

Return to “Lush Places”: Waugh’s Attempt to Make a New Beginning in *Scoop*

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An innocent young man’s experience of being thrust into the world, only to return to his original situation after many ups and downs, is a pattern that Evelyn Waugh (1903-1966) employed repeatedly, with variations, from his first novel onward. Paul Pennyfeather in *Decline and Fall* (1928), Adam Fenwick-Symes in *Vile Bodies* (1930), and Tony Last in *A Handful of Dust* (1934) all exemplify this pattern. Similarly, in *Scoop* (1936), Waugh’s fifth novel, the protagonist, who writes a newspaper column on nature while living in an old country house secluded from the world, is mistakenly sent to a fictional country (based on Ethiopia) as a war correspondent and struggles to fulfill the unfamiliar mission to which he has been assigned before returning home to resume his usual work.

It may be that Waugh resorted to the use of themes involving innocent young men and circular structures because they were easy for him to manage. He published his first novel at age 25 and completed his first five novels while still young. During this first decade as a professional writer, he was granted advances by publishers and newspaper companies, and he set out on journeys to write fictions and travel accounts. Thus, stories in which young men experience alien countries or situations, witness unfamiliar things, and then return home mimic Waugh’s personal lifestyle both structurally and thematically. *Scoop* drew in particular on his sojourn in Ethiopia, on the eve of the Italo-Ethiopian War in 1935-1936, as a war correspondent for the *Daily Mail*.

Unlike *Waugh in Abyssinia* (1935), the account of his time in Ethiopia that Waugh originally intended to write, *Scoop* achieved favorable results in terms of both sales and criticism.¹ Many book reviews described it as a humorous, entertaining satire on the method of the contemporary sensational journalism, although it is arguably no better than Waugh’s other novels. Critics have taken two distinctive approaches to dealing with the novel. Journalists or scholars with a journalism background, such as Philip Knightley and Michael B. Salwen, and William F. Deedes, who was a colleague of Waugh in Ethiopia, understandably tend to treat it as a testimony to contemporary journalistic conditions, examine the validity of its satirical representations, and find models for Waugh’s depictions

in the real world.² Their research has revealed several facts underlying the fictional representations that, for one of them, *Scoop* turns out to be “actually a piece of straight reportage, thinly disguised as a novel to protect the author from libel actions” (Knightley 187).

On the other hand, literary critics discuss the novel in terms of structure and themes common to Waugh's novels, as well as its representations of journalism. Interestingly, not a few of them praise *Scoop* for its structural technique. For example, Derek Verschoyle expressed admiration for “how intricately [Waugh's novels including *Scoop*] are organised” (Stannard 200), and Rose Macaulay complimented *Scoop*'s “ingenious plot” (Stannard 202). More recently, Slater provided further complimentary explication: “Much of Waugh's appeal lies in his novels' apparent anarchic disorder. Yet the illusory chaos is coherently and significantly arranged. Every disorderly element has its appointed place. *Scoop* offers an outstanding illustration of these techniques” (98). William Boyd praised *Scoop* as Waugh's “real masterwork,” saying that it “has a classical and deeply satisfying shapeliness” (610). While its skillful structure is generally applauded, the significance, however, of this circular plot involving an innocent young man has not been fully understood.

Apparently, *Scoop* is closer to *Decline and Fall* than Waugh's other novels from the structural point of view. However, its circular plot is not a mere rehash of the earlier work; rather, there are significant differences between them, which convey the change or progress that Waugh accomplished through writing his four preceding novels. Moreover, *Scoop* exhibits aspects of Waugh's creative attitude that will carry over into his later novels. To bring these features into clear focus, this study will analyze the circular plot involving an innocent young man in *Scoop*, as well as other features of the novel, in comparison with Waugh's other works, particularly *Decline and Fall*.

1. Circularity of plot and an innocent young man

The plot of *Decline and Fall* is a prototypical example of Waugh's circular plots with an innocent young man as protagonist. Paul Pennyfeather is drawn into the world from a secluded and tranquil life for an unfair reason and passes through various experiences before returning to his original situation, where he resumes living the same life as before. This development is an inversion of the progressive linearity in plot, which is typical of a *Bildungsroman*. Contrary to most *Bildungsroman* protagonists, Paul is treated as lightly as his name suggests; his interior activities are barely described, so that the feelings and thoughts underlying his actions remain unrecognizable. The narrative does not aim to

represent a realistic person or a round character, as the narrator boldly reveals at the middle of the story. Instead, the novel farcically exposes the wickedness and absurdity of the world as witnessed through Paul's eyes.

The reason for launching Paul into his succession of adventures is rather simple: because his tie is mistaken for that of the Bollinger Club, he becomes the victim of the drunken vulgarities of upperclassmen, is debagged on the premises of his university, and is unjustly expelled for misconduct. In contrast, William Boot in *Scoop* is sent to Ishmaelia as a war correspondent through a rationalized, albeit somewhat incredible, series of events involving a complicated succession of mishandlings and mistaken identity. Unlike Paul's interior activities, William's activities are described in some detail: readers learn his apprehension about losing his job as a column writer, his horror about going to London, his indisposition to becoming a war correspondent, and his ultimate rejection of this role. After having achieved successful realistic descriptions of the internal aspects of characters in *A Handful of Dust*, Waugh continues to represent people realistically in *Scoop*.

Whereas the story line of *Decline and Fall* comprises unconnected events linked "with an amazing cohesiveness" (190), as a character puts it, events and episodes in *Scoop* are more deliberately arranged. A mysterious Mr. Baldwin shares a flight with William early in the story and reappears later to help capturing a big scoop and explain some enigmas behind the incidents reported. Short passages describing Jocelyn Hitchcock's surreptitious acts are embedded in the text so skillfully that curiosity about the truth increases gradually until the excitement of revelation reaches its zenith. Episodes are thus not only connected more closely but also plotted in a manner much like that of a detective story.³

There are still more points worth observing from a structural point of view. Mr. Salter's trip to Boot Magna is a reversal of William's expedition to London in terms of both spatial and thematic meaning. When William is called to the company office to receive his assignment as a war correspondent, he trembles in the urban environment and faces mistreatment from Mr. Salter, full of raw and ridiculous prejudices against country people. However, it is Mr. Salter's turn to feel profound horror when he visits William in his country home in order to keep him with the company. Moreover, William barely escapes being knighted and attending Lord Copper's banquet for the same reason—i.e., mistaken identity—that gets him sent to Ishmaelia. These parallel episodes are placed symmetrically within the first and third parts of the novel, displaying Waugh's advanced skill in structuring a story.

Waugh's circular plot involving an innocent young man is regarded as a parody either of

the *Bildungsroman* or of picaresque novels. Leaving aside the question as to which appellation is more appropriate, Waugh's novels adopt, with important modifications, the typical themes belonging to those genres. Like the protagonist of a *Bildungsroman* or a picaresque novel, William Boot confronts things with which he is unfamiliar: London, Ishmaelia, journalism, love, and money. These things no more affect his life and personality than Paul's, but William, unlike Paul, displays a tangible emotional response to events around him.

Before his sudden change of lifestyle, William lives in the country seat of Boot Magna with his older family members and has minimal intercourse with the outside world. He writes articles on animals and plants for "Lush Places," a biweekly column in the *Daily Beast* (which is published by the Megalopolitan, a competitive newspaper company owned by Lord Copper), but he has never visited the company office or met the staff. He still uses ink pens in the era of typewriters and submits his columns by mail. Boot Magna gave up its telephone service at the outbreak of the First World War to cut costs, and it has not been renewed. Likewise, deliveries of telegrams are quite rare. Boot Magna is thus secluded not only spatially but in terms of its interaction with the media. However, a telegram—a medium often used to communicate bad news in Waugh's novels—summons William to London.

William expresses extreme reluctance to go to London and vainly resists the fate of giving up his seclusion. When offered a generous salary and expense account to go to Ishmaelia, he tries to refuse, insisting that he wants nothing but "to keep [his] job in *Lush Places* and go on living at home" (33). He is also concerned about what will happen to his column when he "start[s] writing about sandstorms and lions and whatever they have in Ishmaelia" (31). He thus endeavors desperately to cling to his preferred writing role and to life in Boot Magna with his family. However, since he will be fired if he does not go to Ishmaelia, he has no choice but to obey.

Even after heading for Ishmaelia, he still resists journalism. As William is not accustomed to cable transmissions, he cannot interpret the first telegram from his company by himself. He eventually succeeds in grasping its meaning with the aid of Corker, another correspondent on the same boat. Corker turns out to be a helpful colleague, lecturing William on the realities of journalism and on how to communicate using telegrams. Despite Corker's assistance, William remains unenthusiastic about correspondent work. When they arrive at Jacksonburg by railway, they find that the goods wagon carrying their luggage has

disappeared. Contrary to other journalists, who are bemoaning their losses, William alone feels a sense of relief “as though, on a warm day, he had suddenly shed an enormous, fur-line motoring-coat” (85), because the cleft sticks that he bought to conceal the news inside have been lost.

Nevertheless, as he pursues his work as a correspondent, he gradually develops an interest in the job. When riding back to his hotel by taxi from the Legation quarter with a piece of information that he considers highly significant, William feels excited about being a journalist:

In the last few days he had caught something of the professional infection of Corker and his colleagues, had shared their consternation at Hitchcock’s disappearance, had rejoiced quietly when Shumble’s scoop was killed. Now *he* had something under his hat; a tip-off straight from headquarters, news of high international importance. His might be the agency which would avert or precipitate a world war; he saw his name figuring in future history books ‘... *the Ishmaelite crisis of that year whose true significance was only realized and exposed through the resources of an English journalist, William Boot ...*’ Slightly dizzy with this prospect, as with the wine he had drunk and the appalling rigours of the drive, he arrived at the Liberty to find the lights out in the lounge and all his colleagues in bed. (101)

William awakens Corker in their room to talk about his news, but is disappointed to find it dismissed flatly because Corker believes that it will attract no attention. William’s internal response to his initial discovery nevertheless shows that his experiences in Ishmaelia have affected his attitude toward journalism.

But William’s enthusiasm does not last long, partially because his inability to communicate in cablese does not allow him to achieve any accomplishments. When the journalists secure permission to travel to the interior of Ishmaelia, they rush to report the news to their companies. While Corker writes the succinct message “PERMISSION GRANTED LAKUWARD,” William writes in more ordinary prose and informs the recipients of his feelings: “THEY HAVE GIVEN US PERMISSION TO GO TO LAKU AND EVERYONE IS GOING BUT THERE IS NO SUCH PLACE AM I TO GO TOO SORRY TO BE A BORE BOOT” (120). The subsequent telegram exchange also shows his lack of progress in cablese. The *Beast* sends him this message:

UNPROCEED LAKUWARD STOP AGENCIES COVERING PATRIOTIC FRONT
STOP REMAIN CONTACTING CUMREDS STOP NEWS EXYOU UNRECEIVED
STOP DAILY HARD NEWS ESSENTIALEST STOP REMEMBER RATES
SERVICE CABLES ONE ETSIX PER WORD BEAST. (121)

William answers:

NO NEWS AT PRESENT THANKS WARNING ABOUT CABLING PRICES BUT
IVE PLENTY MONEY LEFT AND ANYWAY WHEN I OFFERED TO PAY
WIRELESS MAN SAID IT WAS ALL RIGHT PAID OTHER END RAINING HARD
HOPE ALL WELL ENGLAND WILL CABLE AGAIN IF ANY NEWS. (121)

These telegrams demonstrate that he was completely unqualified to be a war correspondent; moreover, the juxtaposition of William's prose style and cablese creates a battle between the two, which are highly distinct from each other. As a self-avowed craftsman of English prose and a skillful stylist, Waugh must not have liked cablese, which is ungrammatical, full of jargon, and too truncated to be readable. William's inability to use cablese thus indicates Waugh's rejection of the style of correspondents.

There is another parallel with Waugh's personal life here: just as the work of a war correspondent was completely out of William's element, Waugh also lacked key qualities required for the job. As he admitted in a letter to Laura Herbert, he could not handle a typewriter well. Moreover, he did not perform effectively relative to other war correspondents or achieve any results that would satisfy his employer. These factors influence his creation of an inefficient war correspondent as his fictional resemblance. At the same time, Waugh became frustrated when other correspondents obtained a scoop, and he had a bad reputation in Addis Ababa, partially due to his book *Black Mischief* (1932).⁴ He was so offended by this rejection that he made a fictional reprisal in *Scoop*. He lets William achieve a big scoop with the help of *deus ex machina* Mr. Baldwin, who clarifies the facts behind what is happening in Ishmaelia and kindly helps William elaborate the news. Although William receives notice from the *Daily Beast* (which parallels Waugh's own recall) in the act of composing the telegram, he completes the scoop, which enables him to return with a great reputation.

William returns to London and finally, to his starting point of Boot Magna. Unlike Paul, he

has acquired some experience and decides to go home by himself. In the current issue of the *Daily Beast*, he finds his column written by someone else but still under his name and picture, narrating proudly about his experience in Ishmaelia. At this point, he "could read no more. Overcome with shame he turned towards the train" (185). William felt disgusted with the deceitful situation in which he is applauded as a hero thanks to an achievement for which Mr. Baldwin was actually responsible. He finds it equally intolerable that a newspaper article written by someone else is passed off as his own writing. He subsequently expresses intense repulsion in response to Mr. Salter's efforts to retain him in journalism, confessing in a halting way that: "I've felt an ass for weeks. Ever since I went to London. I've been treated like an ass" (210). William expresses strong antipathy toward journalism and goes home without renewing his contract. Thus, his return to his starting point is a voluntary act based on his own decision.

2. Ordeals with father figures, women, and money

Waugh also parodies other elements of the *Bildungsroman* genre besides its progressive linearity in plot; these elements involve ordeals with father figures, women, and money, which Jerome Buckley defines as essential themes of the genre.⁵ *Decline and Fall* initially appears to lack the ordeal of the father, since its protagonist has outlived his father and has no surrogate whom he must overcome, but Waugh renders this theme differently. Informed that Paul has been expelled from university for bad behavior, his guardian construes the will to suit himself and stops giving his ward any allowances from the bequeathed money. Instead, the self-serving guardian buys his own daughter clothes using that money so that she can get engaged. Supervisors at the college let the students' wantonness go unchecked and enjoy receiving fines from them. Thus, Paul, although he does not have to deal with paternal authority, is exploited by the cunningness of other elders who should be caring for him and supervising the university students. This situation seems to suggest the absence or deterioration of paternal authority, as one critic interprets it.⁶

The paternal authority is absent in *Scoop* as well. The newspaper magnate Lord Copper is an authoritative figure, but his depiction only highlights his dictatorial and whimsical behavior. On the other hand, the ordeals of women and money are rendered in *Scoop* as well as in *Decline and Fall*. William experiences love with a woman, Kätchen, for the first time, suffering through an agonizing relationship with her. With a flood of correspondents arriving at Jacksonburg, the city and the hotels become so crowded that William moves to

another hotel. He meets Kätchen again there, and his romantic relationship with her starts in a childish manner. After the other journalists leave for Laku, he goes out for a picnic with Kätchen. He quickly becomes deeply attached to her:

‘Kätchen, I love you. Darling, darling Kätchen, I love you ...’

He meant it. He was in love. It was the first time in twenty-three years; he was suffused and inflated and tipsy with love. It was believed at Boot Magna, and jocularly commented upon from time to time, that an attachment existed between him and a neighbouring Miss Caldicote; it was not so. He was a stranger alike to the bucolic jaunts of the hayfield and the dark and costly expeditions of his Uncle Theodore. For twenty-three years he had remained celibate and heart-whole; landbound. Now for the first time he was far from shore, submerged among deep waters, below wind and tide, where huge trees raised their spongy flowers and monstrous things without fur or feather, wing or foot, passed silently, in submarine twilight. A lush place. (126-27)

William’s love is described metaphorically as leaving safe ground and wading into strange waters, and Kätchen assumes the image of a nymph beckoning a mesmerized lover. When Kätchen first appears before William, she is soaking wet, wearing a raincoat and rubber boots, and carrying an umbrella in her hand. William has now fallen fervently in love with this precarious water fairy.

Kätchen is not a so-called round character but only a device that Waugh uses to play with William’s ardent love. Although less impressive than her predecessors in Waugh’s novels, such as Margot, Nina in *Vile Bodies*, or Brenda in *A Handful of Dust*, she is also a *femme fatale* who tortures the protagonist. William’s love rises to the point where he cannot help but make a proposal to her; however, she is always dodging the subject, finally vanishing in front of him. Thus, he tries vainly to pursue love with a woman, just as he leaves his secure home for a strange and dangerous foreign country.

William’s infatuation with Kätchen does not seem to be a substantial, constituent element of the plot. One senses that the progress of the story is hindered by her presence. But at the same time, the story deeply involves her: she forces William to buy the gold ore deposited by her husband, William’s desire to be with her holds him back from going to Laku with his colleagues, and the information that she procures in the market leads to William’s

big scoop. Moreover, Kätchen plays a role in introducing the element of money into the story.

Kätchen’s sponging on William for money begins when she makes him buy the specimens of gold ore for 20 pounds. When he feels at a loss for news, she offers to help in gathering information for 100 pounds a week. She also demands more money to buy clothing and accessories at the shop owned by her informant. William complies with her demands since he is seeking to win her love, but she never consents and leaves with her husband in William’s boat, which she intends to sell when it is useless. Furthermore, she writes to William to ask for money at the end of the novel. Kätchen thus behaves as a cruel woman who takes advantage of her infatuated lover for money.

The theme of money appears repeatedly in Waugh’s novels. For example, in *Decline and Fall*, Paul is determined to refuse the offer of compensation from a member of the Bollinger Club who pulled down his trousers. He insists proudly that declining the money testifies that he is a gentleman, because English gentlemen do not accept “irregular perquisite” (44). However, when it turns out that his colleague has sent an answer of acceptance without his permission, Paul feigns indignation but is inwardly satisfied. It is not surprising that he should be happy to receive the money, since his guardian has forsaken him and his salary has been reduced. Although we do not see much of Paul’s inner side in *Decline and Fall*, this episode clearly reveals his desire for money.

The story of Adam Fenwick-Symes, the protagonist of *Vile Bodies*, is also deeply intertwined with issues regarding money. Adam is forced into a contract with unreasonable salary terms, which leads to the turbulent series of events at the beginning of the novel, because his biography (for which money was paid in advance) is confiscated to be burned by customs personnel. Then, he wins a thousand pounds while gambling and feels happy, believing that the money will enable him to marry his fiancée. However, he takes up an offer from a strange major to further increase his winnings by betting on horse racing, but instead loses his money. He is also given a check for one thousand pounds—which turns out to be counterfeit the next morning. Adam searches in vain for the major and eventually runs out of money, to the extent that he cannot afford to pay even for his room and decides to sell his fiancée to rival lovers for rent money. Due to his lack of money, Adam ends up losing the person most precious to him.

This obsessive repetition of money themes in Waugh’s novels reflects the author’s own need for more money. In his early days as a writer, Waugh’s economic circumstances were

inadequate to sustain his lifestyle. He continually had to earn money by writing journalistic articles and serializing his novels, and this constant concern for money found expression in his novels. Although transactions between William and Kätchen are the most noticeable examples of the money theme in *Scoop*, another episode also mirrors Waugh's desire for money. When William returns to London from Ishmaelia, he is offered a lifetime contract at 2,000 pounds a year. He signs the contract, although he has no intention to work as a war correspondent again. If he engaged in this unethical act intentionally, then this signing would prove that he had become shrewd through his experience. However, because he appears to be the same simple-minded, innocent person as before, he is not likely to act in such a manner. Whether the payment will be executed in the future is not clarified either as the end of the novel depicts William writing an article for the "Lush Places" column at his home. His acceptance of the contract without intending to fulfill the requirement does not seem to evince any personal development or call his morality into question.

Possibly, Waugh's need for money again prompted him to make his alter ego, William, sign such a significant contract. Since his divorce from Evelyn Gardner, Waugh was living an unsettled life and was far from well off. Besides, when writing *Scoop*, he was in even greater need of money to prepare for his second marriage. However, *Edmund Campion* (1935) and *Waugh in Abyssinia* (1936) sold poorly. The favorable critical reception granted to the anthology *Mr Loveday's Little Outing and Other Sad Stories* (1936) did not boost its sales figures in England, and the results were worse in America (Hastings 349). An edition of Waugh's *Collected Works* issued by Chapman & Hall and a sixpenny Penguin Books' paperback version of *Decline and Fall* published in 1937 improved his financial condition, but "as in the past the bulk of his income still had to be earned from journalism" (Hastings 350). Waugh's repeated return to the theme of money problems thus mirrors his actual life.

3. Structural ingenuity

We have examined many similarities between *Scoop* and Waugh's earlier works in terms of their rendering of typical *Bildungsroman* themes. As already noted, however, William's decision to return to his original situation, as a columnist living in a country house, contains ample description of his emotional response, unlike the case of Paul Pennyfeather. Waugh also gives more of a twist to the ending of *Scoop*. In the last chapter of Book Three, Lord Copper hosts a banquet to celebrate the return of William, the *Daily Beast's* hero correspondent. The ceremony proceeds in a festive and farcical manner, climaxing with

Lord Copper's self-satisfying speech. Although nobody in the audience pays attention to him, he offers a toast for the future. Thereafter, the narrator describes the future of some of the characters, sounding festive and optimistic in tone. This mood seems appropriate as the conclusion of a comedy, but the narrator brusquely gives very short concluding comments about some characters. This disproportion is echoed elsewhere in the novel. It is true that *Scoop* has a carefully constructed structure in some ways; however, the major sections and chapters lack proportional balance, to such an extent as to leave the impression that the novel was not well planned.

To resolve this issue, a look at Waugh's process of writing *Scoop* is helpful. In a letter to Laura Herbert in October 1935, Waugh revealed that he had gotten the idea for *Scoop*. Although he complained that "all those adventures I came for will not happen," and that "there is no chance of making a serious war book as I hoped," he believed that he could "make a funny novel." He returned to London in September 1936 (Waugh, *Diaries* 409) and had just finished *Waugh in Abyssinia* when he started to write *Scoop* on October 15. The entry in his diary on that day stated that he "made a good start with the first page of a novel describing Diana's [i.e., Mrs. Stitch's] early morning" (Waugh, *Diaries* 409).

Waugh continued writing, but the work on *Scoop* did not progress as quickly as that of his previous novels. Most likely, his life circumstances did not permit him to concentrate on writing. Actually, he noted in his diary on February 4, 1937 that *Scoop* "has good material but shaky structure." The following months included several important events such as house hunting and his second marriage. Furthermore, Waugh discovered that he had a memory disorder, as he wrote in his diary on November 12. The novel did not "tak[e] some shape" until November 23. He kept writing as 1938 began, but his work was still disturbed, as his entry for January 10, 1938 indicates: "Work on *Scoop* going slowly [sic], with infinite interruptions and distractions." Writing *Scoop* took longer than any of Waugh's previous novels; it was finally published on May 7, 1938, or more than two-and-a-half years after he received his initial burst of inspiration. Possibly, this long period of writing affected the proportions of the product. Waugh spent the happiest moments of the second marriage in those days, as he noted in the diary during the honeymoon: "Lovely day, lovely house, lovely wife, great happiness" (Waugh, *Diaries*, Portofino, April 18, 1937). However, his repeated distractions from work likely did not positively influence the novel, and his experience of memory disorder did not help. Waugh's memory disorder most substantially impacted his writing of *The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold* (1957), but it might also have affected the

composition of *Scoop*. We cannot know precisely when each portion of the novel was written, but the sense of an ill-planned novel presumably reflects the busyness of Waugh's life.

Nevertheless, the last passage of the novel, which portrays William's future, is highly elaborate. William is described writing a new article for "Lush Places" in his room:

... the waggons lumber in the lane under their golden glory of harvested sheaves, he wrote; maternal rodents pilot their furry brood through the stubble; ...

He laid down his pen. *Lush Places* need not be finished until tomorrow evening.

The rest of the family had already gone up. William took the last candle from the table and put out the lamps in the hall. Under the threadbare carpet the stair-boards creaked as he mounted to his room.

Before getting into bed he drew the curtain and threw open the window. Moonlight streamed into the room.

Outside the owls hunted maternal rodents and their furry brood. (222)

He stops writing, leaving the article unfinished because it is late at night, and he does not have to finish it until the following evening. Now that he is not a war correspondent, he is not under tight deadlines due to the company or the presence of competing journalists. Instead, he can take the time necessary to perfect his column. It also seems as if William intends to prolong the pleasure that he feels when writing about his favorite matters. The moonlight streaming into the room reflects optimism and complacency, a happy mood retained from the banquet in his honor. However, while this picture of his future apparently suggests that he will live a happy life indulging in his favorite work, the closing sentence checks such optimism. Although William describes a peaceful picture of "maternal rodents [piloting] their furry brood through the stubble," the narrator reveals the harsh reality of "the owls [hunting] maternal rodents and their furry brood." This inversion of William's vision suggests that his happiness will not last forever, as critics who have analyzed the passage concur.⁷

However comfortable Boot Magna is for William, "decay, rather than change, was characteristic of the immediate prospect" (17) of the house, as well as its dwellers. A bright future is not anticipated for the estate. Knowledge of the workings of the garden's water system was lost fifteen years ago upon the death of the old man who possessed it. It is

probable that the remaining inhabitants will die one after another in the years ahead, leaving Boot Magna forgotten. If William indulgently continues to write "Lush Places," even though doing so gives him more pleasure than anything else, he himself cannot avoid this course of decline alongside his country house. Thus, William's seemingly happy future ironically foretells his doom.

This ironic twist partially reflects the "general anxiety and distress" (Waugh, Preface, ix) of the time, as international political tensions were increasing during the years prior to the Second World War. The dilapidated figure of Boot Magna exemplifies the grim reality of country houses at that time and the future that Waugh foresaw would befall them. In addition, Waugh's esthetic predisposition toward satirical comedy and black humor probably did not allow him to conclude the novel with a purely happy ending. Moreover, its irony is aimed not only at William but also at Waugh himself. It suggests subtly that, if Waugh himself should become complacent about the contemporary circumstances of his private life and his career as a novelist, he would not attain any improvement.

Conclusion

William's return to Boot Magna to resume writing *Lush Places* among his family means a happy retreat from the city, journalism, and writing cablese. This life change parallels the author's situation when he was writing *Scoop*. Waugh had also resigned as a war correspondent (a post for which he was equally ill-suited), and he had recently acquired a country seat of Piers Court, a second married life, and the status of a country gentleman, all of which he had long desired. These changes provided him not only with his happiest moments ever but also with the resources that he exploited to write the novel and create its plot and ambience. He also reverted to his favorite device of a circular plot with an innocent young man, though not merely as a rehash.

While *Scoop* retains the same style of slapstick comedy as that of *Decline and Fall*, it has a more complex and deliberate structure, and its episodes are linked in a more reasonable manner. William is an innocent man like Paul Pennyfeather, but his character is represented in realistic, understandable fashion; his interior life, feelings, and thoughts are described more graphically. This approach to realism foreshadows Waugh's shift from his earlier novels, absurd and fantastic comedies with flat characters, to his later novels with more intricate, traditional, and realistic narratives. Actually, upon settling in Piers Court, he enjoyed rural life in his newly purchased retreat, as William does in Boot Magna, but he

quickly lost his interest in country society. Additionally, in creating this narrative, Waugh, unlike William, did not indulge in rendering his familiar themes simply in the same manner as before. For the author, a return to lush places marked not a regression but a new beginning as Waugh entered his next phase of narrative creation.

Notes

- * This paper is a revised and expanded version of my previous paper “Return to the Lush Place: Waugh’s Happy Retreat in *Scoop*,” read at the conference “Evelyn Waugh and His Circles: Reading and Editing the Complete Works” held at College Court, University of Leicester on 24–26 April, 2015.
1. Early reviews compiled by Stannard show that *Scoop* was received positively upon publication; see also Salwen 14.
 2. “The Real Scoop 1935–1936” (Knightley 185–205) reveals much of the background of *Scoop*; Salwen’s elaborated work, including some previously published papers by the same author, presents detailed information on the history and politics of the time when *Scoop* was written, as well as the realities of journalism at that time; chapter 7 of Deedes (102–17) is devoted to an explanation of *Scoop*.
 3. Blayac examines the elements of detective stories in *Scoop*.
 4. See Salwen 155.
 5. Buckley offers detailed definitions of the English *Bildungsroman* in the introductory chapter to his now-classic study of this genre (1–27).
 6. See Heath 66.
 7. See for example Heath 138.

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Abstract

Evelyn Waugh’s fifth novel, *Scoop*, is a thoroughgoing burlesque of contemporary journalism, drawing on his experiences as a war correspondent for the *Daily Mail* on the eve of the Italo-Ethiopian War in 1935-1936. While the novel has enjoyed general popularity, with many critics praising its structural technique, it has not received as much critical attention as his other works. However, to fully understand the novel’s significance and its place within Waugh’s corpus, one must focus on its structural characteristics. This study examines several features of Waugh’s writing—including his circular plot, an innocent young man as protagonist, and his treatment of father figures, relations with women, and money issues—that represent ironic treatment of themes common in the *Bildungsroman* genre. Waugh’s approach to these themes in *Scoop* is compared with that in his earlier works, particularly *Decline and Fall*, as well as to his personal experience, in order to gain insight into his attitude in creating narratives.