an exclusive lie was more valuable than a truth which was shared with the others"²⁴. And the only scoop of the war goes to a the *Daily Telegraph* correspondent, Sir Percival, who found out about Mr. Ricket, a British businessman who had received a concession from Haile Selassie for mineral rights of unprecedented dimension for an Anglo-American consortium. Later on, the American government did not ratify the deal, which Waugh saw as its agreement to Italian aggres-

²³ Waugh, *Waugh in Abyssinia*, p. 77.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

sion in Abyssinia. It is worth mentioning that the scoop in *Waugh in Abyssinia* is presented as something as similarly random, accidental and haphazard as the scoop of John Boot from the novel *Scoop*. Interestingly enough, Waugh had sailed with Mr. Ricket on board the same ship. He had suspected that Mr. Ricket was an arms dealer and he mentioned this in *Waugh in Abyssinia*. Moreover, he even wrote a letter from Aden to his friend Penelope Betjeman in which he asked her to get and send him information about Mr. Ricket, who claimed to be a neighbour of hers (in the letter Waugh asked her to inquire if he was in the British secret service and if he was connected with Vickers or Imperial Chemicals). Apparently, Penelope Betjeman did not manage to help him.

The flippant mood in which Waugh describes his fellow journalists is also discernible in his treatment of Abyssinians, their Emperor and their army. Waugh's extremely low opinion of Abyssinians in the first chapter takes the shape of stereotypical judgments, which are followed in the second chapter by a series of specific examples that are supposed to strengthen the impression. The Abyssinians are lazy, incompetent and xenophobic. They think mostly of tricking foreigners. Their ministers treat the League of Nations as a "ju-ju thing", with which they can cheat and gain numerous advantages. They constantly abuse the emblem of the Red Cross and their own Red Cross unit is described in this way: "[...] half of the native orderlies were under treatment for venereal disease; others were in chains for breaches of discipline; others were in tears at the prospect of moving nearer fighting"²⁵. It would be difficult to state to what extent most of Waugh's anecdotal scenes are based on factual events, but one point is certain, the impression that he carefully creates is very negative, very one-sided. The only uncritical words are reserved for their religion. The end of rain season religious festival (in which Waugh perceives a mixture of Christian and pagan elements) receives Waugh's approval and is compared with Christian festivals in medieval Europe. Ethiopian Christianity may be the highest achievement in the life of the country, but Waugh quickly

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

compares it with other Churches of the East and West and finds its decorations shoddy, its ceremony slipshod, and its scholarship meagre.

Only the Arabs in Harar and Jijiga are shown in a more favourable light. Their culture and general standards of civilization, according to Waugh, far exceed those ever achieved by Abyssinians. Arabs are shown as oppressed by Abyssinians and wanting to have more humane masters; preferably British, and if not British, then Italian. Whatever their faults, the integrity of Koranic Law makes them superior to any of their neighbours. This positive bias treatment of Muslim culture re-appeared occasionally in Waugh's writings ever since *Remote People*.

But the fullest contrast remains reserved for the comparison of Abyssinians and Italians. The second part of *Waugh in Abyssinia* describes events that took place just before the war in Abyssinia, and therefore the number of Italians encountered and described by Waugh is very limited. Nevertheless, the contrast is sharp. The chief of the Italian legation, Signor Vinci, is presented as the epitome of a perfect diplomat; competent, cool, courageous, loyal and hard working. He remains in Addis Ababa after the declaration of war in order to, in Waugh's words: "maintain the dignity of the future conquerors"²⁶. In *Waugh in Abyssinia* the personal contacts of the author with the Italian legation are not mentioned, nor did he write about the fact that by many journalists and representatives of foreign legations Mr. Evelyn Waugh was treated as an Italian spy (he complained about it in his letter to Laura Herbert dated 24 August 1935).

As I have mentioned earlier, it is the third part (the last two chapters) of *Waugh in Abyssinia* that is the most propagandist of the whole book; much more than the first chapter. The second part of the book is characterized mostly by negative propaganda: presenting Abyssinians as villains, but even here there are some elements of eulogies, in instances when he describes Italians or different aspects of their culture:

One contrast remains vivid in my memory among confused impressions of the railway system. A cattle truck packed with soldiers on

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 217.

the way to the southern front; their rifles had been taken away for fear they got into mischief during the journey; but most of them had weapons of a kind; all were in a delirious condition, hoarse, staring, howling for blood. In the next coach sat a dozen Italian nuns on the way to the coast; fresh faced, composed, eyes downcast, quietly telling their beads.²⁷

Once again, it is not so important whether Waugh really saw Abyssinian soldiers and Italian nuns in two adjoining railway coaches, but such an aesthetically emotional picture as this one, presented in a chapter describing the situation when the war is about to break out, could be expected of a jingoistic press, rather than in a war-infested travel-book. It is the choice of this contrast that is characteristic.

The third part of the book is different in character and mood from the first and the second parts. This part is a report of Waugh's return journey to Abyssinia (August-September 1936). The first two parts were written in March-May 1936 and then Waugh decided that he had too little information to write the book. He travelled back to Abyssinia via Italy, where he tried to make the Ministry of Information pay for his trip, but did not succeed in doing so (his efforts to get free tickets to Addis Ababa are not mentioned in *Waugh in Abyssinia*, though they are mentioned a number of times in his diary). Waugh complains at the beginning of the penultimate chapter that, although he was the first English writer or journalist to go to Abyssinia after the invasion, he could not get commissions for articles as Abyssinia was no longer news and nobody wanted to read about it, which must have also meant that the prospects for his book were not very good. The truth may be a bit more complex. Having been sacked by the *Daily Mail* he had little chances to get something published in the press, as his pro-Italian stance must have been widely known by then (later on he wrote letters to the editors of some newspapers defending the Italians; an uncharacteristic thing for him to do as these are not paid for).

Ironically, it would seem on the surface that this third part of *Waugh in Abyssinia* should be perceived as being much more typical of a

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 164-5.

travel book than the first or even the second. After all, Waugh describes here a journey to a war which had already ended and goes there not as a war correspondent or even a journalist, but as a curious writer; a traveller of a kind. But there is not much in these two chapters typical of travel books. Waugh seems to be interested in just one thing: how well the occupying Italian forces are doing. His main concern is to point out the advantages of various kinds that the country obtained when it became an Italian colony.

Rose Macaulay, while writing on *Waugh in Abyssinia* in 1946, called it a “Fascist tract”, probably mostly due to the contents of the last two chapters. On his return to Abyssinia Waugh does not find the country destroyed (“I am surprised to see how little damage a bomb does”) and in much better condition than only a few months before. The fact that the Italians have not yet changed it into a model colony is explained by the onset of the wet season, but even this adversity of climate gives Waugh a chance to praise the morale of the Italian army, which heroically bears the boredom of the rain season. The high point of the first part of this visit is an interview with general Graziani, the commander of the Italian occupying forces. “He gave me twenty minutes. I have seldom enjoyed an official audience more. Too often when talking to minor fascists one finds a fatal love of oratory [...] (Waugh must have learnt about it the hard way in the offices of the Italian Ministry of Information not more than a month later) There was no nonsense of that kind about Graziani. He was like the traditional conception of an English admiral, frank, humorous and practical. He asked where I had been, what I had seen, what I wanted to see. Whenever my requests were reasonable he gave his immediate consent. If he had to refuse anything he did so directly and gave his reasons. He did not touch on general politics or the ethics of the conquest...” and so on for three more pages ending with: “I left with an impression of one of the most amiable and sensible men I had met for a long time”²⁸. This passage sickly-sweet and thoroughly one-sided.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 225-8.

In the remaining paragraph of the chapter: “The First Days of the Italian Empire” Waugh describes his tour of inspection of various places in Abyssinia. He renounces Peter Balfour's “eloquent lament” of Harar remarking that he found the city “practically unchanged. It was a little cleaner”²⁹. Later Waugh defends the fact that Italians used gas (yiprite) during the war; presenting two different and partly contradictory arguments. First he claims that gas was, after all, ineffective – killing only 18 people – and then that it was mostly used to clear away and sterilise the bushes in order to enable the quick advance of armoured vehicles.

There follows a description of the raids on Addis Ababa by Abyssinian “bandits”. Waugh tries to sooth his readers by stating that they were made possible by the wet season, and that the Italians “have never for a moment been in serious danger [...]”³⁰. Evelyn Waugh clearly shows how far he has gone from the position of a satirical writer of independent (even if clearly conservative) views to the position of a propagandist rejoicing at the fact that no liberal journalists are allowed by the Italians into Abyssinia for: “It would be easy to write ironically about the Pax Romana and contrast the public utterances in Rome with conditions in the heart of the new Empire. It would be easy to represent the Italian conquest, as the Greek at Djibouti had done, as a bluff which, in the general anxiety of the world, everyone in Europe was eager to accept without investigation. It is for precisely this reason that the Italians have closed the frontier to foreign journalists. I can well imagine what some of the more excitable of my former colleagues could have made of the material”³¹. It is a straightforward justification and support for censorship; written by someone who attacked censors furiously some fifty pages earlier. Italian authorities seem to have done the right thing in allowing just one foreign writer – signor Evelyn Waugh – into Abyssinia. The final chapter, “The Road”, is the most propagandist of the whole book; written in a pompous, manifesto-like

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 222.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 237.

³¹ *Ibidem.*

style. It presents a vision of the model, ideal colony, Waugh thinks Abyssinia is going to become. He sees Italian colonialism as something far superior to its British or French equivalents. In his opinion it can only be compared with the colonization of North America. He sees it as “an expansion of the race” that spreads order, decency, education and medicine. He is fascinated and deeply moved by the idea of white men working manually in Africa; by the fact that they are actually building the road while the Abyssinians are gaping in amazement at what these stupid white victors are doing. The road, which he sees as a great technological project, becomes a symbol of this expansion of civilization and race and western culture. Seventy unarmed Italian road builders killed by Abyssinian bandits become martyrs of the renewed Roman Empire. In contrast, he perceives roads in England: “as a foul and destructive thing, carrying the ravages of barbarism into a civilised land – noise, smell, abominable architecture and inglorious dangers. Here in Africa it [the road] brings order and fertility.”³² The final vision is made to look objective by the enumeration of some possible drawbacks of the Empire *in spe*:

[...] new roads will be radiating to all points of the compass, and along the roads will pass the eagles of ancient Rome, as they came to our savage ancestors in France and Britain and Germany, bringing some rubbish and some mischief; a good deal of vulgar talk and some sharp misfortunes for individual opponents; but above and beyond and entirely predominating, the inestimable gift of fine workmanship and clear judgement – the two determining qualities of the human spirit, by which alone, under God, man grows and flourishes.³³

Even if we agree with Rose Macauley that *Waugh in Abyssinia* is indeed a “Fascist tract”, the question of whether the views expressed in it are those of a committed Fascist, is a different thing altogether. Martin Stannard wrote that it was not so; that they were the opinions of a “po-

³² *Ibid.*, p. 243.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 253.

litically naive aesthete”³⁴. It seems that Waugh was fascinated by the changes that Mussolini brought to Italy; even more so because of the strong leftist and liberal political tendency in 1930s Britain which he detested. But this political fascination looks odd if we take into consideration Waugh's earlier writings. This fascination turned out to be a short lived one, at least as far literature is concerned, *Scoop*, the novel based on what he saw in Abyssinia in 1935 is practically non-political; or to be more exact, politics is treated there very lightly. Waugh's support of Italy resulted in his glorification of things and ideas he mocked and ridiculed in *Black Mischief* or in the Bright Young People novels, particularly of technology and the idea of an expansion of the race. Waugh behaved and wrote against the prevailing intellectual mood of the period, but as Richard Johnstone pointed out, a considerable part of public opinion “regarded the Italian invasion as justified by the Laws of Imperialism”³⁵. Did Waugh count on them to be readers of his book? While giving his opinion on the Spanish civil war in Louis Aragon's *Writers Take Sides* Waugh's opinion was again different from the great majority of the writers and intellectuals. He claimed that as a Briton he did not have to choose between Communism and Fascism, which according to him was the choice facing Spaniards. If he had been a Spaniard, he stated, he would have fought on Franco's side. It seems that in both cases (Italy, Spain) Waugh's fascist sympathies were to a considerable extent influenced by his Catholicism and his staunch conservative views.

The articles that Waugh wrote for the *Daily Mail* as its correspondent to Addis Ababa show a very different style, mood and approach from *Waugh in Abyssinia*. They appear to be less biased than the book, and if one reads them in isolation, it would be difficult to tell what his personal opinions were. He is only very mildly satirical of the Abyssinians, who are shown as a naive, childish people awaiting without misapprehension the horrors of modern war, which they seem not to understand. Instead, they are confident of their bravery and of a quick

³⁴ Stannard, ed. *Evelyn Waugh*. p. 435.

³⁵ Johnstone, *The Will to Believe*. p. 83.

victory (24 Aug, “Three More Weeks of Rain and Then – War Certain in Few Weeks”). Their manners and customs are presented as a bit strange and barbarous, but on the other hand quite colourful (28 Sept 1935 “Abyssinian Chiefs' War Dance Deluge at End of Rains Ceremony”). In one article (Sept 1935 “French Count's Arrest in Abyssinia”) he describes the arrest and its possible political implications of French Count de Rocquefeuil, accused of spying. This event was also depicted, but in a far more detailed and subjective way, in *Waugh in Abyssinia*. Waugh's own political stance, hardly discernible in these articles, is clear in two other pieces of writing from this period: “Appendix VIII to the Official Note Addressed by the Italian Government to the League of Nations” and in his letter to the *Times* published on 19 May 1936 (that is before his return visit) entitled “The Conquest of Abyssinia”. In the former he testifies that he has seen many cases of Abyssinians abusing the emblem of the Red Cross (“It may be noted that the Abyssinians have always regarded the red cross with great familiarity; it is the sign of brothels throughout the country [...]”). In the latter he attacks the British government's treatment of the Abyssinian crisis and concludes that its policy prevented “what might have been a comparatively bloodless transition from a low to a higher form of imperialism...”, thus retaining the tone and rhetoric of *Waugh in Abyssinia*.

No diary exists between July 1934 and July 1936, that is roughly from the moment of Waugh's return from Spitsbergen to his preparations for his last visit to Abyssinia. The journey to Addis Ababa in 1935 remains unreported in the diary, but the next section of it describes his return visit to Abyssinia in the summer of 1935 undertaken to “round off” the book. The differences between the diary and the third part of *Waugh in Abyssinia* are not only purely stylistic or concerning some minor editing of some relatively unimportant events, which has usually been the case with Waugh's earlier travel books. The stay in Italy is described in the diary as an arduous attempt to force Italians to pay his expenses. There are a few entries like this one: “Assisi, Mon 3 Aug 1936. Went to Ministro Stampa. Kept waiting long time then told noth-

ing decided about my fare. Minister in Berlin”³⁶. In the book he wrote nothing of this kind.

The respect and glorification with which Waugh treats Italians in “*Waugh in Abyssinia*” is practically non-existent in the diary (perhaps with the sole exception of the interview with Graziani). Italians are constantly referred to as “Wops”, and they hardly resemble Caesar's legionaries envisaged in the final chapter of the book. “Wop soldiers” in the diary are described while visiting a military brothel organized in a very orderly fashion. The picture of Italian imperialism in *Waugh in Abyssinia* is absolutely flawless, almost idyllic, whereas in the diaries Waugh noted facts of a different nature, and unrecorded in the book. For example, on Mon 31 Aug 1936 he wrote: “When taxed with filth Italians say: ‘We are in Africa.’ Bad omen if they regard tropics as excuse for inferior hygiene. Reminded that they are a race who inhabited and created the slums of the world”³⁷. This quote may serve, I think, as proof that Waugh's fascination with Italian Fascism was not so blind or naive as the impression one might get from the reading of the book, that *Waugh in Abyssinia* is in fact a long propagandist pamphlet for a case that Waugh felt was not presented fairly in the British press.

The novel that completes the last of Waugh's literary chains, that is *Scoop*, was published in 1938, more than two years after *Waugh in Abyssinia*. This was an unusually long time span for Waugh which could be explained by his marriage and subsequent long honeymoon in 1937. Moreover, in his diaries he complained several times that the writing of this novel caused him many problems. On one level *Scoop* resembles *Black Mischief*, as both the fictitious Ishmaelia in the former and Azania in the latter bear many resemblances to real Abyssinia. But *Scoop* is, first of all, a novel about journalists and journalism and Ishmaelia just provides an ample background; whereas in *Black Mischief* Azania and its problems remained in focus throughout the novel. Now, the sting of Waugh's satire is clearly directed against Fleet Street and the professional code of journalists. Politics play a secondary role, and is pre-

³⁶ Waugh, *Waugh in Abyssinia*, p. 396.

³⁷ *Ibidem*.

sented and ridiculed as if it were a small boys' game. Both parties, the one backed by Russians and the one backed by Germans, seem pretty ineffective; the ideas they propagate seem loony to the core. Unlike *Waugh in Abyssinia*, *Scoop* is not a doctrinaire book. The happy ending is of the "deus ex machina" patriotic variety; law and order is brought to the country by a mysterious British entrepreneur – Mr. Baldwin, which is the type of ending one might expect from a wishfully thinking conservative British man of letters. In *Scoop* there is none of the political fervour and seriousness of *Waugh in Abyssinia*.

Jacksonville, Ishmaelia's capital is unmistakably Addis Ababa (although the roots of the Jackson clan of presidents can be traced to Liberia rather than Ethiopia). The Legations, palaces, hotels, and restaurants have changed names but they are similar in both their functions and character. John Boot's journey to Ishmaelia closely resembles Waugh's voyage to Djibouti (it is better and much more economically described in *Waugh in Abyssinia* than in the novel). And many of the problems that journalists face in Ishmaelia mirror those of *Waugh in Abyssinia*: bullying editors, incompetent censors, unreliable informers, French journalists' reluctance towards their Anglo-Saxon colleagues, rivalries between journalists themselves. And last but not least, the language of the dispatches. In *Waugh in Abyssinia* we have a few examples of such telegrams, shortened to the point that they become incomprehensible to the general reader, which makes them susceptible to becoming ridiculously funny. The prime example of this in *Waugh in Abyssinia* is, of course, "nurse unupblown" which Waugh sent as a reply to his editor, who had demanded confirmation of a rumour that a nurse had been killed in a bombing raid. Telegrams sent by editors that sound mysterious both to John Boot, the novel's main protagonist, as well as to an implied reader are numerous in *Scoop*. Here is an example: "POSITION SPLASHING FR4NTWARD SPEEDLIEST STOP ADEN REPORTED PREPARED WAR – WISE FLASH FACTS BEAST"³⁸

Scoop is also, or perhaps first of all, a novel of mistaken identities. The job, which the influential Mrs. Stitch (a character that also ap-

³⁸ Evelyn Waugh, *Scoop* (Harmondsworth, 1983), p. 69.

peared Waugh's other novels) got for her *protégé*, a fashionable writer called John Boot, goes accidentally to a different John Boot, the editor of a weekly column on nature. And it is the adventures of the *ingénu* character that provide the crux of the plot. John Boot, the fashionable writer, is Waugh himself presented in a charmingly auto-ironic way:

His novels sold 15 000 copies in their first year and were read by the people whose opinions John Boot respected. Between novels he kept his name sweet in intellectual circles with unprofitable but modish works on history and travel. He had published eight books, beginning with a life of Rimbaud written when he was eighteen; and concluding at the moment, with *Waste of Time*, a studiously modest description of some harrowing months among the Patagonian Indians - of which most people who lunched with Lady Metroland could remember the names of three or four.³⁹

Waste of Time is undoubtedly *Ninety-Two Days*. It's a pity he was not, at that time, similarly critical of *Waugh in Abyssinia* – a book received by the critics much more coldly than the previous one, mainly due to its strong political bias.

My final impression is that Waugh, in *Waugh in Abyssinia*, feared so strongly that he should be taken for a naive European, who could have been outwitted by some “primitive” Abyssinians (in other words, he detested the notion that he could be thought of as a gullible liberal) that he was prepared to go much further in the opposite direction than anywhere else in his writings.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

Robbery Under Law

Robbery Under Law: The Mexican Object-Lesson is the last of Evelyn Waugh's pre-war travel books. It was published at the beginning of 1939 and is the fruit of Waugh's journey to Mexico in the summer of 1938, as well as of his extensive research in various libraries both prior to and after the trip. He went to Mexico with his wife, stayed mostly in the hotel "Ritz" in Mexico City, and travelled a bit around the country. Waugh was commissioned to write a book on the situation in Mexico by Clive Pearson, who had substantial financial interests in Mexico, especially in the oil industry which had recently been nationalized by General Cardenas' government. But although the book begins with a foreword in which Waugh expresses his gratitude to people who, in various ways, helped him in Mexico, Clive Pearson or his commission are not mentioned.

Robbery Under Law is a "travel book" only in the "technical", generic sense of the word; actually there is very little travelling depicted in it, and the book deals mostly with the politics and history of Mexico. Twice in the text Waugh admits that it is a "political book", and while preparing a selection from his pre-war travel books in 1946, entitled *When the Going Was Good*, he chose to disregard it completely on the grounds that "it dealt little with travel, much with political questions"¹ This shift from "travel book proper" to "political travelogues" was mostly due to the world situation in the late 1930s. This could have been observed in *Waugh in Abyssinia* as well as in the books of other British writers (Fleming, Auden, Connolly). According to Paul Fussell it

¹ Waugh, *When the Going Was Good*, p. 5.

was “a corruption of the genre, as the 1930s began to gear themselves for war”².

Many formal characteristics of a travel book are retained in *Robbery Under Law*. The first person narrative is employed throughout the book, even though there are long passages, or even whole chapters, when the narration turns impersonal and seemingly “objective”. But even then Waugh provides short personal interludes: comments or anecdotes from his short excursions in Mexico.

Yet the overall plan of the book differs distinctly from Waugh's early travel books (or, incidentally, from his only post-war one; *A Tourist in Africa*, which was written in the form of a daily diary). The division into chapters no longer marks the stages of Waugh's expeditions and trips, presented chronologically; it is conducted on purely thematic, topical grounds. The first chapter is entitled “Introduction”. and the seven subsequent chapters deal with: tourism in Mexico (“II. Tourist Mexico”), politics and history (“III. A Country Where There Are No Conservatives”), the nationalization of the oil industry (“IV. Oil”), the USA's relations with Mexico (“IV. The Good Neighbour”), the Mexican government's show-off exhibition (“VI. The Sexenal”), the role in the history of Mexico of the Catholic Church and the account of its persecution (“VII. The Straight Fight”), and the problems connected with and arising from Mexico's independence (“VIII. Independence”). There follows a post-script: “The Object and the Lesson”, and an index of names and places; both being novelties in Waugh's travel writings.

“The Introduction” is explicitly self-referential, which is a feature typical of travel books written in this period. Waugh begins with a defence against the hypothetical, yet definitely feasible accusation he felt some of his Mexican readers were bound to raise: “The fellow mugs up a few facts in the London Library, comes out here for a week or two with a bare smattering of language, hangs about bothering us all with a lot of questions, and then proceeds to make money by telling us all our own business”³. Waugh's answer to this is that such is the habit of pro-

² Fussell, *Abroad*, p. 197.

³ Evelyn Waugh, *Robbery Under Law or the Mexican Object Lesson* (London, 1939), p. 1.

fessional writers and that barristers and doctors are equally culpable of “superficial acquaintance”. His other arguments are: that writers see things in the countries they travel to as fresh and that what often really counts is the first impression, the first experience, and that climax is often reached on disembarkation “and everything beyond is an attempt to revive artificially, under the iron lung of rhythmic, day to day observations, the revelation of first acquaintance”⁴.

Twice in the opening passage Waugh stresses the fact that his is a political book and then adds that it depicts anarchy. Then he proceeds to describe his journey on board the “Siboney” from New York to Mexico which gives him a chance to ponder the nature of American “package tourists” and present an account of a ridiculously funny speech by the ship’s purser on the ways in which foreign tourists should behave in Mexico and gullible questions women-tourists ask (described in Waugh’s letter to his friend, Henry Green, as Jewesses, yet he refrains from using the word in the book).

The description and critique of the European and American artistic community in Mexico, accused of living on invested capital and supporting of the socialist regime because such support happens to be fashionable fosters the narration towards an analysis of *A Plumed Serpent*, D.H. Lawrence’s novel on Mexico. After praising its opening chapter Waugh remarks that “his loneliness and lack of humour and his restless, neurotic imagination combine to make one of the silliest stories in recent literature”⁵. This happens to be one of the few literary remarks in Waugh’s travel writings, a feature particularly striking in comparison with the works of such writers as Aldous Huxley or Graham Greene. The other book to which Waugh refers on several occasions in *Robbery Under Law* is, which is hardly surprising, Graham Greene’s *The Lawless Roads*, which had been published a short time before Waugh started his own book on Mexico (I will compare the two later on in this chapter). In “The Introduction” Waugh mentions and ridicules one more book on Mexico, *Terry’s Guide to Mexico* (1911) both

⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

for its form and contents. It is also in "The Introduction" that he introduces his favourite comparison of the Americans' treatment and attitudes towards Mexico to that of the relations between Britain and Ireland in the 19-th century. This parallel returns occasionally in the book in various contexts: historical, political and religious.

The second part of "The Introduction" deals with the problems of "objectivity" and the bias of journalists and travel book writers. Waugh claims that it is impossible to be an "unbiased traveller", as everybody takes with him his cultural background, education and experiences, and it is useless to pretend that one can arrive somewhere wholly innocent as well as culturally and linguistically unprejudiced. Having written this, Waugh elaborates his conservative credo (which is one of the most often quoted piece of his writings). He begins it this way: "Let me, then, warn the reader that I was a Conservative when I went to Mexico and that everything I saw there, strengthened my opinions. I believe that man is, by nature, an exile and will never be self sufficient or complete on this earth; that his chances of happiness and virtue, here, remain more or less constant through the centuries and, generally speaking, are not much affected by the political and economic conditions in which he lives"⁶. What follows may be described as an overt exposition of Waugh's view on the advantages of non-interfering government, anarchic elements in society, problems of nationality, the inevitability of conquests and wars, and on Art as a natural function of men and artists' tendency to flatter the governments under which they live regardless of the governments' political orientation. There seems to be a note of defiance, of going against the current. Waugh is aware that the political sympathies of the majority of his readers will be hardly compatible with his radically conservative views. Again he foregrounds the hypothetical accusations of his women readers and boldly advises them to return the book to the library and "apply for something more soothing. Heaven knows, she will find plenty there"⁷; this is just the first of many sarcastic comments on the proliferation of the Left Book Club

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

publications and ideas in the late 1930s; remarks that come apparently in an offhanded manner, but often at crucial points, as here, where it rounds off the introductory chapter.

In “Tourist Mexico” Waugh makes a quick inventory of his sight-seeing impressions from Mexico. For most of the two months that he spent in Mexico he stayed in Mexico City itself; rarely and only for short excursions venturing into the country. At the beginning of this chapter he advises his readers to return the book to the library if they had borrowed it in anticipation of, what he describes in a mock heroic fashion as “vicarious endurances, treacherous guides and blistered toes, pack mules, dysentery, common amoebic, bandits, official or outlawed”⁸. He frankly admits: “I was in Mexico both for a holiday and for work and both kept me in soft conditions”⁹. Although Waugh went to Mexico with his wife, she never appears in the book as a character, and her presence can be discerned only by an occasional shift from “I” to “we” in some descriptions.

Waugh compares the Mexico City of 1938 to Venice in the last days of the Habsburg Empire. He senses the same feeling of dilapidation that pervades the whole City. But, similarly as in the case of Venice, saved thanks to mostly to the enthusiasm of British and American romantics, there is the hope that the baroque splendours, which Waugh missed so much in England, would be restored to their former glory in the same fashion. The lengthy description of Mexico City can be divided into two sections: aural and visual, and it is the former that is by far more vivid and detailed. Mexico City is presented as a place of infernal noise, and although the word is not used by Waugh, it is strongly suggested in the descriptions. Several critics have pointed out the frequent connection Waugh made in his early fiction (*Decline and Fall*, *Vile Bodies*, *Black Mischief*) between barbarity and noise. George Mc Cartney in *Confused Roaring. Evelyn Waugh and the Modernist Tradition* made the following generalization: “In his fiction savagery always manifests itself

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 37-8.

aurally”¹⁰. In *Robbery Under Law* drivers hoot incessantly, street vendors and lottery sellers shout fiercely, street singers sing for money, people yell to one another on streets as there is no cafe life, and on top of it all there is a lot of bashing of wood against wood performed for the sole purpose of producing more noise. Fireworks, unlike those in Europe, are designed not for visual effects, but for bangs. Thus, the indispensable noise of any large city mixes with the wanton noise for noise's sake to create an acoustic Inferno, a “confused Roaring”. The loudest and most individual noise in Waugh's description is made by a pile-driver used in the construction of new vaults for the reserves of the National Bank, which provides Waugh with ample opportunity to insert an ironic juxtaposition with the poor condition of the country's economy.

“Tourist Mexico” also deals with the inhabitants of the capital whom Waugh describes as having “a kind of listless shabbiness that has nothing to do with poverty”¹¹ and accuses them of a lack of dignity. Then, he moves on to describe the films shown in Mexico City, notes with relish the lack of demand for Russian “instructional films”, and analyses the popularity of melodramas. The last section consists of ten short episodes presented as typical “if not of the country, at least of my trip there”¹²; but this is in fact a collection of oddities and things bizarre, and of a nature similar to the ones which he would normally intersperse quite evenly throughout his earlier travel books. In *Robbery Under Law* they are clustered together, probably because it would be difficult to fit them into the following descriptive and argumentative chapters dealing with specific topics. Thus, we have the story of an exceptionally honest Mexican chambermaid, one about Waugh's attempts to smuggle a Holy picture out of the country, a surreptitious fiesta that was extremely difficult to trace and some others.

But, on the whole, the second chapter may be treated as an extension of the introduction, even though it mostly contains descriptions of

¹⁰ George Mc Cartney, *Confused Roaring. Evelyn Waugh and the Modernist Tradition* (Indiana, 1987), p. 160.

¹¹ Waugh, *Robbery Under Law*, p. 33.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 38.

Waugh's travelling experiences in Mexico. Yet, they are given only secondary attention, as if they had been mentioned mostly out of the writer's professional code, and the stress is put on politics, religion and history which are dealt with in the next seven chapters in much more detail.

The third chapter, entitled "A Country Where There Are No Conservatives", gives an outline of Mexican history as well as an outlook of the economic and political situation in this country at the end of the 1930s. It is characteristic that Waugh plays down the achievements of the culture of the ancient Mayas and Aztecs, and repeatedly stresses that the country's real cultural and civilizational roots are Spanish rather than Indian. He puts everything in the perspective of Europe in general and England in particular. For example, of pre-Columbian Mexico he has this to say: "[n]othing that has survived is comparable either in beauty or technical skill with the art and craftsmanship of medieval Europe"¹³. The only two personalities in the entire political history of Mexico that receive Waugh's admiration and "preferential treatment" are Fernando Cortés and General Porfirio Díaz (the president of the country at the end of the 19-th and the beginning of the 20-th c.). Others are presented as either incompetent or avaricious, or both. The role of the Catholic Church and the USA in Mexican history is barely mentioned, as Waugh devotes separate chapters to these issues later on in the book. The period between 1913 and 1938 receives the most thorough analysis, Waugh perceives it as a spell of "bandits armies", barbaric revolutions, wanton political assassinations, the dilapidation of the national economy, the growing influence of communists and trade unions, and the persecution of the Catholic Church. He presents Mexican Labour Law as ridiculously biased in favour of employees, and strengthens his point by telling a long anecdote about how it can lead to a situation when a floor cleaner in the National Museum may find himself in charge of the Mayan antiquities. The judicial system is said to be run on purely ideological (Marxist) grounds. Waugh sees Mexico as a country of a mono-party regime; inferior to Fascist states in its inability to achieve internal security, or something that he calls "foreign prestige". In

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

fact, he even treats this as an opportunity to present his theory of a “historical cycle” according to which the “natural” course of events leads to the formation of a Fascist state, and he forecasts this as a likely possibility for Mexico. According to Waugh, the disenchantment and frustration of the middle class combine with its members’ ascetic disgust for people who compete only for physical comforts. This part of the process is completely understandable to him and he sees no evil in it. The evil comes later when “cranks and criminals get into power in the new regime”¹⁴ and the high excitement created by demagoguery finds its outlet in a war of expansion.

It is perhaps worthwhile to deal at this point with the question of Waugh's attitude to Fascism and Communism in *Robbery Under Law*. There is no enthusiasm for Fascist achievements, which was so striking in *Waugh in Abyssinia*. When the events are seen in the global perspective and the looming war makes it necessary even for Waugh to take sides, a thing he eschewed not more than two years earlier, his stance is clear: Italy, Germany and Japan are seen as the enemies of Western democracies, which he is wholeheartedly prepared to defend by any means. But when it comes to Communism, it soon turns out to be, in Waugh's view, a deficient version of Fascism; deficient in the lack of punctual trains and grand melioration projects.

The next section of the chapter deals with Mexican society; Waugh tries to dissect it and present the dominant attitudes and political views of the army, politicians, civil servants, lawyers, doctors and priests, again comparing them with their European equivalents. The conclusions he draws are pessimistic: the only force that can alter the situation is the army, but since its officers hold anti-Catholic, anti-foreign, free-Masonic positions, the prospects for the country, in Waugh's opinion, are very gloomy. The chapter ends typically for this book: with a grandiose, almost pompous paragraph, this time about the jungle recapturing its lost provinces and the conclusion that only by concentrated defence and counter-attack can man retain his place on earth. This sounds like yet another way of presenting Waugh's conservative credo.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

It is the next four long chapters that constitute the crux of *Robbery Under Law*. Chapters I, II and III, may be viewed, in thematic terms, as a long introduction, a way of preparing readers for the main assault of arguments that begins in chapter IV, "Oil". As I have mentioned earlier, Waugh does not reveal in the book the fact that he was paid by Clive Pearson, a British industrialist with large stakes in the British owned "Mexican Eagle Company" dealing in oil. He went to Mexico to write a book with a distinct political bias. The question may be raised, once again, whether the views and arguments presented in *Robbery Under Law* are Waugh's or his patron's. I believe that Waugh's outline of the political situation would not have been much different had he paid for the trip himself, but on the other hand he would not have dealt with nationalization in such detail and with such a propagandist zeal. Actually, the British title of the book, *Robbery Under Law* refers, in an unequivocal way, to general Cardena's expropriation of the oil industry conducted a year before Waugh's journey. The American title, *Mexico. An Object Lesson* is more "neutral", probably because at that time relations between the USA and Mexico were quite friendly, while Britain had severed its diplomatic relations mostly due to the oil nationalization and therefore Chapman and Hall, Waugh's British publishers did not have to be so cautious. Anyway, Waugh's attitude is clear throughout the book. The nationalization (a word he avoids in favour of more emotionally loaded ones such as "expropriation") was a robbery, and the Mexican government, despite its declarations, had no intention of paying compensations to foreign oil companies.

Waugh presents the nationalization of the oil industry from various angles, yet invariable with the same purpose in mind, to show that it did not, is not and will not benefit anybody, save a few trade union officials, and that it would be detrimental for everybody else, from oil workers to motorists all over the world. The robbery takes place under law, but this law is found wanting by Waugh. He sees it is a subject of sheer fancy of the party in power, and he describes the Mexican legal system as a farce due to the courts' ideological and political bias. Waugh appeals to "reasonable people" to provide answers to five basic questions he asks and answers himself with true zest: Did the foreign oil companies establish themselves peacefully in

Mexico? Did their presence retard the peaceful development of its political and social life? Were the workers in the oil-fields neglected and underpaid? Was the destruction of the companies the only way to satisfy workers' claims? Has the Government any intention of paying compensation? I think that "reasonable people" could predict Waugh's answers to these questions.

But the arguments that he relies upon are of a more general nature. Waugh is eager to convince his readers that the Mexican government's nationalization of the oil industry and the very mild, lukewarm response by the majority of Western governments, may create a dangerous precedence; that many small "oil countries" could follow suit, which may endanger even more the already explosive political situation in the world at large. He advocates the worldwide standardization of multinational oil companies as a remedy and the only solution, as according to him the oil industry demands investments on a scale that the governments of small countries (such as Mexico) simply cannot provide. He also resorts to an argument that he has used and will use several times in this book, especially when discussing agriculture: "The profits accruing to private individuals are a cheap price to pay for coherence and stability"¹⁵. This argument, implying the superiority of competitive capitalism over socialism, would perhaps look too crude and obtuse today but both writers' and readers' attitudes were so much different in the 1930s.

Waugh squeezed into this chapter a lengthy apology on the achievements in Mexico of Wheatman Pearson (later Viscount Cowdray), father of Waugh's sponsor who was the founder of the Mexican Eagle Company. Waugh admired his endurance, his ability to withstand adverse conditions for long periods of time, his courage in investing enormous sums of money in a very risky business venture, and his ability to fight against numerous American companies. Waugh perceived Pearson's final success as being the result of his personal characteristics which enabled him to carry out various operations on a large scale. The narrator's aim is also to debunk the popular myth, exploited in numerous films from this period of destitute heroines striking oil fortunes on

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

their mortgaged farms and living happily ever after. Waugh is at pains to make his story just as exciting. His apology of Wheatman Pearson is inserted into the chapter as an answer to accusations that foreign oil companies were established in Mexico in a piratical fashion and it serves a twofold purpose: fulfilling his financial commitments to the Cawdray family and being a key argument in his anti-nationalization campaign. The arguments and accusations that foreign oil companies are bribing officials and financing a rebellion are not answered in a straightforward way. Instead, Waugh tries to prove that it was indispensable and customary for the foreign companies, if they were to remain in business, to pay “irregular levies” to political bosses as well as to succumb to the blackmail of revolutionary generals. In this way the conduct of these companies is viewed as practical and justifiable in conditions that are described as far from being “normal”. This is a very different stance from the one that could be found in *Waugh in Abyssinia*, where the multinational companies were straightforwardly rebuffed for obstructing the progress of Roman eagles.

A long discussion on the Communist dominated trade unions follows. The workers' living conditions and their requests are put by Waugh in this way: workers in the oil industry were much better paid than any other group of workers in Mexico (this is supported by lots of data) and foreign companies cared much more about their comfort than could possibly have been expected. Having described the workers' complaints, Waugh wrote a paragraph which presented the nature of these claims as stemming from the very nature of man, rather than being entirely specific to Mexican oil workers. This paragraph is frequently quoted, in contexts far more general than the question of oil workers' living standards; which was clearly close to the manner in Waugh wanted it to be read:

Man is by nature an exile, haunted, even at the height of his prosperity by nostalgia for Eden, individually and collectively he is always in search of an oppressor who will take responsibility for his ills. The Treaty of Versailles, Sanctions, Jews, Bolsheviks, Bankers, the Colour Bar – anything will do as long as he can focus on it his sense of grievance and convince himself that his inadequacy is due

to some exterior cause. It requires neither great oratory nor astute conspiracy to inflame a group with a sense of persecution; a hint is enough; and once a grievance is aroused there is no place for figures and arguments.¹⁶

The strikers' demands are presented by Waugh as preposterous and thoroughly impossible to fulfil. The list of demands, containing 164 points (he discusses those he considers particularly outrageous, e.g. a privilege of a three-day leave of absence on full pay any worker can ask for whenever he chooses to do so) was compiled, according to Waugh, in order to stir unrest and give a pretext for nationalization; a process he considers to be theft on a grand scale, a robbery under the makeshift, ideologically biased and pragmatically changeable law.

Waugh must have spent a lot of time over various official documents and, undoubtedly, over those provided by Clive Pearson. The nature of the problems could not have been very exciting to him, yet he retains his professional attitude throughout, trying to enlighten the discourse with irony and parody, executed mostly by reducing his opponents' ideas *ad absurdum*. In fact, he tries really hard to prevent the reader from skipping forty pages of this chapter; pages that seem to be crucial for him from the point of view of his obligations to Clive Pearson. It is perhaps an open question to what extent he succeeded; anyway his own censorship performed in *When the Going Was Good*, and the fact that the editors of the Penguin Travel Library republished all of Waugh's travel books but *Robbery Under Law*, is not accidental; chapters like "Oil" have very little in common with travel book atmosphere. It is paradoxical that Waugh's early travel books are almost totally devoid of the argumentative or descriptive paragraphs so typical of the 1930s travel accounts of writers like Huxley, Greene or Auden, and then in *Robbery Under Law* we are faced with the other extreme: travel is reduced to a pretext for ideological discourse, as it was in Sir Walter Citrine's *I Search for Truth in Russia*. Both books, although the former was written by a "travelling writer" and the latter by a "writing traveller",

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 118-9.

may serve as prime examples of travel literature distorted and degenerated by political and ideological issues.

The title of the next chapter, “The Good Neighbour”, turns out to be ironical after one has read its content. Waugh deals in it with the relations between the U.S.A. and Mexico, and he has borrowed the title from the term “Good Neighbor Policy”, as the U.S. government officially named its attitude towards Mexico throughout the 1920s and the 1930s. Waugh considered this policy to be hypocritical, ineffective and harmful for everybody, Mexicans included. At the beginning he gives a historical outline in which he consistently tries to prove the superiority (mostly in terms of antiquity) of the Spanish culture in Mexico over the Protestant-Puritan culture north of the border, selecting examples from architecture, education, literature and science. Basically, he sees the moment when Mexico became an independent country as the beginning of its decline, mostly due to the fact that the various connections with Spain and its culture were severed. The nineteenth century is perceived by him as a period of numerous lost opportunities on the side of the U.S.A. to “swallow” the whole of Mexico, rather than just California and Texas. Even though he has little sympathy for U.S. achievements, he would clearly prefer Mexico to be one more state of the U.S.A. Anyway, he predicts that Mexico will become part of the U.S.A. in the course of the next 100 years. Waugh once more extols President Diaz for bringing prosperity to Mexico by inviting foreign capital and for a cunning play of European interests against those of the U.S.. But on the other hand he sees the Diaz era as the beginning of “a disastrous epoch of American interference on humanitarian grounds”¹⁷, interference that started in the 1870s and has continued till the moment Waugh was writing his book. President Wilson's statement that he was going to teach the South American republics to elect good men as their presidents is mocked by Waugh, who was convinced that those “good men”, at least in the case of Mexico, were often worse bandits than their opponents. Later Waugh describes in detail an ignoble role that an American ambassador played in the coup that overthrew and killed

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

President Madero and the ambassador's wholehearted support for the new regime of Huerta, far more cruel and bloody, according to Waugh. In general, the U.S. policy of this period is seen as incompetent, incoherent, ignorant and inefficient. But the worst was yet to come with the "Good Neighbor Policy". Waugh gets really indignant with what he perceives as the hypocritical and short sighted treatment of the Mexican socialist, Marxist regime. He states that the subsequent American ambassadors in Mexico have maintained "an attitude of imperturbable urbanity" throughout a decade in Mexican history characterized by the very cruel persecution of the Catholic Church, the rise in power of Marxist trade unions, the collapse of agriculture and communications, the devaluation of the currency and, last but not least, the "sensational theft" of European and American interests, i.e. nationalization of oil industry. Waugh strongly attacks the lenient stance of the U.S. government on this issue, the fact that it has not supported the British government's protests and has maintained friendly relations with Mexico throughout the crisis. The role of the American Ambassador is presented as detrimental to American and European interests, Mexicans use him as a puppet in their skilful propaganda: "[s]aved from embarrassment by his ignorance of Spanish, he has sat smiling in platforms where Marxists principles have been preached and applauded; he has let his name be quoted as a supporter of the regime."¹⁸

Yet, it is not only the U.S. government and its ambassadors that receive the brunt of Waugh's critique. He also accuses some American political lobbies that are interested in the marketing of expropriated oil, and U.S. trade unionists agitating Mexicans against "fascists-capitalists" in their own country. The activities of the latter are shown as particularly harmful because, as Waugh puts it, the impression is created that the American trade unions would support (with a general strike in the U.S.A., if necessary) the Marxist policies of Mexican trade unions, which Waugh considers to be totally unlikely. Thus the Congress Against War and Fascism staged by the Cardenas' government in 1938 is presented in

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

Robbery Under Law as a propagandist stunt to which gullible American trade unionists and European socialists lend their names.

This chapter ends on an ironic note: the “innocent” American ambassadors and trade unionists may have inadvertently helped the disappearance of independent Mexico from the maps, thus becoming founders to an imperial expansion of the U.S.A. they have not even thought of. “Once more, at a crucial moment in Mexican history, when a choice was imminent between further violent experiment and a return to saner counsels, representatives from the United States have lent their influence to the disorderly side”¹⁹. This final sentence is a good summary of Waugh's attitude and the way he organizes his arguments in “The Good Neighbour”.

Chapter Six, “Plan Sexenal” is about the Six Year Plan Exhibition staged as a show of achievements by Cardenas' government in Mexico City. Waugh visited the Exhibition and then described it meticulously. He makes a comment on the title of the exhibition – “Sexenal”, suggesting that many tourists have gone to see it expecting something connected with sex or sexual education rather than a six year plan; yet at the same time he uses the same trick as the exhibition's organizers: he leaves “Sexenal” in the title of his chapter. The general point that can be drawn from this chapter is that the harder the propagandists try to accentuate the achievements of the government, the more its failure becomes obvious. While writing about Mexico's economic and social situation he notes: “It is not surprising that the results have been disastrous, but it is surprising that so much failure should be apparent in the Exhibition”²⁰.

The Exhibition is described as being frequented by schoolchildren, trade union delegates and foreigners lured by the word “Sexenal”, as well as by “earnest students of the Left Book Club kind, who abroad will stare at a cot or a blackboard if they have been told they represent proletarian progress”²¹. This is just one of several ironic remarks about

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 168-9.

British socialists. Waugh stresses the gullibility of their opinions and their bias in their perception of events in countries like Spain or Mexico. But Waugh's attention is focused in this chapter on specific spheres of the Mexican economy and its social life: Industry, Education, Agriculture. While describing them section by section, as he saw them at the Exhibition, he generalizes and tries to give an overall picture of the total decay and disintegration of the entire country. He also points out the inefficient attempts of the organizers to convince the audience that it is not so. Waugh, the satirist, assumes a flippant tone while, for example, he describes an incident when he, after careful examination, notices that the carpentry tools (Waugh was a competent carpenter and at one stage of his career in the late 1920s even contemplated becoming a professional artistic carpenter) exhibited there all bear the mark: "Made in the U.S.A.". He reports with relish the awkward attempts of janitors to cover up the blunder. Waugh turns detective and finds eight hundred of the exhibits to have been manufactured abroad, which enables him to pronounce that Mexico is totally dependent on foreign imports.

The part of the Exhibition devoted to the oil industry serves as an opportunity to present further arguments about "robbery under law", especially as a reply to the accusations that foreign oil companies neglected to provide workers with decent living conditions. Though Waugh remarks that it is outmoded and obnoxious to insist that the poor prefer to live in slums, it is exactly this point that he is making, a point supported by the study on the mentality of a Mexican peon and an example from Orizaba. The overall goal is the same as in the preceding chapters: to present the beneficial influence the foreign oil companies had on the Mexican economy and the fact that General Cardenas' "theft" was a desperate measure which in the long run would bring disaster to Mexico.

Education and agriculture are two other parts of the exhibition described and commented on by Waugh with a lot of fervour mostly, I think, because of the ideological issues involved. His purpose seems to be twofold: to show the mess into which Cardenas' policy has led the country and, on a more general level, to use the Mexican example as an

“object lesson” to demonstrate the superiority of capitalism. In the case of education his generalizations reach a different, more personal level. His utter dislike of schools, the curricula and teachers (he worked as a teacher for a year in 1928), which can be traced as far back as *Decline and Fall*, finds full vent in this chapter, especially as he saw education in Mexico to be totally subjected to the ideological demands of the ruling party. Waugh draws an analogy between a totalitarian state and school, claiming that both reduce complex problems to simple terms and try to provoke enthusiasm of any kind in “dull minds”. The very nature of the teachers' work is said to incline the mind to bigotry, and this, according to Waugh, is even more true in totalitarian countries, where teachers become doctrinaire, most of them willingly:

[...] the longing to believe that he is making some mark in the world, preparing a new generation for a new order, not just earning a meagre wage by forcing into unwilling heads facts that will soon be forgotten; the ever present anxiety about keeping order predisposing the mind to a system of absolute decrees, secret police and summary executions – all these considerations, no doubt, contribute to make school masters and mistresses a subversive race.²²

The Mexican system of education is described as similar to that of Nazi Germany. A school teacher is an agent of propaganda as well as a spy on his fellow countrymen. Waugh laments the prohibition of religion in schools, which become “Marxist factories in microcosm”. He discovers with relish that even the ridiculous strike laws operate in schools: a children's committee can announce strikes because of difficult exams. The hypocrisy of the exhibition organizers is once again accentuated when the model school for girls, with all the amenities, free food and clothing, which is presented at the Exhibition as one of the key achievements of state education, turns out to be, after Waugh's thorough investigation, a privately funded religious school persecuted by the authorities. Such incidents provide ample material for Waugh's witty style. Thus he perceives the Hall of Agriculture as a case not of propaganda, but of absolute falsehood. He makes his position clear: the

²² *Ibid.*, p. 189.

mass confiscations of privately owned land have resulted in an almost total collapse of food production and all the complicated figures presented at the Exhibition cannot alter this. It is true that some of the rich land owners used to lead extravagant lives in Biarritz, but this is a small price to pay for stability and prosperity. The hacienda owners are depicted as efficient farmers, patriarchal and fatherly, bringing their peons and Indians presents from their European trips. While confiscations, carried out on ideological grounds, lead to land lying waste and machinery getting rusty. A peon's mentality and his lack of funds prevents any efficient form of agriculture. In the paragraphs on agriculture Waugh shows a remarkable propagandist skill, carefully blending general statements with harrowing tales of dispossessed *hacendos*, the ill will of local party bosses and numerous examples of a wasteland created in what once was a fertile land. He goes as far back in history as Aztec dominance in order to compare various systems of land ownership so that he can pronounce the Spanish colonial system to be the best; at any rate better and more humane than its British equivalent. Having exposed all the weaknesses of Cardenas' policy, Waugh presents his own plan to save Mexican agriculture. He proposes that individual hacienda owners should remain the backbone of the system, that drainage and irrigation of land should be performed in the way Italians have been doing it in North Africa, that taxes should be established for absentee landlords and also some other minor improvements.

At this point in history Evelyn Waugh sees the Catholic church in Mexico as far more important for the country than oil, the economy, or any other issue. He sees the Catholic Church as the only force capable of unifying the divided nation and leading it out of the cauldron it has been driven into by agnostic liberals in the 19-th century and Marxists atheists in the 20-th century. Waugh does not openly declare himself a Catholic; in fact he chooses his narration to remain uninvolved while dealing with the issues discussed, presumably to give his arguments more "objective" power; to make them appear as the only natural, reasonable, commonsense attitude to the whole complex problem. His method is to select some of the anti-church arguments and carefully avoid others, even if they were more obvious and well known at that time. For example, he never explicitly retorts to a key accusation of the anti-Church camp that the Church actively sup-

ported the “ancien régime” in Mexico with all its social injustices. Instead, he exposes his own theory that the persecution of the Church had, at its core, greed and avarice; that it was an ordinary theft, albeit on the grand scale, and all the ideologies, liberal, socialist or Marxist, were mostly a cover-up for it. Those anti-Church accusations he selects are minimized through ridicule or proved to be untrue and arising from the ill-will of their exponents; he admits that there is a “nucleus of truth” in some of them, but for example while dealing with the arguments that priests frequently broke the vows of celibacy he restricts the phenomenon to rural districts and then gives numerous explanations or excuses for this: lack of Episcopal control through difficulties in communication, the climate predisposing priests to indulgence (sic !), the highly coveted position of priest's mistress in these communities, lack of proper theological education and the fact that many of the priests were attracted to the Church by its powerful position so “[...] it was humanly speaking inevitable that there should be scandals. It's either priggish or malicious to make more of them than this”²³. For Waugh, to say that the Church was rich means that it was loved and trusted, and in his opinion only the rich Church can afford to be generous, and therefore the accusation that priests ask stiff prices for their services from the poor should be seen as groundless. They simply cannot afford to be generous. Moreover, so goes this line of thought; most priests are of peasant origin and they have bargaining in their blood, and, on top of this, peasants would feel offended and degraded if they were robbed of a chance to negotiate the price of services. In a recapitulation Waugh states that the Church committed disgraces but that every disgrace can be matched with “a dozen proud achievements”. In general it seems that Waugh is more convincing and stylistically brilliant on the offensive.

The key point for Waugh is the universal character of the Catholic Church, the fact that it contains, with no contradictions, the sophisticated minds of people like Sir Thomas More as well as simple Mexican Indians. He discusses the variety of its influences: Greek philosophy, Jewish theology, Roman political organization, but points out that what matters is not the intellectual acceptance of particular historical events

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 216.

but the belief that they meant “the expression in humanly intelligible form of truth beyond comprehension”²⁴. Throughout the chapter Waugh consistently returns to the distinction (clear cut for him) between the supernatural and the natural. He avoids straightforward theological argumentation and concentrates more on the sociological influence of the supernatural on men in general and Mexican *peons* in particular.

The history of the triumphs of the Catholic Church in Mexico is viewed through the events in Guadalupe in 1531 and their impact on the character and further development of religion in Mexico. The story of the Holy picture of Our Lady with an Indian face that hangs in the church in Guadalupe allows Waugh to express his feelings, emotions and intellectual convictions about the role of miracles in the Catholic Church. His attitude is that miracles happen, although very rarely (usually, explains Waugh, at moments historically crucial for the Church), and that the hierarchy of the Catholic Church checks every miracle very thoroughly, so there is no room or reason not to believe in them. Yet, although the very nature of miracles is supernatural, Waugh thinks that many things about them can be explained in a perfectly “natural” way and this is what he is attempting with the Guadalupe painting, giving rational arguments for its authenticity and its divine origins. Whereas in the cases where he cannot find any, as in the case of the argument that the painting shows features characteristic of the 16th century school, he simply says “and why not” and reverts to faith as a final argument. The same curiously “natural”, almost naturalistic attitude to miracles can be traced in *Helena*, written many years later. There we have the same blend of Christianity treated as a very down-to-earth religion, devoid of any mystical elements; where truth is presented not entirely through revelation but mostly through reason and intellectual conviction, but where the religion allows, at the same time, miracles to happen.

Waugh sees the miracle in Guadalupe as a focal point in the history of the Mexican church at two levels. He praises the courage and faith

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 221.

of Spanish bishops who accepted a painting of Our Lady with an Indian face as a genuine miracle, although the very idea must have been very blasphemous to them as it had to alter the whole conception of the Church and put Indians on an equal footing with Spaniards. Guadalupe is depicted as the holiest place for Indians; a shrine of massive pilgrimages, an embodiment of their simple faith that requires tangible proofs rather than theological arguments. And for Waugh himself, Guadalupe is the only place in Mexico protected from the infernal noise. The whole chapter demonstrates the ways in which the Catholic faith, in Waugh's view, combines the rational with the miraculous. But it also serves to prove the point that only the Catholic Church can give Mexico the unity necessary to overcome the immense difficulties facing the country.

“The Straight Fight” is first and foremost about the persecutions of the Catholic Church in Mexico. The glory and achievements of the Church are presented in order to contrast them with the cruelty, senselessness and uselessness of the persecution. As I have mentioned earlier, Waugh considers greed to be its underlying reason. He depicts the whole history of the persecutions which did not start with the communists but went back to President Juarez in the 19-th century. Waugh is very careful to stress the difference between the mild character of the old, agnostic forms of persecution with the sheer brutality and scale of anti-Church activities in the 1920s and 1930s. He points out that the history of the persecution, although often told, received little attention in Europe, and writes about it at some length. His underlying intention seems to be an attempt to show that, paradoxically, the persecutions have not weakened the Church. On the contrary, as the Church was forced to hide in catacombs, it revived the spirit of the early Christians persecuted in the Roman Empire. The greater the brutality of the oppressors, the more martyrs for the Church. And although he admits that the situation in 1938 is not as drastic as a few years earlier and some “incurious tourists” might even get the impression (artificial and wrong according to Waugh) that it is “normal”, in fact, he insists, it is far from that. The Church has no legal status, priests have no civil rights, there are no seminaries. Waugh argues that for the Church to

exist it must have its property, its ordained priests, and the ability to teach children and that these conditions have not been fulfilled in Mexico. His final call is for the return of the former order, the former role of the Church, which, according to him, is the only way to achieve “fundamental identity” which may lead to a prosperous, peaceful country. This time, unlike in most of the other chapters, he ends on a much more subdued, quieter tone. The climax of pathos has already been reached earlier, in the descriptions of the execution of Father Pro, the martyr of the Catholic Church.

In the last chapter, “Independence”, Waugh discusses the effects the Mexican War of Independence has had on the country's history. He points out the use, or rather abuse, by revolutionaries of the religious convictions of the people and religious symbols (the Madonna of Guadalupe). The celebrations of Independence Day taking place in Mexico City at the time of Waugh's stay there provide him with a chance to present President Cardenas as a little, swarthy, funny man who has no political convictions but is as an excellent tactician. Waugh, once again, returns to the question of oil nationalization and claims that for Cardenas a sudden, drastic change of policy on this issue would not mean the loss of face, but only a few executions, as his main goal is to stay in power and that Mexicans do not expect much from their leaders.

The political situation in Mexico spurs a lengthy essay on the rise of nationalisms in the 1930s, the epoch's obsession with the political frontier, and the demise of the liberal school of thought dating from the late 19th century. The school had advocated a system of the worldwide free exchange of goods and ideas, in which political divisions were to be relatively unimportant. Waugh complains that there is no diversity of opinions in the 1930s, one must stand either on the Left or Right, or be deemed insignificant. This seems to be Waugh's indirect reply to Leftist contempt for those described as “sitting on the fence”.

Having presented his version of the worldwide political situation, he concentrates on the manifold menaces looming over the future of Mexico. He warns of the dangers of a civil war and the chaos which

would arise if 50 000 “communists and criminals” interned in France on the capitulation of Republican Spain were to be sent to Mexico. Another danger he foresees is the German penetration into South America. And then follows an inspired essay on the possibility of Spanish Imperialism, which Waugh foresees as similar to German and Italian ones. It is difficult to assess if the narrator's enthusiasm and apparent relish spring from a genuinely sympathetic attitude to such a possibility, or if it is just the satisfaction of presenting an intellectual game of possibilities, a game that could be played thanks to the erudition and power of speculation of Evelyn Waugh. He admits that the Spain of 1938 is destroyed and divided, but so, he argues, was revolutionary France in the 1790s, Germany after Versailles, Italy before Mussolini. Falangists' imperial tendencies, their insistence on revival of the “Spanishness” and allusions to the Spain of Philip II are presented to show that Spain may follow its imperial tradition, which is presented as far more recent and strong than that of Italy or Germany.

The final threat presented is of a religious nature. The argument goes like this: The Nazis have already been able to stimulate a cult of pre-Christian deities, not unlike the one predicted by Lawrence in *The Plumed Serpent*. So, let us suppose that this happens to Mexico. Waugh pronounces Indians to be superstitious people, susceptible to such an influence. The superstitious nature of Indian religiosity, so carefully played down in the chapter “The Straight Fight”, where they are shown as fervent, even if simple and unsophisticated Catholics, here is used to spur Waugh's argument. The pre-Christian elements of their faith were also shown to be not very different in character from pagan elements in European Christianity (here and there, claims Waugh, churches were built on the sites of old temples). In “The Independence” the argument goes in exactly the opposite direction.

The chapter ends with a grandiose comparison of Mexico's position towards Europe to that which Africa had to the Romans and Mexico as an “object lesson”. The vision is consistent with Waugh's general tendency in *Robbery Under Law* to treat civilization as a city under siege, where all energy should be spent on keeping the barbarians away.

The Romans sent their great men to Africa; they went there and became despots and voluptuaries; they sent their ideologies and the Africans turned them into enigmas and paradoxes; the precise statements of Roman law and faith became equivocal in the African mirage, and when the barbarians came, Africa was the first to go; her canals silted up, her buildings fell, the sand swept in from the desert over her fields.²⁵

The postscript, entitled "The Object and the Lesson", contains a recapitulation of Waugh's views about Mexico's economic and political situation, as well as his predictions for its future. He warns his readers that their lack of knowledge and information on Mexico does not mean that it cannot become a centre of international crisis, a spark to start the new World War. Then the warning becomes more general. It is not only Mexico that is under threat; its decay is seen as a symptom of the beginning of the decay of the whole civilization. The complacency of the majority believing that it takes a long time for a civilization to decline and fall is presented as a totally unfounded and naive example of wishful thinking. European civilization will not continue out of sheer inertia and the constant effort of everybody is needed to keep the jungle at bay. European civilization, numerous aspects of which he ridiculed and criticized in his early work, especially in *Decline and Fall* and in *Black Mischief*, becomes a City, not unlike the City of God envisaged in *A Handful of Dust*. Richard Johnstone in *The Novelists of the Nineteen Thirties* saw this as a common phenomenon in the writers of Waugh's generation: "[n]ot merely English, but public school, Oxbridge. vintage 1905 or thereabouts. Far from dissociating themselves from their upbringing, these writers displayed an exaggerated consciousness of origins, which led in the thirties to a central and crucial paradox; the recognition of the inadequacy in the modern world of values inherited from another age, was coupled with an instinctive faith in these values the values, in short, of the English gentleman"²⁶. And when these values appeared to be seriously threatened, the irony of Waugh's early novels is often substituted by pathos, flippancy by seriousness. Waugh's warning goes even further. The echo of his conserva-

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 272.

²⁶ Johnstone, *The Will to Believe*, p. 133.

tive credo from the introduction returns in a powerful passage in which he pronounces that: “[b]arbarism is never defeated, given propitious circumstances, men and women who seem quite orderly, will commit every conceivable atrocity”²⁷. This may be and has been read as a call to abandon absolute freedom as ultimately sterile, and to impose on oneself restrictions, both in life and in literature, both religious and artistic so as to be able to combat anarchy. For Waugh this meant the return to the values of Western Christianity, and more specifically to Catholic ones. This is certainly a major break with the views explicitly stated in *Waugh in Abyssinia*, where France, Britain and the United States were scolded for hampering the progress of Mussolini's armies in Africa carrying the Roman eagles. The polarity, the clearly cut division: Western civilization versus barbarism, by which he meant both Fascist Germany and the Communist Soviet Union, will reappear in the first volume of his war trilogy, *The Sword of Honour*:

He expected his country to go to war in a panic, for the wrong reasons of for no reasons at all, with the wrong allies, in pitiful weakness. But now, splendidly, everything has become clear. The enemy at last was plain in view, huge and hateful, all disguises cast off. It was the Modern Age in arms. Whatever the outcome there was a place for him in that battle.²⁸

Guy Crouchback, the main protagonist of the trilogy, went to the war as to a crusade. *Robbery Under Law* is a book warning that such a crusade was imminent in 1938 and that it could have begun in or because of Mexico. Another British Catholic writer who went to Mexico in the late 1930s and who wrote a travel book about his experiences is Graham Greene. His book, *The Lawless Roads*, is mentioned several times in *Robbery Under Law* and receives high praise. It seems that Mexico was for both of them what Spain had been for the writers of Leftist orientation: “a testing ground for the survival of their chosen belief”²⁹. Both Greene and Waugh were converts, and both viewed the Catholic Church and Catholicism in Mexico as something at the same time simi-

²⁷ Waugh, *Robber Under Law*, p. 279.

²⁸ Evelyn Waugh, *Men at Arms* (Harmondsworth, 1971), p. 12.

²⁹ Johnstone, *The Will to Believe*, p. 95.

lar but also distinctly different from the Church they had chosen intellectually and emotionally in their late twenties. They show lots of sympathy and empathy for the sufferings of the Church and its subjects, but on the other hand they continue to look at it from without, as if they had been members of a different branch of the same club or organization. Whereas for Waugh the revolution in Mexico meant chaos, decline and anarchy, Greene felt a distinct sympathy for the revolutionaries and their cause. This can be perceived in *The Lawless Roads* and in the novel that was another literary outcome of his Mexican trip, *The Power and the Glory*, a novel often considered to be one of his major artistic achievements. Waugh's *Robbery Under Law* was not followed by a "Mexican" novel. If it had been, then it would have probably been a hagiography of Father Pro or a wild satire on the revolution. *The Lawless Road* is a much more traditional travel book, as Greene depicted in it his intensive travels in the remote provinces of Mexico.

Robbery Under Law stands on its own in Waugh's writings; it was not followed by any short stories or novels. In fact, the only mark in Waugh's fiction of his Mexican trip was a short account of Charles Ryder's, the narrator's of *Brideshead Revisited* (1945), from his journey to South America. Also, at the time he was in Mexico he did not keep his diary; the hiatus lasted from 10 January 1938 till 28 January 1939. As I have mentioned earlier, Waugh omitted any excerpts of *Robbery Under Law* in *When the Going Was Good*, and the book has not been republished since 1939. Nowadays it is remembered mostly for the quotations about man being an exile on earth and about all of us being potential recruits for anarchy.

But at the time of its publications it received a considerable number of reviews and most of them were favourable. Only Harold Nicholson in the *Daily Telegraph* called it a dull book and Waugh's account of the oil controversy as jejune. "Anger", he wrote, "unless it be completely controlled makes a dull book. Mr. Waugh compresses his lips so tightly that he becomes almost inaudible"³⁰. Other reviewers, although most of them held different political views and were bewildered by his

³⁰ Stannard, ed., *Evelyn Waugh*, p. 203.

religious fervour, praised the book for its style, language and power of arguments and thus A.W.J. in the *Manchester Guardian* wrote: "[h]is book is admirably written, and few could have set out more able this view of Mexico"³¹. R.L. Martin in the *New York Times Book Review* remarked: "Evelyn Waugh warns the reader that he went to Mexico a conservative and came away a conservative. Such candour from a writer on Mexico is exceptional. When it is combined with a lively critical faculty and superior skill in handling the English language, you have something new in political travelogues"³². Whereas, Professor Murray Davis, the most distinguished of Waughians, wrote many years later in "The Rhetoric of Mexican Travel": "Waugh's opinion can often annoy us, but his powers of style and observation sometimes undercuts these opinions to create a vision almost independent of the autobiographical viewpoint"³³.

Waugh would have certainly been delighted by such opinions. He could not have expected his reviewers to agree with him in his political assessment or Catholic viewpoint, but the praises about style and the way in which he handled his arguments, proved the point he was making both at the beginning of *Robbery Under Law* and in *Waugh in Abyssinia* that he was a truly professional writer and that although he was writing for money, he could not have been writing better for more money.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 204.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 205.

³³ Robert Murray Davis, "The Rhetoric of Mexican Travel: Greene and Waugh", *Renaissance*, Autumn 1985, p. 168.

A Tourist in Africa

Twenty-one years separate the publication of *Robbery Under Law* and *A Tourist in Africa*, Waugh's next and last travel book. In 1945, while writing a preface to *When the Going Was Good*, a selection of which he then thought to be the best fragments of his 1930s travel books, Waugh predicted: "My own travelling days are over, and I do not expect to see many travel books in the near future"¹. He was right in the second of his claims; there was not much interest in travelling and travel books in the era of displaced persons. But it turned out that, despite the fact that the "going was no longer good", he travelled quite a lot in the years to come, even if not in such an arduous way and not to such exotic places as in the 1930s. These travels stimulated him in a literary sense but the chain of diary entry – press article – travel book – short story – novel, so routine for him before the war, was not repeated. This may be partly due to the nature of his journeys – Waugh was much more a "tourist" or a "visiting writer" than a traveller, and partly to the fact that travel books in the late 1940s and the early 1950s were not in vogue as they were before 1939.

Waugh's visit to the Pax Romana Congress that was held in June 1946 in Spain resulted in a novella entitled *Scott-King's Modern Europe* (1947), in which his satire is directed against the impossibility of travelling freely in a post-war Europe in which nobody writes, reads or needs travel books. His journey to the USA and Hollywood to discuss the film version of *Brideshead Revisited* gave rise to the famous novella *The Loved One*, published in 1948. Characteristically enough, out of several pages of his diary describing his stay in the USA, everything that concerns the main plot and atmosphere of *The Loved One* is envisaged in just one sentence: "I found a deep mine of literary gold in the cemetery of Forest Lawn and

¹ Waugh, *When the Going Was Good*, p. 9.

the work of the morticians and intend to get to work immediately on a novelette staged there”². In the second half of January 1954 Waugh left England on the sea voyage to Ceylon (to get some rest and, as usual at this time of the year to escape winter in Britain). The hallucinations he had on this trip were exploited literally in *The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold*, published three years later. But none of these trips resulted in a travel book.

In January 1960 Waugh embarked on a ship bound for East Africa, and he returned to Southampton in April. In the summer of 1960 he wrote the last of his travel books, *A Tourist in Africa*, which was published the same year. This book, almost forgotten by critics, is interesting not only because of the similarities and differences with those written in the 1930s. By using the word “tourist” in the title, or to be more exact, by calling himself “a tourist”, Waugh indirectly and somewhat ironically admitted what he must have perceived as a kind of resignation and/or defeat. “Tourist” and “tourism” are words belonging to the post-war world Waugh so strongly despised; the world of mass plane travels, package tours, American sightseers and big hotels, which already lurked in the 1930s, but which became widespread and popular with the post war economic boom and the mood of egalitarianism, a mood that made travellers obsolete. Waugh admits that the fact that he became a mere “tourist” cannot be blamed entirely on the world outside, on politics and tourism. At the age of 55 he knew that he was: “too old for the jungle, too young for the beaches”³. He gave up the alternative of going to Jamaica, wincing mentally at the possibility of meeting there people older, uglier and richer than he. But on the other hand, the easy, sybaritic life of a country squire, a copious diet and lack of physical exercise resulted in a situation when a two-mile walk was too strenuous exercise for him, and it is very difficult to be a “traveller” in such circumstances.

Yet, even despite this change from a “traveller” to a “tourist”, some of the overt motifs of his going abroad remain the same; he

² Waugh, *The Diaries of Evelyn Waugh*, p. 675.

³ Evelyn Waugh, *A Tourist in Africa* (London, 1985), p. 7.

states that he simply cannot bear winter in England. "Even when I thought I enjoyed fox hunting my enthusiasm waned by Christmas. I have endured few Februaries in England since I became self-supporting"⁴. This stirs in him the memories of cold, uncomfortable war winters and of his resolve to fight not for what politicians called the "Freedom from Fear" and "Freedom from Religion" but for "Freedom to Travel".

Although in 1960 Waugh's financial situation was far more secure and comfortable than in 1930s, he intended to use the same old method of writing to pay for his travelling expenses. He had ceased to keep a regular diary as far back as 1956 and it was only in October 1960 that he resumed it in the form of loose, irregular notes. In *A Tourist in Africa* he admits, however, that while writing this book in the summer of 1960 he used the notes that he had made during his trip to Africa. These notes were not inserted in the manuscript which Michael Davie used while editing *The Diaries of Evelyn Waugh*.

The fact that *A Tourist in Africa* was first published as a series of articles for the *Spectator* may have had some effect on the overall structure of the book. It is unclear if Waugh's original intention was to write a travel book that could be serialized in a magazine or vice versa. The second hypothesis is supported by the "diary type" method of narration, which he had never used in his travel books. It is true that he also divided the book into seven chapters (matching the *Spectator's* instalments). The diary proper starts in the second chapter, entitled "Voyage" (the first one, "Departure", dealt with Waugh's preparations for the journey and his sightseeing tour of Genoa with his friend), on 31 January, when he boarded the "Rhodesian Castle" bound for Dar-es-Salaam, and runs quite regularly till 10 April 1960, when he disembarked in Southampton. So his actual stay in Africa lasted just five weeks (ships may be the most comfortable means of travel but certainly not the fastest). It seems that this "diary convention" suits the style of the mature Waugh; long, argumentative and discursive essays, which were never his forte, are not to be expected in the comparatively short

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

entries. Compact, crisp, sometimes slightly pompous, often acerbic comments suit it better.

The term “travel book” in *A Tourist in Africa* is used only “historically”, in the instances when Waugh quotes some fragments from *Labels* or *Remote People*. There is none of the thirties' preoccupation with the nature and theoretical aspects of travel books. This may be due to the fact that Waugh, who treated travel books as a very inferior, unimportant genre, was not inclined to write about them implicitly, when the tide of this kind of literature was at its lowest – the genre's revival and the “Penguin Travel Library” were to come a few years later.

While comparing *A Tourist in Africa* with Waugh's earlier travel books it seems clear that here he was prepared to disclose some personal information about himself, that is about his narrator. In the 1930s he carefully guarded his secrets and concentrated solely on creating an image of a travelling dandy or an experienced traveller. Here we also have a strong image of the narrator: an elderly, infirm, squire of ritzy tastes, but we can also learn something of him as a person or as a writer. For example, when he mentions the mermaids that he saw in his hallucinations in 1954, or when he admits that his friend he met in Genoa was the same person that he had more than once attempted to portray in his novels as “Mrs. Stitch”. However, in comparison with Waugh's 1950s diary it is clear that he avoided in *A Tourist in Africa* the topics that were most vital for him; that is his family and the changes in the Catholic Church that were taking place at the time.

It was in *Labels* that Waugh wrote a long eulogy of the “Stella Polaris”, a Norwegian ship on which he cruised around the Mediterranean. Its frankness may be debated as he had been given a free ticket in exchange for favourable publicity. There can be no such doubt about the sincerity of his admiration of ships and abhorrence of planes pervading *A Tourist in Africa*. In 1959 Waugh flew to Africa on a short visit to Lady Acton, who was in possession of some documents concerning Ronald Knox, whose biography Waugh was writing at the time. This trip is described in *A Tourist in Africa* solely because of the unpleasant impressions of the flight:

I had gone to Rhodesia first class. Perhaps we were objects of envy in our expensive quarters, but we had little compassion to spare for the second class victims forward. We had our own bitter troubles. It was impossible to sleep and very difficult to get to the lavatory. After dark it was a strain to read by the little spot lights. All of us, rich and poor alike, were periodically turned out to wait for refuelling at airports which ingeniously contrived the utmost restlessness.⁵

In 1960 his resolution not to use airplanes was broken more than once, apparently because the roads were impassable, and he flew freely between African cities. Yet, his feelings about planes were equally hostile. He professes his preference for the shabbiest and most battered of ships over the airplanes “which capriciously develop what the engineers prettily dub ‘metal fatigue’ and incinerate the occupants”. In the 1930s, when airplanes had been by far less comfortable, more dangerous and slower, Waugh used them with apparent relish. It is feasible that his later dislike of them stemmed from the fact that in the 1950s they became far too egalitarian for his tastes.

Judging from Waugh's earlier works (especially *Brideshead Revisited*) and from his political views one could expect *A Tourist in Africa* to be soaked with nostalgia for the falling British Empire and for the times when the going was good. This, however, is not so. Waugh adopts a stoical approach to the changes that he sees around him and tries to present his arguments in as reasonable a way as possible. At the beginning he vows not to deal with politics, but this (as was also the case with his 1930's travel books) proved impossible as “problems obtrude”. The year 1960 in Africa was the time of the highest intensity of the process of de-colonization, of independence declarations. In such circumstances Waugh felt unable to remain a mere tourist who takes his holidays not knowing or caring to know what is going on around him and why. He gets very critical of the views held, on one hand by the so-called European liberals, and on the other by conservative radicals. The efforts of the former group are presented as futile and often disastrous (for example a groundnut project in Tanganyika described at length).

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

On the other hand, racialism and its South African version, apartheid, are shown as both atrocious and “dotty”. He may no longer be an overt “cultural imperialist” as in *Remote People*, but still holds the view of the conquest of Africa in the 1870s by the Europeans as merely one more military action on the Continent were tribes had been constantly at war with one another and that Africans respect only strong conquerors. Cecil Rhodes is perceived not as a politician or an entrepreneur, but as a visionary, someone halfway between Hitler and religious mystics (according to him visionaries have to be celibate as married men care too much about their children, not posterity). Waugh observes the defeat of nineteenth century European liberalism but also of British imperialism. He sees the impracticality of parliamentary democracy in Africa but stops short of proposing any solutions.

“Happy Valley” and the British white settlers in Kenya with their way of life he admired so much in *Remote People* are not discussed at length in *A Tourist in Africa*. Instead we find a stoical remark: “[t]here was nothing in Kenya I knew to suggest that it enjoyed any immunity to change. Why should not this equatorial Arcadia, so lately and lightly civilized, go the way of Europe”⁶. In *A Tourist in Africa*, as in *Remote People*, he complains about the “socialist” policy of the British conservative government, hostile according to him to white settlers, and observes the deep gap between the government officials and the settlers, as well the contempt of the latter towards the former. His narrator is not overtly on the side of the settlers as was the case in *Remote People*. This may be due to the fact that in 1960 he was the guest of and was shown around by two young officials, Mr. R. and Mr. Newman, whereas in the 1930s he stayed mostly at rich settlers' houses.

Although *Labels* and *Remote People* are mentioned and even quoted from in *A Tourist in Africa*, this book can hardly be called a description of “travel in the footsteps of young Waugh”, both in the sense of the actual route and of nostalgia for the times “when the going was good”. Evelyn Waugh, as a “touring squire” was not prepared to show his sentiments, if he had them, for a “dandy traveller” Waugh. Strangely

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

enough, the only memory of Africa he wants to “remain intact” is that of Cape Town harbour during the war, which he saw on the way to the Middle East (the shorter route through the Mediterranean was impassable). “I remember the scene at night with the men returning to the ship, some drunk, some sober, all happy, laden, many of them, with great bunches of grapes like the illustrations in old Bibles of the scouts returning to the Israelites in the desert with the evidence of the Land of Promise flowing with milk and honey”⁷.

Travelling British writers in the 1930s were obsessed with borders and border crossing, particularly those in Europe. One of the reasons Waugh gave at that time for travelling to distant and exotic places was to escape the intricate pattern of European borders (the other was that “Europe could wait”). Borders, dumb officials, numerous forms to fill, various certificate of vaccinations and similar obstacles were in the 1930s one of his favourite themes for satirical descriptions. There is also an instance of this in *A Tourist in Africa*. From Ndola, where Waugh wanted to stay in transit overnight he reported: “I was required, among other things to inform the Federal authorities of the names, ages, sexes, dates and places of birth of children not accompanying me (six in my case), date and place of marriage. What European languages could I write? The oddest demand was to state “sex of wife”⁸. This form stimulates Waugh to write an imaginary dialogue between two imaginary statisticians debating over the name of Waugh's eldest son. Audebon or Anderson? (actually Auberon). They cannot decide whether to send the form to the Department of Epigraphy at Lusaka or to Salisbury.

Waugh's original claim of eschewing problems and of seeking only the diverting and the picturesque turned out to be impossible to fulfil (or it might have been made in a half-hearted way). The reader's impression that the book is politically biased may be partly due to the fact that it is relatively short (160 pages in comparison with the 230-300 pages of his earlier ones) and the overall balance seems to be disturbed. In *A Tourist in Africa* there are no essays on religion, Christians

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

missions in Africa or remarks about Waugh's own Catholicism. But the pages describing his visit to Father Groeber's "Satima Mission" stand clearly apart from the rest of the text, which is rather lukewarm and lacks the fervour and enthusiasm that is generally associated with travel writing. It is only the visit to "Satima Mission" in Rhodesia that inspires Waugh's otherwise suave but detached style. Waugh was clearly fascinated by Father Groeber's zeal and by his achievements. He admits to having visited the mission during his African trip in 1959, and to returning there a year later to show it to his travelling companions and to see the progress that had been made in the meantime.

Father Groeber studied architecture in Switzerland and the day after taking his degree went straight to the seminary and volunteered for the African mission. He designed and was supervising the erection of a mission complex consisting of a church, dormitories, schoolrooms, workshops, a refectory and a dispensary. Waugh writes with great admiration about the way Father Groeber trains boys from the Mashina tribe to carve sculptures for the church, about his system for the selection of the most artistically gifted ones, and about what he sees as "progressive" education in art. He describes the process during which boys are first taught to control their tools, then make abstract symmetrical patterns, then clay models, then ugly things ("to frighten your little brother") in order to reach the highest level: images of angels, saints, of Our Lady and Our Lord. Waugh perceives the carvings they produce as symbolic and didactic, in many respect similar to that of the European Middle Ages. And it seems that it is the ideal of a Medieval master craftsman (so highly praised by Waugh elsewhere) that he sees re-enacted in the heart of Africa in the year of turmoil – 1960. His narrative reaches the level of vision: "[f]or the industrious apprentice there are the skills of husbandry, the dignity of teaching, family love, or, highest aim, the priesthood; for the idle apprentice, gambling, drinking, dancing, witch-doctors and Mohammedanism"⁹. And the level of piety: "[q]uite soon there will be at Satima one of the most beautiful and original churches of the modern world. That is the aim of the builder

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

to make a church, not to found an Art School. The sculptors have been called into existence for the church, not the church for the sculptors”¹⁰. Waugh is worried about the future of the mission after Fr Groeber's death, about the dangers awaiting his sculptors in the outer world. He ends this inspired part with the wish that Father Groeber's achievements will be cherished “with pride and awe with which we in Europe survey the edifices of our Middle Ages”¹¹. It seems that Waugh has managed to avoid being doctrinaire and yet has drawn a clear and powerful eulogy of what he considered to be the most positive aspects of Christian missions in Africa.

“As happier men watch birds, I watch men. They are less attractive, but more various”¹². This statement, an aphorism, taken from the opening chapter of *A Tourist in Africa*, is probably the most frequently quoted piece of Waugh's prose. It is also supposed to indicate Waugh's main focus in the book. But similarly to his resolution of not writing about politics, this promise is also not kept. Apart from some attempts to portray his fellow passengers on board the “Rhodesian Castle”, the people in his book are as remote as those in *Remote People*. To extend his parallel a bit further; Waugh seems to be an amateur bird-watcher rather than a professional ornithologist as his interest centres only on certain external aspects. His interest in people is thus clearly connected with his talent for finding and describing things odd and bizarre, thing potentially literally useful for him. Father Groeber is the only character more fully portrayed in this book, even Mrs. Stitch, his friend and guide in Genoa is barely mentioned. The object of his watching is restricted to deduction and speculation about the strangers whom he does not intend to be acquainted with: fellow passengers, clerks, receptionists. He introduces a German “junker” settler mostly because of the curiously paradoxical military history of his family. Another bizarre character presented is a New York bishop whose main occupation is to crown himself “King of the World”; apparently he has done so in more

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 130-131.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 192.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 12.

than fifty countries. But on the whole, the shortness of Waugh's visit and his unease in befriending people make him describe whole tribes or groups rather than individuals. Thus he admires Masai or Hehe, is very critical of Kikuyu and tends towards generalizations verging on stereotypes.

As was the case with Waugh's earlier travel books, *A Tourist in Africa* is almost devoid of literary allusions and connotations. Apart from his own *Labels* and *Remote People*, the only books discussed or referred to are: *Stars and Stripes in Africa; Being a History of American Achievements in Africa by Explorers, Missionaries, Pirates, Adventurers, Hunters, Miners, Merchants, Scientists, Soldiers, Show-men, Engineers, and others with some account of Africans who have played a part in American affairs* by Eric Rosenthal (1938,) and *The Path to Rome* by Hillaire Belloc (earlier, in *Labels* Belloc's pilgrimage had been presented as an epitome of one of the types of travelling, the classification of which Waugh presented there). Belloc's book is mentioned in *A Tourist in Africa* when Waugh writes about his resolution not to travel by air, and compares it with Belloc's vow not to use trains (disregarding the difference of motives that must have lain at the core of these two decisions).

The only subject apart from politics that Waugh directly ventures into in *A Tourist in Africa* is archaeology. He was not an expert on the subject, nor was he deeply interested in it. But it seems that at times he felt inclined to put forward his doubts about the achievements of anthropology and archaeology from the position of a layman equipped with common sense. Thus, he disputes the age and original functions of "Great Zimbabwe" (a complex of a ruined temples), by saying that a "carbon test", a method used to establish the age of specimens, is invalid for at least two reasons. It seems that he disagrees with the theories of historians and archaeologists more for the sake of the argument than to elaborate upon his own theories. He is also critical of such "modish attributions" as describing a solid conical tower as "phallic" and asks: "[a]re the objects displayed on some of the new railway stations of outer London phallic?"¹³. He might have asked exactly the same ques-

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

tion, in exactly the same manner in any of his 1930s travel books, and in this respect he has not changed one iota.

A Tourist in Africa in comparison with Waugh's earlier books abounds in practical advice for a prospective reader-tourist or even for travel agents (in the 1930s an implied reader was much more of an "armchair traveller"). For example, he writes of Tanga: "Don't let them take you on a sisal estate [...] Don't let them take you to a sulphurous cave they are proud of. The place to visit from Tanga is Pangani an Arab town some thirty miles down the coast"¹⁴. This is a style typical of a guide-book rather than a travel book, and although it is by no means characteristic of *A Tourist in Africa*, it nevertheless crops up from time to time. While visiting the coast of Tanganyika, or the plains of Rhodesia, Waugh considers their potential to become major centres of tourism, even though he has despised the phenomenon as such. Waugh rarely concentrates on African natural beauty. He would like to see some of the spots of natural beauty developed "tourist-wise", provided that there would be no sun-bathing, an activity he abhorred.

Waugh's elegant style, at times florid, at times astringent, seems to suit quite well the travel diary that *A Tourist in Africa* really is. His only linguistic problem seems to be the choice of terms describing various ethnic groups. He points out the inadequacy and sources of invalidity of terms used by liberals, conservatives and the natives themselves. "Settlers" or "Rhodesians"? "Black Americans" or "alien natives"? "Niggers", "Kaffirs", "Bantu" or "Africans"? "Asiatic", "Pakistani" or "Indian"? He justifies his own, mostly conservative solutions, by the fact that he is used to them and half seriously expresses hopes that the book will not be banned in certain countries because of this.

The style is the only element of *A Tourist in Africa* on which most of the reviewers of this book have agreed. They praised it more or less directly. There was no agreement on the contents of Waugh's book; here the opinions depended clearly on the political views of the reviewers. Dan Jacobson in "The Spectator" applauded him for what he saw as a middle of the road approach in politics and for the lack of dis-

¹⁴ Stannard, ed., *Evelyn Waugh*, pp. 411-2.

cernible nostalgia for the fall of the British Empire. Anthony Allot from the *Tablet* wrote that it was not ordinary bedside reading and that “implicit in the whole narrative is a moral criticism of the so called civilization that Europe has introduced into Africa”¹⁴. Whereas Basil Davidson of the *New Statesman* thought Waugh's political opinions were “often silly and nearly always out of touch with reality” and of the book in general: “not often memorable, not seldom foolish, and yet enough for a book that will be read and liked [...] a book that is meant to be enjoyed for its style – from the superbly civilized use of a semicolon to the gentle whip of ironical understatement that is wielded now and then”¹⁵. Cyril Connolly in the *Sunday Times* thought that “the particular pose he effects; of an elderly, infirm, and irritable old buffer, quite out of touch with the times – is hardly suited to enthusiasm, a prerequisite of travel writing”¹⁶. Both Davidson and Connolly felt that Waugh should have stayed in Genoa and that he is at his best while sightseeing and writing in luxury in Europe.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 412.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 415.

Conclusion

The 1930s in Britain was a decade when “the going was good” and popular, and when publishers paid handsome fees for the travel books of both recognized as well as of promising writers. Evelyn Waugh, who throughout the decade had no permanent home, made the most of this atmosphere and the “travel book” boom; he travelled extensively to various parts of the world and it was during this period that he wrote five of his six travel books. The sixth, *A Tourist in Africa* (1960), comes from a different era, when it seemed that the travel limitations resulting from World War II and the dangers with which jets and package tours threatened “travelling” (as opposed to “tourism”) would result in the demise of the genre; which fortunately turned out to be a false assumption.

Evelyn Waugh's 1930s travel books are not as erudite as those by Aldous Huxley's or as exquisitely formal as Robert Byron's. Yet, apart from displaying many features characteristic for artistic travel books of the era, such as the acute sense of the looming apocalypse, or the theoretical debunking of the myth of the traveller-explorer, they also disclose a distinct and very individual command of the English language and a mastery of style. From the very beginning of his career as a man of letters Waugh stressed the importance of being a master craftsman of words and he wrote that he treated them in the same way as a good shoemaker treats leather, rather than as an artist suffering romantic agonies during the process of creation. He ridiculed the latter stance several times both in his travel books and in the novels. The goals he aspired to were those of lucidity, elegance and individuality of style, and it seems that he achieved them, especially when his style grew more mature, which can be discerned as far back as *Remote People* (1931). And it was as a craftsman rather than as an artist that he wrote his travel books (this, I think, is also true of the majority of his novels). He did not hold travel books in high esteem, yet treated them very profession-

ally, and it seems that he was sincere and realistic when he said that although he wrote travel books for money he would not write them any better for more money. His elegant and lucid style was often strengthened by his impeccable ear for dialogue as well as his comic genius, which allowed him to insert numerous delightful anecdotes and interludes into the otherwise serious passages of his travel books.

Evelyn Waugh's travel books are not only well written and entertaining. They also have numerous, often interesting and even intriguing links with his fiction; links that are not always straightforward, direct and evident. It is these links and also the links existing between his diary entries, his newspaper articles, his travel books and his novels that allow for a better, more comprehensive understanding of his writings and the background for them as well as of the atmosphere and the mood of the 1930s.

Most British writers, critics and historians perceived and wrote about the 1930s with sympathies directed more or less overtly towards liberal, leftist and agnostic points of view and so were to various extents critical of the opinions held by a dandy converted into a conservative Catholic with strange and often bizarre aesthetic tastes. Thus, the opinions on Waugh's travel books were often unfavourable not because of any stylistic or formal inadequacies (in fact these were praised even by many Marxist critics), but because the ideas and views supported there were deemed staunchly conservative. Although it would be difficult to disagree with most of these pronouncements, it should be remembered that seen from a longer time perspective his political ideas, no matter if one agrees with them or not, form a coherent entity, which in old fashioned language might have been called moral integrity. It is true that some of the extracts of *Waugh in Abyssinia* read like Fascist propaganda, hostile to Britain and its policy in the late 1930s, and that in *Robbery Under Law* Waugh attacks certain aspects of Western democracies with the fervour and the arguments of the Holy Inquisition, but it is also true that after 17 September 1939 Evelyn Waugh was one of the few people who had a clear and distinct view of the world situation and that for him "at last the enemy was in plain sight"; by the enemy he meant both Fascist Germany and the Commu-

nist Soviet Union. From the very beginning he was against British and American tactical alliance/flirtation with Joseph Stalin; the effects of this alliance are discernible today in all spheres of life throughout Eastern Europe and many other parts of the world.

In Evelyn Waugh's travel books we can detect the gradual evolution of the narrator from a dandy in *Labels* who substitutes aesthetics for morals and is looking for things bizarre and strange or even revolting to shock an implied reader, but he remains completely detached himself, to an orthodox Catholic in *Robbery Under Law*, dissatisfied with almost all aspects of contemporary life. Waugh himself remarked that upon re-reading his pre-war travel books he discerned that they were becoming grimmer and grimmer in tone as the decade went on, and it seems that nobody would disagree with this claim. Their increasing gloom could be accounted for by the author's growing awareness of a looming Armageddon that he perceived as far back as the climax of *Vile Bodies* (1930) and, also, by his more serious and also much more misanthropic views on life and people. The grimness may have also been caused by the growing importance that politics started to play in Britain the 1930s and from which Waugh tried to escape abroad, only to find himself involved in much more fervent political discussions in Abyssinia or Guiana. His misanthropy was in turn due to the combined influence of orthodox Catholicism and the fact that he was placing his Arcadia in the past; either in Medieval rural communities or in the manor houses of English Catholic aristocratic families. Snobbery, a strong aesthetic bias and his religious convictions resulted in a very critical attitude both to the majority of the cultures and countries he visited (the only obvious exception that springs to mind is Kenya) and often to the England of the 1930s and can be discerned both in all of his travel books as well as in his novels of the period.

The characters of his travel books were to remain "remote" throughout the decade, and it seems that Waugh did not try hard to change this situation. The possible reason why he did not or could not make them "round" (in E.M. Forster's sense of the word) is that he was fundamentally a misanthrope. He cared about his own salvation and did what he felt appropriate to achieve it, but he did not care much for the

salvation of other people. For him they remained remote; funny and bizarre at best, savage and incomprehensible at worst.

Seen from a certain perspective, however, all of Waugh's travel books are great eulogies of travel. They are celebrations of the myth of travel as Northrop Frye and later Joseph Campbell saw it. They celebrate setting out; the disjunction from the familiar. Thus, Waugh would describe how cold he was in England in February, how bored with fox hunting and local gossip, and how pleasant and refreshing it was to embark on a ship bound for some sunny and warm destination. The second parts, the trials of initiation and adventure, are often presented in a mock heroic, self-parodying manner, debunking the jungle and its explorers. And then there is, according to Campbell, the return and the hero's reintegration in society. Waugh's narrator would not usually be reintegrated in society on returning home. He would perceive England, especially in his later travel books, as little different from the barbarous hinterlands of Guiana or Abyssinia.

The outbreak of the Second World War ended the era when the going was good and Waugh knew it perhaps better than anyone else. During the war Waugh was a brave and competent officer. In 1944 he remarked that he was fighting not for "Freedom of Speech" or for the "Freedom to Vote" but for the "Freedom to Travel". It was the lack of this freedom in the post-war Europe and his regret that no one would write or read any more travel books that prompted him to write *Scott King's Modern Europe* (1946).

But the travel book lives on, as Waugh proved himself with *A Tourist in Africa* and as numerous writers are proving every week. There are no more gentleman travellers or trans-Atlantic liners, but there are many travellers of Belloc's *The Path to Rome* extraction who travel by different sorts of locomotion to the most remote of places and write both fascinating and boring accounts of their journeys. And their publishers usually ask them to read the classics of the genre before they set out. To the best of my knowledge Evelyn Waugh is high on this list, even though not a single contemporary travel writer follows in his steps; neither in the literal nor in the literary sense.

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