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INTRODUCTION

Evelyn Waugh's fourth novel, *A Handful of Dust*, takes its title from T. S. Eliot's quintessentially modernist poem *The Waste Land*.¹ While less aggressively experimental in technique and less comprehensive in thematic and historical range than the poem, the novel is in some ways a deeper indictment of contemporary civilization because it chronicles social and moral disintegration so pervasive that the characters are unaware of it and the omniscient authorial voice reveals it primarily through implication. The result is a book that Frank Kermode has called 'one of the most distinguished novels of the century'.²

In retrospect, it is less surprising that Waugh completed work of this stature by the time he was thirty than that he wrote at all. Seven years earlier Waugh had been fired from the last of a series of dismal teaching jobs and, 'feeling rather like a housemaid who has been caught stealing gloves', concluded that 'the time has arrived to set about being a man of letters'.³ By the time he was ready to begin writing *A Handful of Dust*, he had published six books in five years and had a seventh nearly ready to go to press. His opinions were widely disseminated and well remunerated by the daily newspapers. Rebecca West and other critics spoke highly of his books and even more highly of his future.⁴

Waugh was far from solemn about his career, but he conducted it efficiently and, if an early article based on his own experience is credible, almost cynically. 'Art', he wrote, especially literature, 'offers scope for profound and prolonged laziness, and in the event of success gives rewards quite out of proportion to industry'.⁵

In fact he worked very hard, but in military terms he was a good tactician with little grasp of strategy. In 1928, a year after his reluctant decision to become a writer, he published a centenary biography of Dante Gabriel Rossetti. *Decline and Fall*, a novel very loosely based on his first teaching job in Wales, followed six months

later. It is far more light-hearted than the title from Gibbon suggests. In fact, Waugh felt it necessary to point out in the Author's Note to the first edition that the novel was supposed to be funny.⁶

He also married Evelyn Gardner and engaged A. D. Peters as his literary agent. The second was the wiser move. At this point Waugh needed money so badly that he was even willing to write about cricket, which he hated, or about anything else which could find a market. When an editor read 'mothers' for 'manners' in accepting Waugh's offer to write about 'Matter-of-Fact Manners of the New Age', he dutifully wrote about mothers. Peters and his associates were able to sell most of the 'stuff' that Waugh sent them and very ably managed Waugh's campaign to become a spokesman for the younger generation.⁷

That campaign culminated in the extremely successful novel *Vile Bodies* (1930), a *roman-à-clef* about the Bright Young People among whom Waugh had moved in London. This novel reflected its title – from Philipians 3:21 and the Anglican burial service – somewhat more accurately than *Decline and Fall* had done with Gibbon. This was due in part to the collapse of his marriage, and in part to the sense that he belonged to 'a crazy and sterile generation'.⁸ However, there is little sense of this theme in *Labels* (1930), the travel book based on his belated honeymoon trip to the Mediterranean. In fact, the book contains no mention of Evelyn Gardner, and the American edition of the book was called *A Bachelor Abroad*.

The success of *Vile Bodies* made Waugh's 'stuff' much more profitable, but he still seemed to have very little sense of direction, as a man of letters, and he was writing about his life almost as fast as he could live it. Clearly he was in need not just of tactics but of a strategy. For the next few years he was in the process of finding one. In September 1930 he was received into the Roman Catholic Church and shortly thereafter left for Ethiopia to attend the coronation of Emperor Haile Selassie. The travel book, *Remote People* (1931), and the novel, *Black Mischief* (1932), which resulted from that trip both reveal a concern for style and a seriousness of purpose new for Waugh. He began to find the stance of spokesman for youth increasingly awkward and turned his coat to advantage in an article titled, 'Why Glorify Youth?' He admitted that 'The Youth

boom has been very convenient for young men like myself who have made a living out of it, but it seems to me time that criticism adopted some more significant standard.⁹

In December 1932, perhaps in search of that standard, Waugh embarked on a three-month trip to what was then British Guiana with ill-defined or at any rate unexplained purposes. On the journey to the interior, he encountered a man named Christie who professed to see the auras of his visitors, viewed the choir of the blessed singing before the throne of God, and confidently predicted the end of the world. A little later, Waugh found himself stranded in Boa Vista, the inaptly named town in Brazil which he had idealized as a centre of ease and civilization and was to transmute into Tony's 'City' in *A Handful of Dust*. There he wrote 'The Man Who Liked Dickens', a story about an explorer imprisoned to read to a madman in the jungle. He wrote to his agent that it was 'first-rate' and should command a large fee in America – which it duly received.¹⁰

By the time he returned to England Waugh had discovered a theme to give some coherence to his body of work. In *Ninety-Two Days*, the travel book he wrote before beginning *A Handful of Dust*, he denied that he had taken the trip for specifically literary purposes.

One does not travel, any more than one falls in love, to collect material. It is simply part of one's life . . . for myself and many 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 transplantation. It is there that I find the experiences vivid enough to demand translation into literary form.¹¹

This passage illustrates Waugh's ability to describe a temporary arrangement as if it were chiselled in stone. This was in fact only his second trip to 'distant and barbarous places', and his efforts to secure commissions from editors make it obvious that he intended to write about it.

However, he had recently been forced by a Catholic editor's attack on *Black Mischief* to reconsider not only that novel but his

position as a Catholic writer. In a letter to the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster defending himself against charges of obscenity and blasphemy, he argued that 'The story deals with the conflict of civilization, with all its attendant and deplorable ills, and barbarism.'¹²

He rather overstates the novel's case for civilization, but the apologia may have given him the idea for 'Out of Depth', a story he wrote before he finished *Ninety-Two Days*. Rip Van Winkle, the central character of the story, is displaced from his sterile and fashionable existence forward in time to a shattered London whose inhabitants have degenerated into barbarism. Submerged in delirium more fully rendered than the explorer's in 'The Man Who Liked Dickens', Rip emerges only after perceiving 'a shape in chaos' at a Roman Catholic Mass.¹³ The religious theme is at most implied in *A Handful of Dust*, but the fantastic story anticipates a major theme in the novel.

Of course, Waugh could draw on more than the trip to British Guiana and his growing interest in the theme of civilization versus barbarism. As in his first three novels, Waugh drew incidents and characters from his experience and circle of acquaintances. Readers familiar with Waugh's life have assumed that Brenda's affair with Beaver is based on Evelyn Gardner's with John Heygate. Four decades after the novel was published, Heygate wrote that 'One realizes one was the rather feeble villain in *A Handful of Dust*.'¹⁴ Heygate may have underestimated the incidence of adultery in Waugh's circle. As Waugh began the novel, he said that it was 'first about sponger [Murrough O'Brien] and then about some imaginary people who are happy to be married but not for long.'¹⁵ He worried that Lord Brownlow 'will think it is about him — it isn't but bits of it are like'. He did admit that Marjorie's Pekinese was drawn directly from Phillis de Janzé's.¹⁶

Furthermore, though Waugh was far from being a social realist, his work shows that he was aware of economic and political developments. In 1932 he had published a short story first titled 'The Patriotic Honeymoon' (that is, taken at home rather than abroad) and then 'Love in the Slump'. The story presents the marriage of Tom and Angela Trench-Troubridge as 'completely typical of all

that is most unremarkable in modern social conditions'.¹⁷ The two marry out of a sense of desperation on her side, and bewildered acquiescence to 'one of the few bright fragments remaining from his glamorous [undergraduate] past'¹⁸ on his. They are separated by accident, and Tom discovers the pleasures of hunting on his host's new mare, while Angela has very satisfactory sex with the same man — who gives them a cottage near his estate which 'would be such a good place for her to go sometimes when she wanted a change'.¹⁹ In retrospect, the story is almost a negative image of *A Handful of Dust*. Tom, the Beaverish Londoner with neither qualities nor prospects, is cuckolded by a lively country squire, a counter-Tony, in a cottage which, like Mrs Beaver's flat, is 'very suitable for base love'.

Even Waugh's most feckless social butterflies can be vaguely aware of social and economic conditions. One of the Londoners in *Black Mischief* remarks to a character just returned from abroad that 'Everyone's got very poor and it makes them duller,' and mentions 'something about a gold standard'.²⁰ She is talking about England's going off the gold standard in 1931.

In *A Handful of Dust*, economic conditions strongly affect the plot, though they do not drive it. John Beaver is 'London's only spare man' because the slump ended his job with an advertising agency and, 'Since then no one had been able to find anything for him to do.' The necessity of paying death duties has left Tony's estate in relatively straitened circumstances, and a second imposition of these taxes after Tony is declared legally dead leaves the heirs only a little less impoverished than they had always been.

Even the trip to Brazil has analogues outside Waugh's direct experience. Peter Fleming had already made an expedition to Brazil to search for a lost English explorer, described in *Brazilian Adventure*. Before Waugh left for South America, he consulted Fleming about 'equipment for forests'.²¹ After returning he praised Fleming's book, though he objected to the author's 'awareness that the spirit of adventure often results in literary trash'.²² Perhaps Waugh had cured himself with his own very early illustrated story about a rescue from the Brazilian jungle, 'In Quest of Thomas Lee'.²³

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By the end of 1933 Waugh had assembled the materials from which to shape his novel and he had settled in Fez, Morocco, to begin work on the book for which he had no definite title or plot. His account of the composition of *A Handful of Dust* is much clearer than the actual process seems to have been. The novel, he said, 'began at the end' with 'The Man Who Liked Dickens'. But later:

the idea kept working in my mind. I wanted to discover how the prisoner got there, and eventually the thing grew into a study of other sorts of savages at home and the civilized man's helpless plight among them.²⁴

In the long view, this statement is probably true, but it is certainly misleading. Ten months after writing the short story, he wrote to A. D. Peters that, though he might use the story, he had no idea how the novel would end.²⁵ In fact, he did not yet have a title: the manuscript is headed 'NOVEL (as yet unnamed)'.²⁶ Even after finishing the draft through to the end of what is now 'English Gothic - II', he was not sure what would happen in the next half.²⁷

For the most part, however, his spirits were high. In rather pious letters to Katharine Asquith and overtly bawdy letters to Lady Mary Lygon he commented on the progress of the novel. It seemed 'faultless of its kind', he commented to Mrs Asquith, but 'Very difficult to write because for the first time I am trying to deal with normal people instead of eccentrics. Comic English character parts too easy when one gets to be thirty.'²⁸ He told Lady Mary that his 'filthy novel' was 'excellent - very grim'; later he called it 'My good taste book'.²⁹

At this point in Waugh's career his lack of a clear goal was no deterrent to progress. Years later, he said that early in his career he 'had the facility . . . to sit down at my table, set a few characters on the move, write 3,000 words a day, and note with surprise what happened'.³⁰ By the time he had finished John Andrew's death scene he was complaining that 'The novel drags on at 10,000 words a week'.³¹ In late January, a typescript of what is now chapters one and two reached Peters, and by 6 February Peters had received typescript up to the point of Mrs Rattery's arrival at Hetton. By 10 February Waugh had finished what was then called Book I -

through to the end of 'English Gothic - II' - and instructed Peters to inquire about serialization, offering to write another 5,000 words to round off the story.³²

Two weeks later Waugh was back in England, announcing his intention to remain at the Easton Court Hotel, Chagford (for some years Waugh's favourite refuge for writing), until he finished the novel. By then it had a title - or two titles: 'A Handful of Ashes' and, in a postscript to the same letter, 'A Handful of Dust'.³³ He said nothing about his plans for the rest of the novel, but by this time he must have had them clearly in mind, for the manuscript of the last three parts is very clean, with just enough revision to indicate that it was not recopied.

His contention that the novel was written to lead into the short story was by this time obviously true, for he used the typescript of 'The Man Who Liked Dickens' for major portions of the manuscript of chapter six. He probably finished the brief chapter seven in March, for by mid-April he had corrected proofs of the first half. By early May he had written the ending for the serial (titled 'A Flat in London'), printed at the end of this volume and at the end of the 1964 Uniform Edition.³⁴

The serial differs from the novel in tone and in many details, most obviously in the conclusion. One might ask why Waugh bothered to reprint the alternative ending, which seems to have been written out of financial rather than artistic necessity. He provided one answer in the 1964 Preface: it was 'a curiosity'. Other motives are possible. The 'alternative ending', and indeed the whole serial version, may have represented to Waugh a kind of alternative fictional universe to *A Handful of Dust*.³⁵ 'A Flat in London', in the body as well as the conclusion of the story, embodies a system of values and sanctions which, ironically, show English society decaying more sordidly, if less spectacularly, than in the novel or in Eliot's poem.³⁶

In some ways, the novel embodied a bleaker vision than the poem, which ends with the Sanskrit words 'Shantih shantih shantih', implying at least the possibility of salvation. The novel rejects even

that faint consolation. Waugh may have been drawing upon the whole story of the Cumaean Sybil, merely referred to in Eliot's epigraph from the *Sabyricon* of Petronius, who asked Apollo for the same number of years of life as the number of grains of dust (or sand) that she could hold in her hand. The wish was granted, but she forgot to ask for eternal youth and was condemned to dwindle, with age, into little more than a voice. That version of the story comes from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (XII, 115-82). The Sybil's fate anticipates that of Tony, condemned to read aloud until his voice is extinguished.

This conclusion is harsher than Eliot's, perhaps because Waugh had a more coherent view of theology than Eliot did before his own conversion. Writing after the Second World War, at a period when he was more overtly concerned with religious values, Waugh commented that *A Handful of Dust* 'dealt entirely with behaviour. It was humanist and said all I had to say about humanism'.³⁷ Readers for whom 'humanism' is an honorific term may be confused by this remark; the tone of the novel is certain to bewilder them. For example, Waugh regarded his friend Cyril Connolly as an archetype of the liberal humanist, and while Connolly thought *A Handful of Dust* Waugh's finest novel to date, he complained that it was 'the first of Evelyn Waugh's to have a bore for a hero'.³⁸ The anonymous reader of a library copy of the novel had similar expectations about what the central character should be like and wrote 'Hurrah! At last' in the margin when Tony finally asserts himself and refuses to sell Hetton in order to buy Beaver for Brenda. It is easy to see why readers sympathize with Tony, and in the Preface to the 1964 edition Waugh referred to him as a 'betrayed romantic'. David Bittner goes even further, arguing not only that 'Tony is a hapless victim and that he is a good character' but that, when imprisoned by Mr Todd, 'it is Tony's heroic faith which helps him accept his fate for the foreseeable future'.³⁹ For that matter, he is the only character in the novel who gives evidence of having virtue, of any sort. If everyone else is wrong, then Tony must be right.

The flaw in this reasoning comes from a problem of definition. For Waugh, humanism is antithetical to the religious view of life.⁴⁰

Writing just after his conversion to Roman Catholicism, he asserted that 'in the present phase of European history the essential issue is no longer between Catholicism, on one side, and Protestantism, on the other, but between Christianity and Chaos'. Further, 'civilization' — by which he meant European civilization — 'has not in itself the power of survival. It came into being through Christianity, and without it has no significance or power to command allegiance'.⁴¹

Christianity is not entirely missing from the novel, but it is clearly vestigial. The chief symbol of this decline is Hetton Abbey, 'formerly one of the notable houses of the county', until it was razed and rebuilt by Tony's great-grandfather — as the American edition puts it — 'in the late generation of the Gothic revival, when the movement had lost its fantasy and become structurally logical and stodgy'.⁴² Waugh does not specifically identify the original structure as medieval; his point is not merely that a building of historical and aesthetic significance has been destroyed and replaced by a grotesque version of little historic value, but that the religious heritage of the building, and by extension of England itself, has been lost. Waugh may have admired aspects of Ruskin's thought, but his comment that the way to beautify Oxford was to dynamite many of the buildings shows that he deplored at least some of its effects.⁴³

Tony's Victorian ancestor destroyed the building. Tony ends the practice of holding daily prayers in the chapel, and at church his attention shifts easily from divine judgement to renovations in Hetton's plumbing. Even when confronted with the death of his son, he remarks that 'the last thing one wants to talk about at a time like this is religion'. Nor are traditional virtues much regarded — the bedroom named after Sir Galahad, purest of Arthur's knights, is so uncomfortable that it is reserved for the most unwelcome guests.

Tony is faithful to his vision of Hetton, but that vision is based upon a false and sentimental conception. Readers can sympathize with Tony's personal unhappiness when his 'whole Gothic world had come to grief', but in the context of Hetton, made inescapable by the names of the bedrooms, Tony is a very feeble imitation of King Arthur — though his dalliance with Thérèse de Vitré is more

in the spirit of Malory than of Tennyson – and John Beaver is unrecognizable as Lancelot. There is no Round Table, and Tony goes in quest not of the Holy Grail but of another way of escaping the politely savage world of Brenda's London. Brenda's infidelity destroys Hetton as Guinevere's did Camelot, but only for Tony.

Oddly enough, Brenda's 'Thank God' at learning that her child, not her lover, has died does not wholly destroy sympathy for her. Jock and the reader know what she said, but later Waugh describes her at Hetton, moving slowly and expressionlessly up the stairs, 'the stained glass windows glowing and sparkling all about her', in an echo of the scene in which John Beaver first sees her, to look out at 'the naked tossing trees' and 'the maelstroms of dust and leaf' in 'the troubled landscape'. And when Beaver abandons her, she may have received her deserts, but, the repetition of the line she used twice in chapter two, 'Me? Oh, I'm all right', indicates that she is forlorn.

If readers cannot entirely sympathize with Tony or condemn Brenda, conventional morality and religion offer no reliable clues to the novel's tone and scale of values. Perhaps, as Waugh said in 1947, only 'behaviour' is left, and when he wrote *A Handful of Dust* he was still trying 'to distil comedy and sometimes tragedy from the knockabout farce of people's outward behaviour'. However, he denied that he was a satirist because:

Satire is a matter of period. It flourishes in a stable society and presupposes homogeneous moral standards . . . It is aimed at inconsistency and hypocrisy. It exposes polite cruelty and folly by exaggerating them. It seeks to produce shame. All this has no place . . . where vice no longer pays lip service to virtue.⁴¹

In Waugh's London, the distinction between vice and virtue no longer exists for the background chorus of gossips. Waugh had said that he was giving up 'comic character parts', but many of the characters are defined by and limited to their names. Some characters partake of but transcend the label assigned to them, like Tony Last and Mr Todd, a name which can refer to Beatrix Potter's fox or to the German word for 'death'.⁴⁵ Others, like the surprisingly

American Souki de Foucauld-Esterhazy, are merely names. Even when characters are more developed, it is impossible to take seriously someone named Polly Cockpurse – especially in view of her former profession as a procuress – and the way in which she is introduced parenthetically puts her firmly outside any possible moral scheme:

. . . her first steps to eminence had been in circles so obscure that they had made her no enemies in the world to which she aspired; some time ago she had married a good-natured Earl, whom nobody else happened to want at the time; since then she had scaled all but the highest peaks of every social mountain.

Waugh had been tempted to go still further. In a manuscript passage which survived into the serial version, he continued with:

She enjoyed herself hugely and did very little harm to anyone else. But men, except the very young and the very old for whom she had the glamour of the reputation she was trying to shed, mostly found her a bore.⁴⁶

However, he deleted the passage before book publication, possibly to avoid making her merely comic.

The same motive seems to have operated when Waugh trimmed back the first description of the Old Hundredth. He retained the club's eventful history, and in manuscript and serial continued, after 'an unimpeded flow of dubious, alcoholic preparations', with:

Mrs Weybridge, founder and martyr of its fortunes, is dead, but she has left behind her a vast and handsome progeny to carry on her work; while some married into the aristocracy and limited their interest in the concern, others grew up to take their places, and it was a younger son, still wearing the short black coat in which during the day he practised as a barrister, who admitted Tony and Jock to the ramshackle building.⁴⁷

By cutting this passage and adding the information that the patrons are frequently robbed, the novel emphasizes the pathos of Tony's attempt to enjoy himself and the essential sordidness of still another aspect of life in London.⁴⁸

The London characters have no taste, only an eye for fashion,

and no morals whatever. Adultery is not a sin or even an indiscretion. 'Old Sybil' is the woman of first choice for a liaison, however brief, and she refuses to help Tony provide divorce evidence only because it is momentarily inconvenient. Adultery helps Mrs Beaver to let her flats, gives John Beaver new status, and provides the gossips with a new and welcome topic, far more interesting than if Brenda 'had at last broken away with Jock Grant-Menzies or Robin Beaseley or any other young buck with whom nearly everyone had had a crack one time or another'. Brenda begins the affair partly out of boredom and partly because Beaver seems indifferent to her. She rubs against Beaver's cheek, 'in the way she had', in the same manner and in the same words as she had done with Tony.

At times, the characters employ the vocabulary associated with traditional standards, but it has been emptied of content. 'Hell' is invoked almost a dozen times in the course of the novel, but it is used to describe minor inconveniences or, at worst, the embarrassment of faked adultery. On the first page, Mrs Beaver remarks that 'The fire never reached the bedrooms, I am afraid', and then encourages her son to eat yoghurt which she describes as nasty. Brenda characterizes Tony's response to betrayal as 'brooding'.

The inversion of traditional labels is strongest in 'English Gothic - II'. Tony's divorce lawyer 'had not had Tony's opportunities to contract the habit of loving and trusting Brenda', in a phrase echoed from the end of the previous chapter. One of the detectives hired to provide evidence of Tony's infidelity complains, 'Sets a nasty, respectable note bringing a kid into it.' One of the bar girls says of Milly that 'Lots of the girls here are all right to have a lark with in town, but you have to have a *lady* for a divorce.' Later the appalling Dan confides that Milly attracts a higher class of people 'like you and me'. Dan's friend is by Tony's usual standards incredibly vulgar, but Tony wonders 'whether he was as amiable when people he did not know were brought over unexpectedly to Hetton', without staying for the obvious answer in the negative. Brenda's brother finds 'even the Christian era full of significance'. No one else seems to find significance in anything.

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Even those readers accustomed to discerning a structure of values in the most experimental fiction are sometimes puzzled by novels like *A Handful of Dust*. If the characters have no values, or only shallow ones, and the narrator seems to refuse to provide them, then two alternatives are left: either the story has no inherent structure and meaning, or these principles of coherence are established through other means.

One way of discovering these principles is to look at the differences between serial and novel versions. The fact that it was possible for Waugh to alter not only plot, but tone and theme, casually and significantly raises useful questions about the construction of the book. Critics have argued that, as Rose Macaulay put it, the serial ending 'has a closer coherence with the rest of the book',⁴⁹ and generations of students startled by the shift of setting from England to South America have felt that the novel breaks in half.

Two novelists whose work Waugh praised highly have objected to the South American episodes without, apparently, knowing anything about the serial. P. G. Wodehouse hufted, 'What a snare this travelling business is to the young writer. He goes to some blasted jungle or other and imagines that everybody will be interested in it.'⁵⁰ Henry Yorke, better known as the novelist Henry Green, objected more to the shift in tone. He praised the English scenes for presenting 'a real picture of people one has met and may at any moment meet again', but felt that 'the end is so fantastic that it throws the rest out of proportion'.

Waugh's response seems to have more to do with theme than with structure. He agreed that:

the Todd episode is fantastic. It is a 'conceit' in the Webster manner — wishing to bring Tony to a sad end I made it an elaborate and improbable one. I think too the sentimental episode with Thérèse in the ship is probably a mistake. But the Amazon stuff had to be there. The scheme was a Gothic man in the hands of savages — first Mrs Beaver etc. then the real ones, finally the silver foxes at Hetton. All that quest for a city seems to me justifiable symbolism.⁵¹

Waugh had attempted to embody this intention in the novel's external structure. In this, as in most of his novels, he made final

decisions about chapter divisions and titles after he completed at least one draft and, in the case of *Brideshead Revisited*, fifteen years after the first edition appeared. He experimented with various principles of division as he wrote the novel. By the time he reached what is now chapter five he had settled on its title, 'In Search of a City', though he numbered it 'Book Two'. 'À Côté de Chez Todd' (in Waugh's fractured French) and 'English Gothic - III' followed.

The current divisions and titles support his theme. The first and sixth chapters describe two strongholds of barbarism, and Waugh clearly expects the reader to compare their essential heartlessness, materialism and lack of values. 'Hard Cheese on Tony' and 'In Search of a City' show the death of two versions of a dream. The second, fourth and seventh chapters use the words 'English Gothic' in their titles, but the meaning changes significantly in each repetition. At first, the words seem merely to describe the architecture of Hetton, but as chapter two develops, they encompass Tony's way of life and that of his class. The second use of the title apparently describes English divorce proceedings of the period, in which absurd chivalry and ritual adultery render divorce respectable, formalized and dull. The third use refers to Hetton again, but a Hetton occupied by Tony's worthy but deluded successors.

For purposes of mathematical symmetry, chapters six and seven should be reversed. Thematically the current order seems to offer consolation: Tony's living death is followed by the heirs' plans for the future. The final chapter demonstrates that, unlike characters in tragedy, the Lasts have learned nothing; that delusions as well as property are handed down; and that the process of social entropy continues.

Waugh did not rely solely on external structural devices to give coherence to the novel. Well before he formulated the chapter titles, he had carefully interwoven parallel scenes, characters and verbal motifs to provide an internal structure to the novel. Most of these also reinforce the novel's ironic tone. For example, the visit to Hetton of Mrs Rattery, cool, reflective, reserved and controlled, is parallel to that of the emotionally extravagant Jenny Abdul Akbar. Jenny unwittingly prophesies the succession of Teddy

Last when she gets Tony's name wrong. Mrs Rattery, like Mme Sosostris in *The Waste Land*, has a 'wicked pack of cards' (1.46), but she uses them in an attempt to console rather than fraudulently to predict.

Perhaps the most startling use of the device is in the pairing of John Andrew Last and John Beaver, not only for the confusion in their first names but in Brenda's maternal failure towards the first and quasi-maternal interest in the second. John Andrew is also paired with Winnie, not merely because one falls from a horse and the other from her fairy bicycle, but because both are literal-minded enough to ask very inconvenient questions. John Andrew's death causes his parents' marriage to fail and Winnie's surprise appearance prevents it from being dissolved.

In chapters five and six, the comparisons become more obvious and painfully ironic as Waugh uses the apparent differences of Brazil to emphasize the realities behind the pretensions in the manners and language of the English. For example in chapter five pigs are hunted and eaten in the jungle. In England, in Jock's question about the basic pig in Parliament, they are merely a paper concept.

Characters and situations are not only paired, as in the counterpoint of Brenda's and Tony's increasing isolation, but conflated, as in Tony's delirium. Unlike Winnie at Brighton, John Beaver is allowed to bathe, 'for the time is different in Brazil'. Brenda appears in a gown like Rosa's which has been obtained from Polly. The bus that occasioned John Andrew's death merges with the mechanical mice which frightened the Macushi Indians and, in chapter six, Brenda. And it is in delirium, and only there, that Tony is able to formulate, to an unseen audience of Londoners 'walking round in a circle' as in Eliot's poem, his understanding of what has happened:

I know you are friends of my wife and that is why you will not listen to me. But be careful. She will say nothing cruel, she will not raise her voice, there will be no hard words. She hopes you will be great friends afterwards as before. But she will leave you. She will go away quietly during the night. She will take her hammock and her rations of farine . . . Listen to me. I know I am not clever but that is no reason why we should forget all courtesy. Let us kill in the gentlest manner. I will tell you what I have learned in the forest, where time is different. There is no

City. Mrs Beaver has covered it with chromium plating and converted it into flats. Three guineas a week with a separate bathroom. Very suitable for base love. And Polly will be there. She and Mrs Beaver under the fallen battlements . . .

Cured of his fever by Mr Todd's medicines, Tony relapses into his usual state of dulled acceptance of the unfamiliar. Like many readers of the novel, he does not realize the most devastating parallel in the novel: himself and Mr Todd. Instead of 'a transfigured Hetton', he finds Mr Todd's house, where, eating farine and tasso, he is condemned to 'recklessly mixing starch and protein' in defiance of his and Brenda's diet at the beginning of the novel. There he is forced to read aloud, as earlier he had unwittingly forced Brenda to listen and then failed to listen to her. He is kept captive. Brenda, at least in the imaginations of the London gossips, had been 'the imprisoned princess of fairy story'. Most significantly, by juxtaposing Tony's hallucination at the end of chapter five and the drab reality of Todd's place, Waugh emphasizes the emptiness of Tony's ideal and presents not a sentimental, Ruskinian, Gothic estate but an irreducibly feudal community, based on Todd's real patriarchal authority and upon force. Years later, in *Helena*, one of the characters speaks of power without grace.⁵² That is what Tony finds in the Brazilian jungle: secular feudalism unredeemed by the saving grace of Christianity, without which, to use Waugh's comment on his conversion, 'it has no significance or power to command allegiance'. The only spirit informing Todd's clearing is a limited and sentimental understanding of Dickens, whose writings Waugh regarded as limited and sentimental.

Ironically, therefore, Tony has found the reality behind the delusive object of his quest. Having sought the form without awareness of spiritual content, an embroidered Camelot rather than the Grail, he is left bound in undifferentiated time. He is, like Ovid's Sybil, reduced to a voice, without hope of rescue or redemption.

In the final chapter, the wisdom of the children of Mammon is proven correct. Jock's satisfaction at having done something for his constituents has kept him in Parliament. Brenda marries Jock Grant-Menzies, as 'Everybody thought she would.' As Jenny had

unconsciously predicted, Teddy Last will be master of an imitation Gothic Hetton reduced still further by death duties. And all of the characters more or less get what they wanted all along, whether or not they realize it.

Notes

1. The title is taken from lines 27-30 of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (Faber and Faber, 1922), which serve as the epigraph to the novel.
2. Frank Kermode, *Puzzles and Epiphanies* (Chilmark, 1962), p. 171.
3. *Diaries*, 20 and 21 February 1927, p. 281.
4. Rebecca West, 'A Letter from Abroad', *Bookman*, vol. 71 (March 1930), pp. 83-6; reprinted in *Ending in Earnest* (Doran, Doubleday, 1931). For other contemporary estimates of Waugh's books, see *CH*.
5. *Essays*, p. 49.
6. *Decline and Fall* (Chapman and Hall, 1928).
7. Letters to A. D. Peters and W. N. Roughead, *Letters*, p. 30. Waugh's letters to the same men, October 1928 to January 1929, are summarized in *Catalogue*, 185-96. 'Matter-of-Fact Mothers of the New Age', *Evening Standard*, 8 April 1929, p. 7.
8. 'The War and the Younger Generation', *Essays*, pp. 61-3.
9. *Essays*, pp. 125-8.
10. Waugh, letter to A. D. Peters, 15 February 1933. The story appeared in *Hearst's International* combined with *Cosmopolitan*, vol. 95 (September 1933), pp. 54-7, 127-30. The story was reprinted, with minor variations, in the November *Nash's Pall Mall Magazine*.
11. *Ninety-Two Days*, p. 6. In 1946 Waugh put the idea more bluntly: 'If you hear a novelist say he needs to collect "copy", be sure he is no good'. *Essays*, p. 301.
12. *Essays*, p. 77.
13. *Mr Loveday's Little Outing and Other Sad Stories* (Chapman and Hall, 1936), p. 136.
14. *Diaries*, p. 796.
15. *Letters*, p. 83.
16. *Letters*, p. 85.
17. *Mr Loveday's Little Outing and Other Sad Stories* (Chapman and Hall, 1936), p. 167.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 170.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 183.
20. *Black Mischiefs* (Chapman and Hall, 1962), p. 233.
21. *Diaries*, p. 355.
22. *Essays*, 136. See also A. S. G. Edwards, 'A Source for Waugh's *A Handful of Dust*', *Modern Fiction Studies* vol. 22 no. 2. (Summer 1976), pp. 242-4.
23. Robert Murray Davis, *A Catalogue of the Evelyn Waugh Collection at the Humanities Research Center*, The University of Texas at Austin (Whitston, 1981), A3.
24. 'Fan-Fare', *Essays*, p. 303.

INTRODUCTION

25. Letter to A. D. Peters, early 1934. See *Catalogue*, E234.
26. The manuscript of *A Handful of Dust* is now at the Humanities Research Center of the University of Texas at Austin. *Catalogue*, A12.
27. Letter to A. D. Peters, c. 10 February 1934. *Catalogue*, E235.
28. *Letters*, p. 84.
29. *Letters*, pp. 84, 85.
30. *Vile Bodies* (Chapman and Hall, 1965), Preface, p. 7.
31. Letter to Katharine Asquith, c. 10 February 1934, *Letters*, p. 85.
32. *Catalogue*, E235.
33. Letter to A. D. Peters, c. 27 February 1934, *Letters*, p. 87, where Mark Amory dates it '[March? 1934]'.
 34. Letter to A. D. Peters, c. 12 April 1934, *Catalogue*, E239. For the serial ending, letters to A. D. Peters, c. 27 February and c. 30 April 1934, E236, E240.
35. The 1988 motion picture of *A Handful of Dust* offers another vision of the novel. It is a thorough and honourable attempt to do justice to the novel, but it cannot reflect the complexity of the novel's themes, particularly the Gothic/religious theme.
36. For a discussion of the text of the entire serial version, see Robert Murray Davis, 'Harper's Bazaar and *A Handful of Dust*', in *Philological Quarterly* vol. 48, no. 4 (1969), pp. 508-16. Waugh revised the serial ending for inclusion in *Mr. Loveday's Little Outing and Other Sad Stories* (Chapman and Hall, 1936). See Robert Murray Davis, "'A Flat in London'" and "By Special Request": Some Variant Readings, *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, vol. 69 (1975), pp. 565-8.
37. *Essays*, p. 304.
38. Cyril Connolly, 'The Novel-Addict's Cupboard' in *The Condemned Playground* (Macmillan, 1946), p. 116. The essay was originally published in January 1936.
39. David Bitner, 'Tony as Hero of *A Handful of Dust* or "Last" But Not Least', *Evelyn Waugh Newsletter and Studies* No. 1, vol. 28 (Spring 1994), p. 5. In 'Tony Last's Search for Order and Justice in *A Handful of Dust*', *Evelyn Waugh Newsletter* No. 1, vol. 18 (Spring 1984), pp. 6-7, Pamela Johnson maintains that Tony 'is a sensitive, sharing, and gentle man' who searches for 'order and justice', however naively. Johnson also gives a useful summary of the comparisons and contrasts between Tony and Todd.
40. Waugh's essay on George Orwell, 'A New Humanism', is almost contemporaneous with his comment on *A Handful of Dust*. *Essays*, pp. 304-7.
41. *Essays*, pp. 103, 104.
42. *A Handful of Dust* (Farrar, Rinehart, 1934), p. 44.
43. *Letters*, p. 49.
44. *Essays*, pp. 303, 304.
45. Eric Korn, 'Reminders', *Times Literary Supplement*, 23-8 July 1988, p. 803.
46. 'A Flat in London', *Harper's Bazaar* June 1934, p. 138.
47. 'A Flat in London', *Harper's Bazaar* August 1934, p. 96.
48. A comparison of the Old Hundredth in this novel with the club of the same

INTRODUCTION

- name in *Brideshead Revisited* illustrates some of the ways in which setting helps to establish tone and character.
49. Rose Macaulay, 'Evelyn Waugh', *Horizon*, vol. 14 (December 1946); reprinted in *CH*, p. 158. Richard Wasson develops the point more fully in 'A Handful of Dust: Critique of Victorianism' (*Modern Fiction Studies*, vol. 7, no. 4 (1961-2), pp. 327ff.), reprinted in James F. Carens, *Critical Essays on Evelyn Waugh* (G. K. Hall, 1987).
50. Quoted in Frances Donaldson, *P. G. Wodehouse* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1982), p. 155.
51. Letter to Henry Yorke, September 1934, *Letters*, p. 88. Yorke's criticism is quoted in a note to Waugh's response.
52. *Helena* (Chapman and Hall, 1950), p. 198.