THE BRIGHT YOUNG PEOPLE
CHAPTER II

The Bright Young People

The phenomenon of the Bright Young People constitutes a very significant aspect in the study of the post-war malaise. The war to end war was followed by a different kind of war in another front, in the society, of which the elders who fought the war were unaware. Political peace was restored with complacency but unsettling tremors were recorded in the social seismometer which threatened the confidence and complacency of the elders. Paradoxical though it seemed, the new crisis, the legacy of the successful war appeared rather bitter and at the same time too formidable to be subdued by any material force whatsoever. A new vista of uncertainties was opened up which showed the petulant youth decrying all pre-war leanings as sham and unreal and the middle-aged straining every nerve to keep young. Thus the shifting landmarks and the dissolving perspectives of the early decades of the twentieth century brought into its ken a new vision of reality - the loom of the post-war youth popularly known as the Bright Young People or the Angry Young Men.

Although the phenomenon of the post-war youth was basically intellectual and moral, they in their topsyturvy shaped as a violent social force challenging the entire set of old values. However, there are reasons to suppose that the section of the youth known as the Bright Young People or the Angry Young Men was only a very small part of the toiling humanity, but the contemporary writers saw in them the agony of the age - the tragic failure of the decade. In their cynical gaiety, amorality,
in their intellectual curiosity and maimed spirituality the post-war writers saw the melting away of the ancient world of faith and fortitude, of placidity and promise. Richard Aldington's *Death of a Hero* proclaims how the war had been fatal to a whole generation either morally or spiritually or both. The glory brought from the battle field proved very shortlived.

It was a common feeling among the fighting youth that it was fought for none of their own reasons. As a matter of fact, their approach to life after the war was tainted by agnosticism and cynical rejection of the conventionally valid ways of life and values. Disillusionment of their romantic visions of life turned their love into disgust and faith into distrust.

However, in the phenomenon of the post-war youth their cant and callow the contemporary writers found an eddy, their vantage ground for social criticism. In fact, however the topicality of the problem provided the writers a very effective speculum in order to express their own notions and feelings. The satires of Wyndham Lewis, the novels of Aldous Huxley and the plays of Noel Coward and Osborne are more about their own attitude to life and their notions about the post-war society than about the Angry Young Men. As an intellectual movement against the turgidity and tedium of the elders the looming youth presaged shadowy change and transition in the inner shape of the things. But the dissident writers with their progressive pose saw the issue as a militant force.

In fact they were in search of a common appellation in order to express their own mood, their disillusionment and cynicism. No one was perhaps so angry as the sensitive writers of the decade were.
In the phenomenon of the Bright Young People Evelyn Waugh studies at once the tragic and the comic situation of life of the modern youth, their doom and despiration, not indeed the mood of the Angry Young Men of Osborne, Noel Coward, Hambrey or Kingsley Amis. Unlike the radically progressive youths of the angry generation the Bright Young People of Waugh are less petulant and do not possess half of their self-consciousness. Osborne's Jimmy Porter in Look Back in Anger with his angry tirades against the social ills, his sentimentality and self-pity, or the characters of Noel Coward, the pitiful seekers after a good time drinking and flirting to ward off their tedium do possess an inner life and a vision. Dixon 'the Lucky Jim' in Kingsley Amis's Lucky Jim lambastes rather cruelly the hypocrisy of the academic world, their contradictions. In fact, the Angry Young Men of these writers are seen as rebels rejecting the values of the past and affirming a vision of their own. On the other hand the Bright Young People of Waugh describe only a state, a limbo, in their dizzying gaiety, a self-defeating strategy.

In his observation of the cant and callow of the modern youth Waugh is not original anyway but he is more topical and morally consistent. In his travesty of the life of the motley youth Waugh has been trying to focus the character of the age, its bestic and nervy ways of life when all rational values were allowed to blow into the air. He exaggerates the fantastic dance of the human marionettes swirling away from the reality, but Waugh is never inconsistent or away from his inner vision and motivation. Therefore, we never find his Bright Young People, the vile allergy of the nervy 20's
tending to compromise with the established orders. In the pavilion of the Bright Young People Waugh has snapped the doom of the faithless civilization, the legacy of a spiritually damned society in its cause and effect relationships. The seemingly absurd characters in the pavilion of the modern youth proclaim the ultimate gain of a materialistic society.

In the satires of Waugh the phenomenon of the Bright Young People is seen as an aspect of the post-war malaise and its dilemma in the context of the sophisticated society of the 20's. In this community of the Bright Young People Waugh has found his niche, a strategy to bring into focus the social mores. In fact, the chaotic youth in their pell-mell provide only a cleavage for the satirist's critical censure of the macabre world of the modern youth and the undosings and inner proclivities of their elders. The Bright Young People in the satires of Waugh is the inner picture of the social morality, its turbidity, in a state of advanced decadence. His exaggerations and satirical nuances are consistently meaningful.

In Vile Bodily Waugh's version of the modern youth, its nervy and hectic ways of life, its fantastic capers and dizzying gaiety have found its cogent expression. In the traumatic world of this satire the phenomenon of the modern youth is seen in its social perspective - in the post-war malaise when the elders failed to live up to the basic standard of the postulates of their social hierarchy and were gradually exposed to overt degeneracy and moral turpitude. Waugh's satirical nudge, his keen eyes for the most revealing situations of life and his comic perspicacities have unsettled the dazzling facade of the upper-class society of the 20's.

The war of 1914-18 did not however initiate the collapse
of the society, it only exposed its dissolving boundaries.
brought into focus the fatal hiatus that fostered the callous
and apathy of the elders. The familiar frontiers of the society
immersed into topsyturvy. As Lawrence observed that it was
in 1915 the old world ended and the spirit of old London collapsed.
The city of London, according to him became the vortex of
broken passions, lusts, hopes, fears and horrors.

The world did not change after the war though it marked
the culmination of the general debasement of the bourgeois
society and its competitive economy. Growing distrusts and
disillusionment hastened the piling up of the social ugliness
and indecency in which Lawrence saw 'the real tragedy of England'.

In such a world of ugliness and incongruities the generation
of the trenches and those who grew to their manhood during the
20's played their parts in a tragic play though not tragically.

Truly, it was a great dilemma of human existence in the early
decades of the twentieth century when the incapacity and indolence
of both the neurotic young men of the modern times and the
apathetic elders failed to re-shape the society and to develop
an ethics, a new ethics to equate the inner tendencies and
votions. The old foundations of the society was broken.

The 20's were obviously heady and full of contrarities.
In the cult of the youth in the early decades of the century,
in their anger and anguish, in their thwarted ambition and
unheroic temper the writers have diagnosed the disease of the
age, its chaos and contradictions, though failed to suggest
a palliative, an anodyne. In fact, they shared the disillusionment
and cynicism of their angry young men, their dilemma. As a
result a cynical acceptance of the hierarchy of the social
life becomes so common—though in a partially improved state. Jim Dixon in Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim* accepts the status quo of Bertrand's society even as he is challenging it. He escapes the academic world only to return to a rich man's house as a well-paid sinecure. Jim's protest ends with a compromise. Similarly, Jimmy Porter in Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* and Nicky in Noel Coward's *Vortex* resolve their dilemma through reconciliation. Huxley's young men and women reject the decadent ways of life only either emotionally or intellectually. They cannot however break the inevitable cycle. Thus rejection and reconciliation leading to a kind of half-way living have determined the fate of the youth in modern fiction.

The Bright Young People of Waugh as they are depicted in *Vile Bodies* are a set of cosmopolitan human marionettes dancing through the pages in a festive mood and laughing away everything that pretends seriousness. They neither reject anything nor they reconcile; only they do not accept anything that is not in conformity with their own ways. In fact, the young people in *Vile Bodies* embody a state of mind, a mind in a state of emptiness. Unlike the angry youngmen in the contemporary fiction, the Bright Young People do not possess any inner life the existence of which distinguishes the heroes of Sartre and Camus and the angry youngmen of modern English fiction and plays. All the same, the seemingly crude and superficial youths provide a profoundly consistent meaning in the context of Waugh's satires.

In fact, the content and method in the satires of Waugh are determined by his ethical stance, his essentially Christian view of life. The theme of the fall of man in the mire and fury
of the life without Christ and his gradual recovery is depicted quite consistently through marked transitions. In *Vile Bodies* Waugh takes a step in advance in his satirical slant. The bizarre youths are seen in a limbo - a world without faith, without religion or any such spiritual or emotional affiliation.

In the dazzling kaleidoscope of the Mayfair group and its giddy whirls, in the hurried pace of the youth towards a dreary future where the erotic social parties and promiscuity, the vices and follies are endemic, Waugh senses the doom of the civilization, an imminent cataclysm. Thus the comic and the farce in *Vile Bodies* is tainted by a note of tragic consciousness. It is in reality an elegy on the disinherited youth of to-day. The brightness of the youth is only superficial and a deceiving tinsel. Beneath the capers and the dizziness of the youth in desperation, their swirling in the eddy, there is unsettling hollowness. The poise and poetry of the youth are lost in cocktail parties and the jazz music.

As specimens of dark proclivities of human passions and egotism the Bright Young People are both products and protagonists of chaos and profanity. In fact, the serried phalanx of the motley youth are seen in a state of immersed consciousness even of individuality. Known as social rackets they rally together in their night orgies and pristine adventures. They are a collective force, a manifestation of the pagan ways of life in the modern context. In the phenomenon of the Bright Young People Waugh has developed an idiom of criticism of the upper-class society of the 20's, its spiritual sterility and sacrilege.

In the uproarious life of the modern youth the comic and
and the farse are fused in such obis that the tragic iron
remains suspended unobtrusive. Verily, there lurks a tragic
consciousness at the core of the masabre life of the youth
though the characters are unaware of it or refuse to accept
it anyway even when the crash comes upon them. In Yile Bodies
Waugh has depicted a limbo where pain and pleasure, comedy
and tragedy and even life and death are meaningless. Runcible
dies a painful death without being pained. The experiences of
Adam, Nina and Chastity are equally painful though they refuse
to take it as such. A critic says:
"What is really so attractive and seductive about the Bright
young things, is their refusal to be tragic."

Waugh's vision of life provided the leaven of his satirical
speculum. The consciousness of a tragic failure of the moderns,
their rejection of faith in the eternal verities, remains at
the bottom of his satires, its gloss and panache. Father
Rothschild, the omniscient Jesuit is almost near the truth
in his statement.
"Don't you think," said Father Rothschild gently, "that perhaps
it is all in some way historical? I don't think people ever
want to lose their faith either in religion or anything else.
I know young people, but it seems to me that they are all
possessed with an almost fatal hunger for permanence. I think
all these divorces show that people are not content just to
muddle along now-a-days... And this word "bogus" they all use...
They won't make the best of bad job now-a-days. My private
school master used to say 'If a thing's worth doing at all, it's
worth doing well.' My Church has taught that in different words

for several centuries. But these young people have got hold of
another end of the stick; and for all we know it may be the
right one. They say, 'If thing's not worth doing well, it's
not worth doing at all.' It makes every thing very difficult
for them."

As a historical phenomenon the Bright Young People are
a shattering irony of contemporary civilization. Their anarchy
and nihilism reveal the sophisticated society of the decadent
bourgeois in a lagoon of perversities and disturbing incongruities.
In Vile Bodies the elders and the youths are seen vis-a-vis
in sequence of events in order to allow the basic issues, the
inadequacies of both the young and the old to come within
the focal distance. Travesty of life and manners in the satires
of Waugh does not however distort the inner visage of reality
or his vision. On the contrary, it makes a significant watershed
of his attitude to the world of his creation. Waugh maintains
a meticulous uniformity between his content and method in order
to establish the validity of his vision.

The younger protagonists in Vile Bodies are shown as
indecent and erotic in their social conduct and expressed
behaviour. In their desperation and irreverence Waugh tries
to make an autopsy of their mood, their affiliations. Although
in a state of eddying motion of their life the youth had only
"one thing left to rebel against the idea of mere decency"2
and they were totally lacking in any sense of the qualitative
values yet Waugh's insight into the deeper facts of life
provides them with an uncommon significance. The satirist's
sympathy for them makes everything about them, their overt
egotism and blasphemy, tolerable.

2. Evelyn Waugh: "The War and the Younger Generation", Spectator
(April 13, 1929), p. 571.
The disaffected people in *Vile Bodies*, the younger generation, do not pretend any serious pre-occupation or any concern with the life within other than an oppression with the immediate present mirrored in a series of pagan parties each appropriate to their mood and the milieu. The hectic and nervous social parties; the reckless drinking bouts and the hangovers in *Vile Bodies* are the symptoms of the diseased youths of the 20's, their rootlessness and rabidity, their profanity and pain. The hysterical life and the fortuitous death in *Vile Bodies* satisfy Waugh's notion of a doomed world, a Christian's view of Hell, the land of the deads. In *Vile Bodies* there is only death, either spiritual or physical and no stirring into consciousness. But the comic and the tragic, the life and the death are punched in such a manner that no single impression takes the root or finds intensity. Waugh reveals only his view of such a world and introduces his readers to it for a feeling experience.

The macabre death of Agatha Runcible is a poignant irony of the erotic and inconsequential life of the modern youth. In her death-bed Waugh has rendered a clinical operation of their plethoric life and preoccupations. The agony and ecstasy of the unhappy generation is revealed in the delirium of Miss Runcible. In her delirium she sees the vision of the fatal motor race, a tragic-comic phantasmagoria.

"There was rarely more than a quarter of a mile of the black motor road to be seen at one time. It unrolled like a length of cinema film. At the edge was confusion; fog spinning fast; 'Faster, faster,' they shouted above the roar of the engine.
The road rose suddenly and the white car soared up the sharp ascent without slackening speed. At the summit of the hill there was a corner. Two cars had crept up, one on each side, and were closing in, 'Faster' cried Miss Runcible, 'faster'.

In her craze for speed Waugh presages the nemesis of the modern ways and its tyranny. Runcible is defeated and ruined yet she cries in hysterical impatience, 'Faster. Faster.' The nurse stopped her shouting with the stab of the hypodermic needle.

'There's nothing to worry about, dear...nothing at all...nothing.' Miss Runcible, the epitome of the bright young mood, lived a fast and died fast. There was of course nothing to worry in the hurried pace of the consumptive world of the Bright Young People. This tint of nothingness in the midst of chaos and confusion brings into focus the inward tragedy of the life of the modern youth.

The crescendo of life and death of the modern youth is expressed with uncommon pith in the death of Miss Runcible. The cocktail party at the death-bed of Runcible is a tragic irony of the obsession and innocence of the Bright Young People. Not only the band of Miles Malpractice and Archie Schwert is disregardful of death's cold touch, death itself has lost its bitter sting with them. They take everything jestingly. Dying Runcible, the paragon of their cult, does not excite in them any emotional response. Paradoxically it provided them an occasion for a drinking bout.

"So soon there was quite a party, and Simon appeared from next door in a very gay dressing gown, and they played the new records and Miss Runcible moved her bandaged limbs under the

Moribund Runcible tries to reach out of the tedium of death with feverish frivolity and cynical jest.

"Indeed, Miss Runcible was already showing signs of strain. She was sitting bolt upright in bed, smiling deliriously, and bowing her bandaged head to imaginary visitors.

'Darling', she said. 'How too divine...how are you?... and how are you?... how angelic of you all to come...only you must be careful not to fall out at the corners...oah, just missed it. There goes the nasty Italian car...I wish I knew which thing was which in this car... darling, do try and drive more straight, my sweet, you were nearly into me then... Faster...'

Through the dilution of the tragic and the comic effects in their crescendo of life and death Waugh has developed his ambivalence of attitude for the Bright Young People. In her derision at the death-bed Waugh testifies the growing signs of human breakdown and the loss of human values and vitality. The death of Runcible marks the swan song of the amoral ways of life of the Bright Young People. Sister Briggs sees in her the fatal weakness of the moderns,— their impatience and excitement.

"Sister Briggs, over her evening cup of cocoa, said she would be sorry to lose that case. Such a nice bright girl — but terribly excitable."

In *Vile Bodies* life is lived in an atmosphere of gruesome rapidity in which human values and emotional leanings are allowed to blow into the air. Agatha Runcible's disappearance from the track of the race was received with cynical jest. When the announcement said that the English Plunket Bowne car of

1. Ibid., p. 188.  
2. Ibid., p. 191.  
3. Ibid., p. 191.
Agatha Runcible went out of control Miles was excited, though almost in glee:

'My dear, that's lucky for me,' said Miles. 'A really good story my second day on the paper. This ought to do me good with the Exagger - very rich-making.'

The theme of heartlessness of the modern cosmopolitans and their blatant morbidity develop in an amoral atmosphere of disarray gaiety. Waugh's occasional hints are revealing. Miles' injured friend oblivious of Runcible showed anxiety for his ruined car.

'I think it's very heartless of him,' said Adam. 'He ought to be worried about Agatha. It only shows...

In a jestingly cynical manner Miles replied, 'Motor men are heartless.'

The collapse of the society is seen in the immersion of human values, in its regard for life. The tragedy of the Bright Young People is traced in their ultimate surrender to the causality of the destiny, its inevitable ways. In Runcible's death, in Nina's cynical surrender to the ways of the vile society and in Adam's apathy Waugh has shown very carefully the tragic failure of the modern youths and their ways.

The Bright Young People of Waugh is a lost generation both spiritually and emotionally. Only Adam who suffers purgatorial crisis in a seemingly limbo world of blase profanity possesses certain traits of a rational human being. He bears the testimony of human hopes and despairs in a gruesome world of irrelevance and violence. His emotional responses are identical with the common human feelings. His incidental observations are meaningful indeed. Indifference of the society to the funeral of Runcible

1. Ibid., p. 175. 2. Ibid., p. 176.
seemed to him ruthlessly inadequate. He said to Nina:
'Did I tell you I went to Agatha's funeral? There was practically
no one there except the Ghams and some aunts. I went with
Van, rather tight, and got stared at. I think they felt I was
partly responsible for the accident...'

The dilution of pathos and cruelty in the chiaroscuro of life
in Vile Bodies reveals its intrinsic emptiness and fatality

A world that does not recognize the human values, romance
cannot however find a mooring there. In Vile Bodies Waugh has
created a profane world of masochism and masquerade, an essentially
anti-romantic or at least pseudo-romantic world of pristine lust
and sexuality which does not provide a niche for romance or
any such leanings for which humanity lived and suffered in the
past. The alienation of love and romance, the gradual immersion
of youthful passion and promise and even of individuality
in the mire and fury of the social morass are shown with meticulous
precision in the painful cadence of the love and romance of
Nina, its inevitable failure. They could not bear the heat of
the day and therefore melted away beyond recognition only to
become a part of the social platitudes, a malaise. Nina marries
Ginger, a social humbug and Adam joins the war cynically.

The comic and the pathos in the satires of Waugh are
shuffled within the folds of irony in such an exquisite manner
that his slant becomes a stinking reality, a living tyranny
in which the manikins, the images of a doomed world are allowed
to dance in utmost liberty. Unhappy Adam and Nina, the flotsams
of the immersed humanity succumb to the tyranny and boredom
of this world of unrelieved chaos and emptiness. The satirical
skits of Waugh are quite revealing. Nina once said to Adam:

1. Ibid., p. 206.
'If only you were as rich as Ginger, Adam, or only half as rich. Or if only you had any money at all!' Nina could not refuse to accept the social biddings only because she could not forgo the secular ways of the profane society. Her unworthy flippancy is expressed when she rang up Adam:

'Darling, is that you? I've got some thing rather awful to tell you.'

'Yes?'

'You'll be furious.'

'Well?'

'I'm engaged to be married.'

'Who to?'

'I hardly thing I can tell you.'

'Who?'

'Adam, you won't be beastly about it, will you?'

'Who is it?'

'Ginger.'

'I don't believe it.'

'Well, I'm. That's all. There is to it.'

'You are going to marry Ginger?'

'Yes.'

'I see.'

'Well?'

'I said, I see.'

'Is that all?'

'Yes, that's all, Nina.'

'When shall I see you?'

'i don't want to see you again.'

Unlike the angry youngmen Adam accepted his situation which
turned him into a cynic manque. His decision to sell Nina, though a part of the overall vileness of this society, is a shattering irony of its overt baseness. Adam debunks Ginger:

'May Ginger, tell the truth. What is Nina worth to you?'

'Good Lord! why, what an extraordinary thing to ask; everything in the world of course. I'd go through fire and water for that girl.'

'Well, I'll sell her to you.'

'No, why, look here, good God, damn it, I mean...'

'I'll sell my share in her for a hundred pounds.'

'You pretend to be fond of Nina and you talk about her like that! Why, hang it, it's not decent. Besides, a hundred pounds is the dozen of a lot. I mean, getting married is a damned expensive business, don't you know. And I'm just getting a couple of polo ponies over from Ireland. That's going to cost a hell of a lot, what with one thing and another.'

'A hundred down, and I leave Nina to you. I think it's cheap.'

'Fifty.'

'A hundred.'

'Seventy-five.'

'A hundred.'

'I'm damned if I'll pay more than seventy-five.'

'I'll take seventy-eight pounds sixteen and twopence. I can't go lower than that.'

'All right, I'll pay that. You really will go away?'

'I'll try, Ginger. Have a drink.'

Evelyn Waugh's attitude to his young folks, their gilded appearances, is rather cruel though with deeper understanding of their predicaments the acridity of his satire melts into

1. Ibid., pp. 196-97.
pity and cruelty into pathos. Adam, Nina and Ginger are funny
indeed but only so long as we suspend our memories and our
sympathies and everything that makes us human. In fact, Waugh's
attitude to the Bright Young People is complex rather than
simple. It is something of a love-hate relationship expressed
and developed through significant slits. The difficulty with
Waugh is that he does not find any vantage ground in this
world without faith, a limbo. He rejects everything that shows
any affiliation to this turgid world of moral turpitude. Adam
suffers because he is involved rather unheroically in an
unholy alliance in the forbidden world of the sinners, the vile
bodies.

The cult of the youth in *Vile Bodies* is only superficial,
a levity of thought and manners. Their foolhardiness and dash
immaturity and callousness which some critics have cited as
Waugh's reason for sympathy with them, are only symptoms of
their apoplexy, their dissipated vitality and overt vulgarity.
A deeper understanding of the situation reveals that beneath
its glittering surface lurks a tragic hiatus in which the
clayed humanity, the groaning generation of the post-war malaise
are doomed to unrelieved strain, though they are not always
aware of it, at least it appears as such.

Unlike the younger generation in the novels of Huxley or
the angry young men in the plays of Noel Coward or Osborne, the
Bright Young People in *Vile Bodies* are without any tint of
the inner life. Futile and sterile as they are both spiritually
and intellectually Waugh taints them as pseudo-tribal pagans
doomed to the archaic chaos of the carnal life. Their weariness
and apathy are due to their excessive strain and carousel.
No one except Adam bears some testimony of human sufferings
and pains. In fact, he is a stranger to this society thrown
to suffer the ordeal for no reasons of others. Waugh</p>

and a train
which makes a travesty of human semblance
in a state of impervious impiety. The swirling social parties
in Vile Bodies, its hectic and nervy social parties and the
hangovers impinge him and leave him in a state of utter
loneliness and despair. The very thought of social parties
becomes a dizzying experience for him, a weariness. He says:
'Oh, Nina, what a lot of parties!' Then he reflects in disgust:
(...Masked parties; Savage parties; Victorian parties; Greek
parties; Wild West parties; Russian parties; Circus parties;
parties where one had to dress as somebody else, almost naked
parties in St John's Wood, parties in flats and studios and
houses and ships and hotels and night clubs, in windmills and
swimming-baths, tea parties at school where one ate muffins
and meringues and tinned crab, parties at Oxford where one
drank brown sherry and smoked Turkish cigarettes, and dull dances
in London and comic dances in Scotland and disgusting dances
in Paris - all that succession and repetition of massed humanity.
...Those vile bodies...)2

In Vile Bodies Waugh has picked up the crisis and the chaos
of the urban civilisation, its inherent emptiness in gruesome
social parties which claimed its victims in a crescendo of
painfulness and a sense of futility. In a moment of disillusionment
Adam realizes the futility of his situation though he cannot escape it
'You don't seem to be enjoying yourself very much to-night.'
'Sorry, am I being a bore?'
'I think I shall go home.'
'Yes.'
'Adam, darling, what's the matter?'
'I don't know. ... Nina, do you ever feel that things simply can't go on much longer?'
'What d'you mean by things - us or everything?'
'Everything.'
'No - I wish I did.'
'Idare say you're right... what are you looking for?'
'Clothes.'
'Why?'
'Oh, Adam, what do you want... you're too impossible this evening.'
'Don't let's talk any more, Nina, d'you mind?'
The attitude of ambivalence is further emphasised when Adam says later:
'I'd give anything in the world for something different.'
'Different from me or different from everything?'
'Different from everything ... only I've got nothing ... what's the good of talking?'
'Oh, Adam, my dearest ...'
'Yes?'
'Nothing.'

There is something formidable about the society Waugh depicts, almost an inscrutable way of its own at least so it seems, in which human marionnets dance in utmost freedom and frivolity and are ruined in course of its inevitable sequence.
of events. Waugh's sympathy for the young folks, his explicit predilection for them in *Vile Bodin* is however determined by his awareness of the human predilections in the contemporary context of the social life which he conceives as tyrannical and profane, a world with maimed spirituality, a vortex of beastliness. There is pathos in the predilection of the youths, more the victims of circumstances than villains. The grim overtones, anyway, of the human drama in the novel is mirrored in the nightmares of Chastity, her fatigue and loneliness.

'I have been called a lot of things. I was called Chastity once. Then there was a lady at a party, and she sent me to Buenos Aires, and then when the war came she brough me back again, and I was with the soldiers training at Salisbury Plain. That was swell. They called me Bunny - I don't know why. Then they sent me over here and I was with the Canadians, what they called me wasn't nice, and then they left me behind when they retreated and I took up with some foreigners. They were nice too, though they were fighting against the English. Then they ran away, and the lorry I was in got stuck in the ditch, so I got in with some other foreigners who were on the same side as the English, and they were beasts, but I met an American doctor who had white hair, and he called me Emily because he said I reminded him of his daughter back home, so he took me to Paris and we had a lovely week till he took up with another girl in a night club, so he left me behind in Paris when he went back to the front, and I hadn't no money and they made a fuss about my passport, so they called me *numero mille soixante dix-huit*, and they sent me and a lot of other girls off to the East to be with the soldiers there. At least they
would have done only the ship got blown up, so I was rescued and the French sent me up here in a train with some different girls who were very unrefined. Then I was in a tin hut with the girls, and then yesterday they had friends and I was alone, so I went for a walk, and when I came back the hut was gone and the girls were gone, and there didn’t seem anyone anywhere until you came in your car, and now I don’t rightly know where I am.'

Chastity is indeed an unforgettable symbol of the waste land, its despotism.

The pains and predicaments of Chastity mirror quite obviously the fortuitousness of human existence in the wire and the fury of the modern imbroglio. A critic has pointed out, "Lust, violence, loyalty, nationality, identity, sentiment, life and death— all are casually fortuitous and Chastity, incapable as she is of moral distinction, is the appropriate medium to express the incoherence."2

All the same the chaotic experiences of Chastity in a world of incoherence and impiety reveal more precisely the uneasy turmoil and the tragic tension that subsist at the core of the modern life. Waugh is quite humane and sympathetic to Chastity. A body that is a body is a vile body.

Waugh criticises the youth for their confounded affiliations and their foolhardiness, their lack of experience and immaturity. In their imprudence and impetuosity, inadvertance and impiety Waugh sees the doom of a generation of innocents, the unthinking youths. Thoughts of a dreary future, an imminent cataclysm, nestled in his mind rather too deeply. The arbitrary nature of

1. Ibid., pp. 243-4
the modern situation, its inevitable process of corrosion and gradual immersion landed the modern youth in the abyssmal dreariness of decay and utter deprivation. The "Happy Ending" of Vile Bodies is an incisive dramatic irony of the inevitable fate of the modern youths and their pathetic predicaments. The dramatic sequences of events, the meaningful flashes of the broken images of humanity, the 'woebegone womanhood', 'the stranded of barbed wire', the 'splintered tree stumps', the lamentations of Chastity and the loneliness and apathy of Adam in the "biggest battle field in the history" presage the tragic end of a generation driven recklessly to the swirls of the social boggy. Nina's letter to Adam is the ultimate proof of the emptiness and brutality of the modern youths.

Nina writes:

"I am going to have a baby, is not it awful? But Ginger has quite made up his mind it's his, and is pleased as anything so that's all right." 2

Adam receives the letter without interest, rather casually and "puts it back in his envelope and buttoned it into his breast pocket. Then he took out a pipe filled it and began to smoke." 3 A significant gesture that perhaps conveys the author's own attitude to the world of his creation. Adam's cynicism suggests the ultimate failure of the Bright Young People of the 20's.

The "Happy Ending" in Vile Bodies is quite painful.

In this nightmare world of chaos and annihilation, of apathy and cynicism, of disillusionment and anguish, Waugh has said everything that he had to say about the moderns, their futilities and faithlessness. In fact, it bears the testimony of Waugh's commentary on the modern situation though cynical enough to be

1. Ibid., p. 220. 2. Ibid., 220. 3. Ibid., p. 221.
accepted in its face value is revealing anyway. His meticulous observation of the pathetic predicaments of the moderns and his deeper understanding of the basic problems and their impingements on life in the modern context dissolve the explicit fun into pathos. Anyway this is a part of Waugh's satirical method. His attitude to the specimens of the cosmopolitan youths of the 20's - the Bright Young People - is not without ambivalence. He criticises them for explicit reasons however, though he praises them as potentials with immense possibilities only driven astray by the overwhelming whirlwinds of time. The Bright Young People in Vile Bodies are seen as the victims of the situation suffering innocently because they cannot see what lies ahead till the shock comes with a devastating effect.

Such an unsettling shock, a nauseating experience touched Nina during her fantastic aerial flight with Ginger. Their honeymoon ended as a fiasco. The society which provided her the zest to live now appears only insipid and indistinguishable. "Nina looked down and saw inclined at an odd angle a horizon of staggering red suburb; arterial roads dotted with little cars; factories, some of them working, others empty and decaying; a disused canal; some distant hills sown with bungalows; wireless masts and overhead power cables; men and women were indistinguishable except as tiny spots; they were marrying and shopping and making money and having children. The scene lurched and tilted again as the aeroplane struck a current of air.

'I think I'm going to be sick,' said Nina."!

The sickening view of the earth marks a significant turnover in her attitude to the living world. She also becomes a cynic. 

1. ibid., pp. 199-200.
In his later satires one senses, a gradual change, though not inconsistent anyway, in the satirist's attitude to the Bright Young People or the yesterday's youth. Their glow and brightness is gone. They have grown middle aged, though not improved anyway. In *A Handful of Dust*, *Work Suspended* and *The Loved One* the frivolity and superficiality of the flippant youth of the yesterday are not easily shed even when the glamour and brightness are no longer there. Even Basil Seal appears tired and tarnished. He seems rather disillusioned and morbid in *Basil Seal Rides Again*. The virility and verve of Agatha Runcible, the epitome of the Bright Young People of the 20's, are replaced by apathy and diffidence of the Beavers and the Hoopers, the youth of the 30's and the 40's. In their failure and fatigue and consequent return to the wheels of tyranny, the monotonous life, Waugh views the failure of the Bright Young People, their cant and callow. A disinherited generation driven rather cruelly to a deserted land without pity and humanity, a land of primitive savagery.